

"IT WAS A CURSE, IT WAS A GENERATIONAL CYCLE:"
UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE
OF SIBLING ABUSE AND SURVIVORS OF
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study with interpretive phenomenological analysis, was to explore my participants' experiences of sibling abuse in childhood and intimate partner violence in adulthood, as well as explore connections between the types of abuse and abusers. This study is novel in examining the long-term impact of sibling abuse in the context of intimate partner violence victimization outcomes. By examining participants' descriptions of their experiences, several nuances came to light about the experience of sibling abuse, and how it impacted participants' vulnerability to violence in adulthood.

The most notable finding was the lack of parental support for both types of victimization. In childhood, the parental failure to protect impacted participants in three ways. One, because the sibling abuse was tolerated by their parents, they learned that it was "OK" to be abused. Two, participants came to expect and accept abuse in future relationships based on their childhood experiences. And three, because their parents failed to protect them in childhood, they could not be counted on to help them in adulthood; therefore, participants felt "stuck" in their relationships with intimate partner violence.

Current family violence theories may explain the long-term outcome of sibling abuse, but my study, and the current state of the literature around long-term outcomes, may best explain victimization outcomes when the victim of sibling abuse also experiences parental failure to protect. Additionally, because sibling abuse often occurs in homes where there are other types of violence present, more research needs to be done to identify the most significant contributors to a victimization outcome, as well as protective factors in the home that prevent revictimization.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my participants. Thank you for trusting me with your stories and for allowing me to share parts of you with the world. Your bravery throughout your life is an inspiration to me. You will always live in my heart.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

IPV Intimate partner violence

IGTV Intergenerational transmission of violence

IPA Interpretive phenomenological analysis

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“As siblings we were inextricably bound, even though our connections were loose and frayed.... And each time we met, we discovered to our surprise and dismay, how quickly the intensity of childhood feelings reappeared.... No matter how old we got or how often we tried to show another face, reality was filtered through yesterday’s memories.”

Jane M. Leder, 1991

A sibling is a group of two or more children, typically related through one or both parents, who live in the same household at some point in their life. A sibling can also be non-biological (related through marriage), as well as fictive kin, children who are raised together in the same house for a period of time and are parented by one or more of the same people. The sibling relationship is one of the most significant relationships in a child’s life, equal to, and sometimes greater than, the relationship between parent and child due to its long-lasting nature (Noller, 2005; Tucker et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2015). The sibling relationship plays a significant role in emotional development and self-esteem, and it has a long-term impact on peer and intimate partner relationships (Simonelli et al., 2002; Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Kumar et al., 2015; Meyers, 2017).

Decades of studies demonstrate the significant impact of a positive sibling relationship, as well as a negative one. Siblings serve as social partners and role models within the family structure (McElvaney et al., 2021). Sibling relationships influence social skills, peer relationships (McElvaney et al., 2021), impact psychosocial functioning (Noller, 2005), play, risk-taking behaviors, as well as shape self-esteem and self-worth amongst each other (Dirks et al., 2015;

Kumar et al., 2015; McElvaney et al., 2021). Positive sibling relationships, referred to as high-warmth or high-quality sibling relationships, most often create individuals with positive feelings of self-worth and high self-esteem, similar self-perceptions (Gamble et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2015), and greater resiliency in challenging situations in childhood (McElvaney et al., 2021; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018).

Sibling abuse is an intentional and aggressive act perpetrated by one sibling against another sibling in the home. Negative outcomes for victims of sibling abuse include: emotional and/or behavioral problems, depression, anxiety, high risk behavior, low self-esteem, higher risk for peer bullying, and other externalizing behaviors (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998; Duncan, 1999; Simonelli et al., 2002; Wareham et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2010, 2018; Tucker et al. 2013 Meyers, 2016). Nascent research suggests the outcomes for victims of child maltreatment, witnessing intimate partner violence, and/or sibling abuse are strikingly similar (Simonelli et al., 2005; Wareham et al., 2009; Meyers, 2016; Finkelhor et al., 2010; van Berkel et al., 2018). Additionally, sibling relationships may influence future partner choice, potentially uncovering an additional path from abuse in childhood (by a sibling) to IPV victimization in adult relationship (Simonelli et al., 2002; Meyers, 2017).

As explained by trauma theory, (Bloom, 1999) parental child maltreatment can destroy the first, and most sacred bond of trust, in childhood - the relationship between parent/caregiver and child (Krienert & Walsh, 2011; Meyers, 2016, 2017). Parental child maltreatment may teach the victim that relationships that should provide safety and security instead consist of terror and unpredictability (Bloom, 1999; Krienert & Walsh, 2011; Meyers, 2016, 2017). Living in a state of hyper vigilance throughout childhood may leave victims more vulnerable to victimization into adulthood. As a child grows and seeks out intimate relationships in adulthood, they may recreate

dysfunctional relational connections, intimate partner relationships in particular, based on their experience of sibling abuse in childhood (Bloom, 1999). Similarly, it has been suggested (Meyers, 2014, 2016, 2017; van Berkel et al., 2018) that the outcomes from sibling abuse are very similar to those of parental child maltreatment because of the broken bond of trust from the abusive sibling, living in anticipation of terror, as well as the unpredictability of the relationship, alternating abuse with comfort and/connection (Meyers 2014, 2016, 2017). Much like the outcome of parental child maltreatment, victims of sibling abuse may be more vulnerable for adult violence, intimate partner violence in particular, due to similar relational mechanisms between the sibling and the abuser.

The strongest and most consistent predictor of sibling abuse in a home is the presence of other types of family violence, namely the occurrence of IPV and child maltreatment (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Guedes & Mikton, 2013; Finkelhor et al., 2010; Herrenkohl et al., 2008; Kumar et al., 2015; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018). Co-occurrence households are defined as homes where multiple types of family violence occur, i.e., IPV (bidirectional and directional), sibling abuse, child-to-parent violence, and violence by other family members within the home (Goodlin & Dunn, 2010). When one type of violence is present, there is an increased likelihood that additional types of violence will occur (Herrenkohl et al., 2008; Eriksen & Jensen, 2009). According to the IGTV, the impact of witnessing IPV and/or experiencing child maltreatment may create pathways for the intergenerational transmission of violence (IGTV) to occur in adulthood (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Guedes & Mikton, 2013).

There is a gap in the literature on sibling abuse's potential connection to the IGTV. We know the negative outcomes from sibling abuse are very similar to the outcomes of parental child maltreatment and witnessing IPV (Artz et al., 2014); research demonstrates that for some,

exposure to either type of violence can result in a higher likelihood for adulthood victimization (as explained by the IGTV). Individuals who experience sibling abuse may be at a higher risk for IPV in adulthood (Gully et al., 1981; Simonelli et al., 2002; Noland et al., 2004; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009). There is ample research to suggest that sibling abuse can damage sibling relationships long term (Wiehle, 1997; Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998), as well as predict a violent behavior pattern with peers, intimate partners, and parents for the sibling aggressor (Gully, Dengerink, Pepping, & Bergstrom, 1981; Loeber, Weissman, & Reid, 1983; Simonelli et al., 2002; Steinmetz, 1977, as cited in Eriksen & Jensen, 2006).

This study is a phenomenological exploration of the experiences and nuances between sibling and intimate partner abuse. Through in-depth interviews, I hope to learn more about how sibling abuse may be connected to IPV victimization and discover how sibling abuse may be viewed as a component for the intergenerational transmission of violence (IGTV). The proposed study questions will be: 1) *How do adult female survivors of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence experience and make sense of abuse by a family member? And 2) Did, or how did, participants experience the relationship between sibling abuse and IPV?*

Study Purpose and Significance

The goal of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of my participants' and their abuse experiences. Research fully demonstrates the negative outcomes of sibling abuse are similar to the negative outcomes of parental child maltreatment and witnessing intimate partner violence (Erikson & Jensen, 2006; Finkelhor et al., 2010; Meyers, 2014; 2016; 2017).

Sibling abuse research is several decades old; however, policy and practice is only in its infancy as far as screening for and providing protections for victims of sibling violence, and the

many long-term challenges those survivors may face. By illuminating the personal experiences of women who have experienced both types of violence, I may be able to contribute new insights into why and how sibling abuse, regardless of other types of family violence or experiences, makes a survivor vulnerable to relational abuse, IPV, in adulthood.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Current State of the Literature

The current state of literature on the long-term emotional and mental health outcomes for victims of parental child maltreatment is grounded in object relations, trauma theory, and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Herman, 1997; Black, 1999). These theories demonstrate that possible long-term outcomes of a volatile and unpredictable parental relationship due to maltreatment are: intimate partner relationship avoidance, hyper vigilance with a partner, and bonding by seeking out painful, instead of pleasurable, experiences as a way to connect with an intimate partner (Bowlby, 1988; Herman, 1997; Black, 1999). Meyers (2014, 2016) suggests because the emotional and mental health outcomes for victims of sibling abuse are so similar to those of victims of parental child maltreatment, these theories may also offer an explanation on the long-term impact of sibling abuse victims in adult intimate partner relationships.

Sibling abuse research, both qualitative and quantitative, demonstrates the negative outcomes from sibling abuse to be almost identical to those from parental child abuse (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Meyers, 2014; van Berkel et al, 2018). Similar to the outcome of parental child abuse, children exposed to sibling abuse are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, self-harming behaviors, eating disorders, substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attachment issues, pervasive feelings of helplessness, and have much higher rates of overall mental health issues (Meyers, 2014; 2016; 2017; van Berkel et al., 2018). Additionally, sibling abuse increases the risk for physical and psychological injury, and it

interrupts psychological and behavioral regulation throughout childhood and adolescence (Meyers, 2017; van Berkel et al., 2018).

According to Herman (1997), trauma “overwhelms the ordinary human adaptations to life.... And generally, involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close encounter with violence or death (p. 33).” Looking through a more neurological lens, trauma attacks the brain through excess stimulation, which disrupts the brain’s ability to fully process what occurred, leaving victims to cope in unhealthy ways (Suleiman, 2008). The relational patterns that are formed in childhood transfer into adulthood and to subsequent relationships (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). When a child experiences any type of maltreatment, it begins to modify and contour her social self (Green, 1984). Any type of child maltreatment and trauma fundamentally alter a child’s sense of self, safety, and their relationship with the world (Ornduff et al., 2001).

Sibling Abuse Definition, Types, and Rates of Occurrence

King and colleagues (2018) describe sibling abuse as “the forgotten source of child trauma” (p. 523). Sibling abuse affects almost 39 million children each year, making it the most common form childhood family violence (Wiele, 1998; Gelles & Straus, 1988; King et al., 2018; McDonald & Martinez, 2019). Despite the serious and pervasive nature of sibling abuse, it remains on the cusp of family violence research and services. Throughout the past few decades, studies continue to demonstrate that sibling abuse is a pervasive problem, and many studies produce a wide range of results. Studies by Kettrey and Emery (2006) and King and colleagues (2018) reported the largest range of children possibility impacted by sibling abuse. Kettrey and Emery (2006) reported 71 percent of respondents perpetrated, or were victimized by, sibling abuse in childhood. King and colleagues (2018) reported perpetration rates between 33 and 88 percent. Wolke and colleagues (2015) suggest that approximately 40 percent of children are

exposed to some form of sibling abuse each week. In a sample of 4,000 children between 0 and 17, Finkelhor and colleagues (2015) found almost 22 percent of respondents reported at least one assault by a sibling in the previous year.

Sibling abuse, while inconsistently defined in the literature, is a recurrent pattern of intentionally aggressive and damaging physical, psychological, or sexual acts with the intent to harm a sibling (Wiele, 1998; Caffaro & Conn Caffaro, 1998; Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006). Sibling abuse increases the risk for physical and psychological injury, and it interrupts psychological and behavioral regulation throughout childhood and adolescence (Meyers, 2017; van Berkel et al., 2018). Parents who may initially be concerned with the occurrence of sibling abuse and are proactive early on, could find they have a difficult time stopping the abusive behavior. The inability to effectively protect the victim, or control the aggressor, may lead to a denial of the seriousness of the abuser's actions. Eventually, these parents may ignore the abuse or normalize it as sibling rivalry (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Tucker et al., 2013; Martin, 2016).

Sibling rivalry is a "normative part of sibling development and can foster competition, cooperation, and negotiation" (Meyers, 2017, p. 335). In healthy sibling relationships, there is a natural fluctuation between harmony and contention, but it is not oppressive; aggression is usually related to a possession and is short lived (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Meyers, 2017).

The sibling abuse literature lacks specificity when it comes to what defines a sibling in a relationship; few studies offer a breakdown of step, biological, half, and/or foster sibling (King et al., 2018). Because the definition of sibling is ambiguous in the literature, we assume that most of the research is centered on biological siblings, but we can reasonably expect that some of siblings are half-siblings or non-biological siblings. Therefore, I will use the term similarly in my

proposal to create an academic equivalency, but when doing my study, I will specify the sibling relationship to understand the nuances between the different types of sibling relationships.

Sibling abuse can be physical, sexual, or psychological. Sibling physical abuse includes any aggressive act that is meant to cause physical harm. Sibling verbal or psychological abuse is any act meant to terrify, scare, or control a sibling; sibling verbal abuse is the most common and damaging form of sibling abuse (Krienart & Walsh, 2011; van Berkel et al., 2018). Sibling sexual abuse is any type of unwanted sexual act towards a sibling. Evidence suggests baseline response of depression from all types of child abuse and maltreatment, including sibling abuse (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Gilbert et al., 2009). Although sibling abuse research is decades old, there is only anecdotal evidence connecting negative long-term outcomes from the experience of sibling abuse in childhood (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Krienart & Walsh, 2011; van Berkel et al., 2018). There are no longitudinal studies that demonstrate a link between sibling abuse and adult victimization or perpetration of IPV.

The negative impact of sibling sexual abuse, typically fraternal, is a woefully understudied area of family violence research. Sibling sexual abuse has been found to be equal to, if not more profound, than the impact of paternal sexual abuse (father/daughter incest); often the impact of sibling sexual abuse is minimized for the survivor (Tsun, 1999; McVeigh, 2003). Maniglio (2009) suggests that adult survivors of sexual abuse experience significant long-term and severe mental and physical health outcomes; survivors are eight times more likely to experience mental health issues than their non-abused peers (Corcoran, 2004; Tucker et al., 2013). Because sibling sexual abuse is most frequently between an older brother and younger sister, a similar power dynamic is created by either paternal sexual abuse or fraternal sexual abuse (McVeigh, 2003). The long-term consequences of paternal or fraternal sexual abuse are

most often experienced as substance abuse, depression, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and PTSD (Mc Veigh, 2003; Mangold & King, 2021). However, Rudd and Herzberger (1999) found that these negative outcomes were more pronounced with survivors of sibling sexual abuse than with survivors of paternal sexual abuse (as cited in Mc Veigh, 2003; Tucker et al., 2013; Veith, Russell, & King, 2017).

Empirical Evidence on Sibling Abuse

In a nationally representative survey of families, Tucker and colleagues (2013) reported approximately 46 percent of children experience physical sibling abuse; additionally, in a nationally representative survey by Straus and colleagues (1980), 53 out of every 100 children reported an attack by a sibling sometime that year. Studies on adolescents done by Roscoe and colleagues (1987) and Goodwin and Roscoe (1990) found that 50 - 60 percent of those surveyed reported being psychologically aggressive to at least one sibling. In a study of 1331 undergraduates, King and colleagues (2018) found that even rare experiences of sibling abuse increased overall aggression in the victim. Using data collected from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, Finkelhor and colleagues (2013) analyzed telephone survey data from 1705 families with a two-child household. Data analysis revealed the rate of physical and psychological sibling abuse, and sibling property aggression (the destruction of a sibling's personal possessions) to be at just over one-third of the sample size.

Using a nationally representative sample of 733 homes in the U.S., Straus and colleagues (1980) found that reports of sibling abuse from the closest age sibling to the index child were at almost 90 percent; while close to 45 percent of what was reported was non-lethal, the remainder of the violence included punching/beating up, and the use of weapons with the intent to injure. In a study of public high school students, in a rural setting in the upper Midwest, Roscoe and

colleagues (1987) found that of 272 students anonymously surveyed, 66 percent reported physical sibling abuse perpetration or victimization during the last 12 months.

There are several typical sibling abuse victim characteristics within a family, but research is underdeveloped, and these risk factors can vary a significant amount (Krienert & Walsh, 2011; Meyers, 2014). Age hierarchy plays a role. There is an age risk factor when addressing sibling abuse; younger children are more likely to be victims of an older sibling's abuse (Cox & Paley, 2003; Meyers, 2014; van Berkel et al., 2018). In the case of sibling abuse, (typically) older siblings observe or experience violence from adults in the home, and then perpetrate violence against (younger) siblings whom they have more power over (Cox and Paley, 2003; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009; Tucker et al., 2013; Meyers, 2014). Empirical evidence suggests that older children, especially those who are exposed to violence or those who are being mistreated, will "pay the violence forward" (Cox & Paley, 2003; Wareham et al., 2009; Franklin & Kercher, 2012) by using intimidation, physical violence, physical and/or psychological threats, and (excessive) force to maintain the power advantage. Perpetrators of sibling abuse often take advantage of the power differential that exists in the home. Perpetrators may take advantage of their role as favored child and be permitted to harm a sibling, or due to parentification (due to parental absence or inability to parent) they may punish younger siblings with no parental repercussion (Meyers, 2014, 2017; van Berkel et al., 2018; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006, 2009).

Finkelhor and colleagues (2007) and Tucker and colleagues (2013) found that the most common age for experiencing sibling abuse is between 6 and 9, but the level of intensity and aggression increases with age. Research suggests the most aggressive and injurious behavior occurs between ages 14 -17 (Finkelhor et al., 2007; van Berkel et al., 2018). Additionally, violence was typically more severe between same sex siblings, and slightly more injuries

occurred with male-to-male sibling abuse (Finkelhor et al., 2007; Tucker et al., 2013; van Berkel et al., 2018). While a majority of sibling abuse does not produce life-threatening injuries, the older the aggressor is, the more dangerous and serious the abuse outcome. Male to male sibling abuse is often the most injurious, followed by male to female, and female to male (King et al., 2018). Male sibling abuse outcomes tend to be more influenced by larger sibling groups, especially those with non-biological siblings, and siblings who are closer in age (King et al., 2018).

Family risk factors contribute to the likelihood of sibling abuse occurring. Sibling abuse tends to occur more often in homes with less emotionally available or physically present parents, creating an additive outcome for the victimized child (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Meyers, 2014, 2017). Factors that increase the risk for sibling abuse include parental stress, family disorganization, family violence (IPV or child maltreatment), social isolation, parental indifference, and poor parent-child relationships (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Meyers, 2014, 2017; Center for Disease Control, 2019). Contrary to other family violence literature, poverty and low SES is an inconsistent predictor for sibling abuse (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Tucker et al., 2013). While Tucker and colleagues (2013) and Eriksen and Jensen (2006) found a higher prevalence of sibling abuse in families with higher-than-average SES indicators, Meyers (2014) found that a majority of her sample came from homes with fewer financial resources.

Overall, the outcomes for children exposed to any type of family violence are strikingly similar. Broadly, those who are exposed to IPV, experience child maltreatment, and/or experience sibling abuse are more likely to experience poor mental health, PTSD, difficulty with emotional regulation and aggression, eating disorders, substance abuse, risk taking behaviors, attachment issues, more problems with depression/anxiety, and much higher rates of suicidal

ideation and completion (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009; Sturge-Apple et al., 2012). Victimized children appear to be at a greater risk of additional victimizations occurring in close proximity, suggesting that for some children, victimization is not a specific event but an ongoing condition; this cycle is referred to as poly-victimization (Ornduff et al., 2001; Finkelhor, 2007; Gilbert et al., 2009). Once an individual experiences one trauma, they are at an increased risk of 4.5 to 5 times to experience another trauma. This is highly significant because children exposed to one type of violence at any point are at a far greater risk of experiencing additional types of violence at any point in their lifetime (Finkelhor et al., 2011).

The parental failure to protect or acknowledge the experience of the victimized child can further reinforce the abused child's sense of being helpless, alone, and unimportant (Simonelli et al., 2002; Meyers, 2014, 2016). Sibling abuse is only prosecutable by the victim's parents, and since parents often choose to ignore or downplay it, the victim is further traumatized by parental neglect and/or indifference (Linares, 2006; Meyers, 2014, 2017). Several studies established the additive influence of negative sibling relationships on child development in the context of parent effects (Ornduff et al., 2001; Simonelli et al., 2002; Meyers, 2014). Sibling abuse may have a unique effect on antisocial behavior, delinquency, peer difficulties, depression, and self-harming behavior over and above the effect of dysfunctional parenting and even parental abuse (van Berkel et al., 2018).

Family Violence Theories

Through object relations theory, Mitchell and Black (1995) suggest the parent-child bond should bring a child pleasure via the creation of a secure attachment. Early interactions between parent and child teach her that she is safe to seek interaction with others in the world because of

her secure and consistent relationship with her caregiver (Bowlby, 1982). Contrarily, when the parent relationship is unpredictable and riddled with painful experiences, children learn to pursue painful experiences, rather than positive ones, in order to connect emotionally (Meyers, 2016, 2017). The experience a child has with her caregivers creates a type of internal template of expected behavior, and future interactions are filtered through past experiences (Ornduff et al., 2001). Blatt (1974) maintains the parental role is critical in that it provides the basis for “organizing, integrating, and imposing meaning on subsequent experiences” (p. 108).

According to object relations theory, the long-term outcomes from harmful childhood experiences may lead to the victim to expect pain and aggression in partner relationships (Ornduff et al., 2001). Additionally, impaired social judgment and inability to correctly perceive the motives of others may cause adult victims to become more vulnerable to relational dysfunction, which places the victims at an even higher risk for IPV victimization (Ornduff et al., 2001).

McCluskey (2010) proposed object relations theory as a viable explanation for IPV outcomes when a dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship exists; she demonstrated that the shaming behavior from the mother could create vulnerability in her daughter, increasing the likelihood IPV victimization for the daughter. McCluskey (2010) suggested a potential outcome of a dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship, based on the maternal abusive or ineffective style of parenting/attachment with her daughter, may set up the daughter to be vulnerable to future abusive relationships. Due to the affective and cognitive components of object relations theory, evidence suggests that children who experience a disruption in the parent-child relationship are more likely to experience adult relationship violence (Ornduff et al., 2001; Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Black et al., 2010).

When applied to family violence and influences on long-term outcomes, trauma theory—much like object relations theory—gives additional insight to how past emotional experiences shape future relational expectations and experiences (Bloom, 1999). In homes with child maltreatment present, a child must learn to adapt to an unstable, unpredictable, and often frightening environment. The combination of familial instability and fear results in children who must be vigilant against the emotional shifts within their family in order to protect themselves (Herman, 1997). Trauma theory highlights the impact of a dysfunctional parental relationship; the victim suffers from an impaired personal identity, which can lead them to connect in unhealthy ways with unhealthy individuals (Jawaid, 2018). An impaired ego leaves individual too willing to make compromises that benefit others, which compromises their personal growth (Jawaid, 2018). Children who grow up with abusive caregivers find themselves living in a contradictory system. The family members who are supposed to be the safest are the ones they ultimately fear the most.

Using the trauma theory lens, although traumatic events are external, they quickly become fused within the mind (Bloom, 1999). Disassociation is a common coping mechanism for those who have experienced significant trauma, especially at the hands of caregiver, children learn to deny emotional reactions to events, be they positive or negative (Bloom, 1999). Victims of abuse literally learn how *not to feel* their emotions (Bloom, 1999). This disassociation and an emotional numbing can interfere and damage relationships long-term. Survivors of child maltreatment may display relational avoidance tendencies, or they are compelled to reenact the trauma and past chaos in current intimate relationships (Bloom, 1999; Meyers, 2016).

Object relations and trauma theories intersect concerning the belief that victims of parental child maltreatment generally take two approaches to intimate partner relationships:

avoidance in order to avoid recreating the same comfortable, yet dysfunctional, relationship they had with their abusive parent (Meyers, 2016), or seeking out those partners who will reward their attempt at connection with pain and instability (Bloom, 1999). Meyers (2014, 2016) suggests that because the outcome for victims of sibling abuse is so similar to the outcomes for those who experience parental child maltreatment, object relations and trauma theories are germane when discussing theory application for victims of sibling abuse.

Attachment is a bond that is protected and nurtured by the quality of the relationship between parent/caregiver and child; the quality of this care is especially important during times of perceived danger and fear (Bowlby 1969, 1982). Attachment theory typically refers to the relationship and potential bond between parent and child, (Scott & Babcock, 2010), and how the quality of that relationship impacts a child's self-concept and interpretation of the world (Bowlby, 1979; Collins & Read, 1990). According to attachment theory, "children develop internal models, beliefs, and expectations about "whether or not the caretaker is someone who is caring and responsive," and whether or not "the self is worthy of care and attention" (Collins & Read, 1990 as cited in Scott & Babcock, 2010, p. 1). The quality of the relationship with the primary caregiver(s) determines the attachment style of the child. There are four attachment styles: secure attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment (mix between anxious and avoidant).

There is an association between insecure attachment style and IPV (Babcock et al., 2000; Dutton and Painter, 1993, as cited in Scott and Babcock, 2010), as well as between a disorganized attachment style for children who suffered significant trauma in childhood and multiple IPV experiences (Alexander, 2009). Victims of parental child abuse learn that adults cannot be trusted to meet their needs. Eventually, those children may develop insecure

attachment styles, which can translate into emotionally dangerous adult relationships (Meyers, 2016; Ng & Smith, 2006). In cases of parental child maltreatment, children who lacked protection from their parents through a secure attachment find they face many relational challenges within their families, as well as in their adult intimate partner relationships, even carrying over to their own children (Mullins Geiger et al., 2015). The experience of growing up in a violent household shatters expectations of security, as those who should be the protectors become the attackers, leaving child victims helpless (Woollett & Thompson, 2016). When individuals seek out relationships and find ones that share an emotional similarity to relationships from childhood, those feelings may trigger learned behavioral sequences, thus predisposing survivors of childhood trauma to relational violence, IPV (Weiss, 1994, as cited in Scott & Babcock, 2010).

Research (Meyers, 2014) has uncovered and confirmed striking similarities for victims of sibling abuse and victims of parent–child abuse. Children have an intense connection and loyalty to abusive siblings, and children not only repeat negative interactions which mirror the sibling abuse relationship but approach relationships with the assumption that they will be treated in the same manner they were related to by the sibling. (Meyers, 2016, p. 48).

As explained by object relations theory, trauma theory, and attachment theory, experiences of trauma by family members in childhood erodes the critical bond of trust and often replaces it with expectations of violence and insecurity in adulthood. Because the sibling relationship is so significant, it is reasonable to suggest that an outcome of sibling violence could be violence in intimate relationships in adulthood.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence (IGTV), defined as “a repetition of violence into the next generation (Langeland & Dijkstra, 1995. P. 296),” is a theory/hypothesis that seeks to explain how the effects of the experience of violence and trauma transfer from one generation to the next. Exposure to, or the experience of, violence in childhood does not guarantee a perpetration or victimization outcome in adulthood; practitioners and scholars are ambivalent about the IGTV because they cannot exactly say why and how transmission occurs.

A well-established connection exists between exposure to IPV in childhood and the experience of parental child maltreatment and the IGTV. Children exposed to any type of family violence may learn that violence and aggression is a reasonable option for dispute resolution (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Krienert & Walsh, 2011), which can later carry over into romantic relationships (Simonelli et al., 2002). According to Krienert and Walsh (2011), any type of violence in the home, IPV, child maltreatment, or sibling abuse, “can teach negative regulative rules of behavior creating a greater likelihood of replication of that violence at future points in time and in future relationships.” (p. 35)

Abundant research exists that ties childhood exposure to IPV or child maltreatment to the IGTV via perpetration or victimization in adulthood (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Herrenkohl et al., 2008; Black et al., 2010; Herrenkohl et al., 2015; Fowler et al., 2016). Multiple studies establish a clear connection between witnessing IPV and later relational violence or victimization (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Black et al., 2010); thereby connecting witnessing IPV to the IGTV. Black and colleagues (2010) found that the experience of witnessing violence between parents was more significant for future victimization than even child maltreatment.

We find only anecdotal evidence that sibling abuse could be a contributor to the IGTV. In connection with the IGTV, a majority of family violence research has focused solely on

transmission through IPV exposure or the experience of child maltreatment. There is a general lack of research in the violence literature on sibling abuse, especially its potential role in the IGTV.

The IGTV theory posits those who experience victimization in childhood are more likely to become victims or perpetrators in adulthood (Renner & Slack, 2006; Finkelhor et al., 2007; Wareham et al., 2009; Mullins Geiger et al., 2015; Li et al., 2019). In most family violence research, childhood victimization has primarily focused on exposure to IPV and child maltreatment (Ericksen & Jensen, 2006; Herrenkohl et al., 2008, 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2010; Guedes & Mikton, 2013). Since the IGTV theory posits that exposure to any type of trauma in childhood can lead to victimization or perpetration in adulthood, this suggests that the experience of sibling abuse may be an overlooked, yet important component, in the IGTV experience.

Through in-depth interviews with survivors of sibling abuse and IPV, my study seeks to understand the nuanced experiences between both types of abuse, how the survivor navigated family support or lack of support, as well as common themes between stories. Based on the themes generated from my interviews, I hope to be able to offer evidence on the transmission pathway between sibling abuse and IPV, and how sibling abuse may be a contributor to the IGTV hypothesis/theory.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV), also referred to as domestic violence, is defined by the World Health Organization as “a behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors” (Jewkes et al., 2002, p. 148). The occurrence of IPV in a home deprives non-violent family members the right to overall safe welfare, personal

freedom, physical and/or psychological autonomy, and the ability to grow up secure in a safe family environment (da Silva Franzin et al., 2014). In the U.S., more than 10 million people a year suffer some form of physical partner violence; approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience IPV in their lifetime (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, n.d.).

Li and colleagues (2019), in a meta-analysis of 46 studies, found that there was a significant association between the experience of child maltreatment (physical, sexual, psychological, and neglect) and IPV victimization. The literature on IPV and the IGTV suggest that witnessing IPV in childhood and adolescence is associated with IPV victimization experiences beginning in the teenage/dating year and lasting into adult relationships (Simonelli et al., 2002; Black et al., 2010; Franklin, 2012). Black and colleagues (2010) surveyed a diverse population of undergraduate students (ages 18-27) about witnessed psychological and physical violence between their parents in the last 12 months and similar experiences in their own intimate partner relationships in the last 12 months. Black and colleagues (2010) found a significant relationship between witnessing both psychological and physical aggression between parents and the experience of the same in emerging adulthood relationships; the college students reported higher rates of victimization than the observed rates between parents. This study is unique in its focus on the impact of witnessing IPV as an emerging adult; a majority of studies include childhood and find significantly lower reports of abuse (Edleson, 1999; Jankowski et al., 1999; Black et al., 2010; Artz et al., 2014). Black and colleagues (2010) suggest the higher rate of reporting in their study could be due to recall bias and the difference between a child and a young adult's ability to understand the nuances of both psychological and physical violence.

Rationale for the Present Study

When it comes to sibling relationships and their impact on all relationships and on personal well-being, research demonstrates clearly that quality matters. The quality of the relationship one has with their sibling(s) has a significant impact on interpersonal abilities, self-esteem, and self-confidence within not only familial relationships, but also with peer and partner relationships (Morrill-Richards & Leierer, 2010; Meyers, 2016, 2017; Morrill et al., 2018). Smith (2004) suggests the quality of the relationship an individual has with their closest peer, often times a sibling, is a reliable and long-term indicator of overall mental and emotional well-being. Positive sibling relationships not only predict better interpersonal outcomes for each family member, but they also predict a decrease in susceptibility to peer bullying, and the potential for negative peer and partnered relationships (Simonelli et al., 2002; Morrill et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019). Conversely, negative sibling relationships often lead to a “normalization of maladaptive interpersonal behavior” (Morrill et al., 2018, p. 114). This normalization (Morrill et al., 2018) between siblings may be what leaves the victim most vulnerable to dangerous intimate partner relationships and more susceptible to IPV outcomes (Bloom, 1999; Ornduff et al., 2001; King et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019).

Perhaps most relevant to my study, Bloom (1999) posits that once a child understands the perpetrator and the caregiver are one and the same, meaning the abuser is the source of pain as well as the source of relief, traumatized children tend to create relationships later in life based on power, control, and terror (Bloom, 1999; Renner & Slack, 2006; Franklin, 2012). They are more likely to seek out those partners that will repeat the pattern that they experienced in childhood with their caregiver (Bloom, 1999).

Research exists that examines perpetration outcomes (Simonelli et al., 2002; Noland et al., 2004). However, little research exists on the connection between sibling abuse and IPV victimization outcomes. There are only a few phenomenological studies that examine the experience of sibling abuse (Meyers 2014; 2016; 2017; McDonald & Martinez, 2016), but no studies exist that attempt to directly connect sibling abuse victimization in childhood to adult IPV victimization outcomes. Since sibling relationships may influence future partner choice, this potentially exposes an additional path from abuse in childhood (by a sibling) to IPV victimization or perpetration in adult relationships (Simonelli et al., 2002; Noland et al., 2004). IPV and sibling abuse may act as a loop, further embedding both as contributors to the IGTV (Noland et al., 2004). My study questions will explore how my participants made sense of sibling abuse and IPV by family members, and if or how they experienced connections between the two types of violence perpetrated by a family member.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that focuses on a specific conscious experience from the point of view of the participant (Connelly, 2010); it is the study of a lived experience (van Manen, 1997). The intent of phenomenology is to understand what an experience was like for an individual, and perhaps discover buried or ignored meanings at the most basic level as experienced by the study participant (van Manen, 1990; van Manen, 1997; Connelly, 2010). The goal of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the participants' experiences of sibling abuse in childhood and intimate partner violence. A phenomenological approach was the best choice for my study, as it provided me with the most flexibility for in depth exploration of my research questions. A phenomenological lens allowed me, as the researcher, to explore and retell the life experiences of my participants, and to reveal the hidden meaning in their words (van Manen, 1997; Finlay, 2009). Through the use of open-ended questions and thoughtful exploration, my study discovered similarities between the experiences of sibling abuse in childhood and IPV in adulthood.

My study revealed the experiences in adulthood often mirrored the experiences from childhood, with both the type of abuse, relationship dynamics, and lack of parental support. I discovered commonalities between participants' experiences and nuances within both abuse experiences, which may help inform prevention best practices, as well as intervention approaches. The methods section is an in-depth discussion of my philosophical approach, rationale for my approach, the steps of my approach, and how I conducted the study.

“You never really know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee, 1960).

Philosophical Research Approach, Framework, and Analysis Method

The first step of a phenomenological study is to identify the phenomenon of interest (Padgett, 2017). The aim is to understand *what* the participant experienced and *how* they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology was the appropriate methodology because my research sought to understand the experiences of sibling abuse and IPV for adult female survivors. Looking at childhood and adulthood, the interviews explored the types of abuse experienced, the level of support available and responses from family and friends, and the nuances of each participant’s story in order to discover common themes in the telling of their tales. As a researcher, it was my hope to discover some of the nuances between sibling abuse and IPV as these phenomena were experienced by participants, which is why phenomenology was the best fit for my research. Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to talk participants through their experiences of abuse in their different environments, and then engage in lines of questioning that allowed me as to understand their orientation (emotionally, mentally, and physically) (Smith et al., 2009).

I chose interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) for my method of analysis since the goal of my study was to help my participants make sense of their experiences of abuse, and IPA allows the researcher to go deep with participants to get at the essence of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Interpretive phenomenological analysis focuses on how a specific group of people understand and discuss specific life events and experiences, rather than describing an occurrence/phenomenon according to a prescribed category or model (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As a qualitative researcher, I am

focused on the meaning of an experience - discovering how my participants made meaning of their life and abuse experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Phenomenological studies most often deal with the human condition (e.g., loss, trauma, grief, or a prolonged and difficult experience) (Padgett, 2017). The intent of IPA is to find the deeper meaning of the participant experience through in-depth exploration, allowing the researcher to understand not only the studied phenomenon, but also “the situation and conditions surrounding those experiences” (Padgett, 2017, p. 41). The goal of my study was to understand the lived experience of my participants and their experiences of abuse.

Sample sizes across phenomenology are typically small because the researcher is concerned with meaning making and not theory generation or generalizability (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, because of the nature of qualitative research, interviewing, coding, and analyzing is time consuming and a large sample size is unwieldy for data analysis (Ritchie et al., 2003). There are loose suggestions for sample sizes in phenomenological research; however, those suggestions are based on the type of research one is undertaking. In general, phenomenological studies aim for six (6) to 10 participants using a heterogenous group of participants in order to achieve some level of saturation within the group of participants (Padgett, 2017). However, because IPA focuses on a specific type of event with a specific type of participant, IPA suggests a small and homogenous sample to get at the lived experience of a specific phenomenon (Smith et al, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The goal in IPA is to interview three (3) to six (6) participants; most studies interview participants more than once when possible (Aparicio, 2017; Padgett, 2017).

My analytic method, IPA, allowed me to interpret their words and meanings more fully to better interpret the essence of the participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutic phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology, and IPA was the most appropriate analytic method, because it is not concerned with new theory generation (grounded theory); my study is not focused on a particular group or culture's shared patterns of beliefs (ethnography). The descriptive nature of hermeneutic phenomenology and IPA allowed me to fully answer my research questions and achieve more in-depth data, which will allow for theme generation, as well as nuanced findings (Polgar & Thomas, 2000). The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology, and the goal of IPA, is to provide rich and meaningful description of the phenomenon being studied. My research questions were created based on the connections I hoped to discover between both types of abuse. My initial question was created during my proposal writing. My second research question was created after reviewing my goal and aims for this study, upon realizing that one question did not adequately address the full goal of the study to also consider how participants make sense of the unique experience of *both* types of violence.

Research Questions

- 1) How do adult female survivors of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence experience and make sense of abuse by a family member?
- 2) Did, or how did, participants experience the relationship between sibling abuse and IPV?

Research Approach

Purposive sampling, intentionally recruiting participants who have experienced the research phenomenon being studied, is the most common sampling strategy in hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative studies (Laverty, 2003; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Recruitment in hermeneutic phenomenology is based on a sample of participants who have lived the experience being studied and have a variety of experiences within the area of

study, to add depth and diversity to the findings (Laverty, 2003). Both hermeneutic phenomenology and IPA use purposive sampling and recruit participants who have shared experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The participants were adult women who experienced sibling abuse in childhood and also experienced IPV in at least one adult relationship. Eligibility criteria included a) females b) age 18 or older, c) at least one sibling (did not have to be biological), d) experienced sibling abuse before the age of 18 by someone identified at that point in time as a sibling, and e) experienced physical, sexual, or emotional IPV in an adult relationship. Participants were excluded who were in active crisis, or who would be in danger by participating in this study. It was at the discretion of the researcher to decline participation from a qualified and interested individual.

In addition to small sample sizes in phenomenology, IPA focus on fewer than eight (8) participants to allow the researcher to dive deep with the participants in order for their story to unfold in depth. On average, researchers using IPA for analysis aim for between four (4) to eight (8) participants, with six (6) being the ideal due to the unique nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Padgett, 2017). IPA, unlike grounded theory, aims for a fairly homogenous sample in order to identify similarities and dissimilarities between the experiences of each participant (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Based on Smith and colleagues (2009) suggestion, my goal was to recruit and interview at least six (6) participants to adhere to IPA principles and ensure a homogenous sample for my study. I was able to recruit and interview six (6) women about their experiences of sibling abuse and IPV, but I chose to only include four (4) in my final analysis (see detailed explanation below in "Potential issues with recruitment" section).

While hermeneutic phenomenology was my theoretical approach guiding my study, my analytical method (IPA) influenced sample size and construct. In a phenomenological study on six (6) young women who were in or aging out of foster care, Aparicio (2017) used IPA to focus on a specific dimension of motherhood, efforts of breaking the cycle of child maltreatment. Aparicio (2017) conducted three (3) interviews with each of her six (6) study participants who were all young mothers, all in - or aging out of - foster care and had all experienced some type of family violence. Burton and Rehm, 2003, used IPA in their phenomenological study when interviewing four (4) adult survivors of child abuse and family violence. Using names as metaphors, and thick, rich description, this study described the participants' experiences in childhood and the long-term outcomes of the abuse, both positive and negative. The pseudonyms the participants chose for the study ended up being unintentional metaphors for positive growth in adulthood (Burton and Rehm, 2003). In a phenomenological study using IPA analysis on the experience of childhood sexual abuse for male survivors who disclosed to a therapist, Smith (2020) interviewed three (3) participants who were male, cis-gender, and experienced childhood sexual abuse from another male before puberty and had not disclosed the abuse to a therapist before the age of 18.

Data Collection

I submitted for IRB for approval from the University of Alabama before beginning recruitment; I received approval June 20, 2020 (IRB # 20-02-3289) to begin my study on June 20, 2020 (see Appendix 1). My intent was to recruit participants using word of mouth and through agencies who work with victims of IPV (see Appendix 2). Snowball sampling, which can be used to help the researcher find participants using previously established social networks (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004), was my back up method if I could not recruit enough participants

through word of mouth or agency connections. I was able to recruit two participants using word of mouth but did not have any success with agency recruitment. I submitted an addendum to my IRB that allowed me to use social media for recruitment - specifically Facebook. Once contact was made with a potential participant, they were emailed a flyer that outlined my research and the focus of my study (see Appendix 3). Through email, I established eligibility and explained my study in depth. Once eligibility and interest were established, a Zoom call was scheduled, and each participant was emailed an informed consent form and a referral list should they need to speak with a professional after the interview concluded (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5). I began the interview by discussing confidentially, interview procedures, and answering any questions they had in regard to participation and the outcome of the study. Once I obtained verbal consent, in lieu of written consent, as approved by my IRB protocol, the interview began.

Data collection lasted for a period of 11 months. The initial suggested avenues of recruitment, domestic violence agencies and then snowball sampling, did not produce any eligible participants. I spoke with five (5) agencies and their therapists or advocates. The agency gate keepers were not comfortable handing out flyers to their clients they knew may qualify. I was able to recruit two (2) participants using word of mouth in my own circles of influence. I was not able to recruit more using snowball sampling with my first two eligible participants, so I sought to expand my methods of recruitment. I submitted an addendum to my IRB, which was approved on August 28, 2020. This allowed me to recruit via social media (Facebook) and I was able to find eligible participants. Initially, six participants met study criteria eligibility and were interviewed. However, after reviewing conversations around eligibility and qualifying experiences, I felt that two (2) participants fabricated their stories to be eligible for the 30-dollar incentive (see detailed explanation below in "Potential issues with recruitment" section). While

my sample goal was six (6), to avoid compromising the integrity of my study, I decided against using the two fabricated interviews for my study. Because of the nature of IPA, saturation can be reached in a minimum of two (2) interviews, and the rich descriptions I received from the other four participants provided sufficient saturation for data analysis. (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 1: Timeline of engagement with each participant

Participant name	Date of first correspondence	Date of first interview	Interview Length (minutes)	Member Checking: 1st attempt	Second attempt	Third attempt Email with 4 questions	Meaningful contact response
Denise	07/15/2020	08/09/2020	110 m.	05/22/2021- no response	06/14/2021 - agreed to a phone call, never happened	07/10/2021 no response	No final phone call or email response
Alexis	08/15/2020	08/21/2021	87 m.	05/22/2021 no response	06/14/2021 agreed to a phone call, on 06/20/2021	07/10/2021 response 7/20/2021	06/20/2021 45 m. phone call, email response
Lucille	08/22/2020	08/26/2020	51 m.	05/22/2021 no response	06/14/2021 no response	07/10/2021 response 07/10/2021	07/10/2021 Responded to email questions
Kimberly	08/23/2020	08/30/2020	50 m.	05/22/2021 no response	06/14/2021 no response	07/10/2021 response 07/10/2021	07/10/2021 Responded to email questions
Gloria	08/27/2020	08/30/2020	42 m.	Removed from study	---	---	---
Javan	08/29/2020	09/07/2020	31 m.	Removed from study	---	---	---

Data collection occurred between August 2020 and July 2021. With the participant’s permission, I audio recorded each interview on the Zoom videoconferencing platform. I also took notes during the interview to record impressions and note follow up questions for the participant. I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The questions were worded so the participant could control what details they shared; any follow up questions were directly related to what the participant shared earlier in the interview and were

only asked when clarification for the study was needed in order to maintain study rigor. The questions were worded in a way to avoid being leading or judgmental; nor were they worded to presume a connection or outcome was known by me. Questions were asked that allowed the experience of the participant to be told in as much detail as they were comfortable sharing. The goal was for a onetime interview, lasting one to one and a half hours, with the possibility of member checking if necessary to achieve saturation. I initially conducted six (6) interviews ranging from 31 minutes to 110 minutes. Interviews consisted of several open-ended questions designed to illicit the lived experience of the participant and minimal participation from me. Interviews began with broad, open-ended questions around the participant's current life to establish the rapport needed to encourage openness and trust throughout the interview.

Examples of interview questions (see Appendix 6):

1. Thinking back to childhood, most siblings fight and argue, but sometimes that fighting and arguing turns into abuse. Did this happen in your family?
2. Now I'd like to talk about the past relationship(s), dating or married, where you indicated that you experienced abuse. Were there specific feelings or emotions you experienced during those times of abuse, or in that particular time of your life?
3. Thinking about both types of abuse you've experienced, in what ways were the experiences similar or different?

Additional information was needed from four (4) participants to reach saturation, so there was a request for a follow-up interview on the phone via email. However, only one (1) participant agreed for a phone interview; that follow up phone call lasted for 45 minutes (see Appendix 7). Because I was only able to speak with one participant via phone for a second interview, I sent an additional follow up email to request additional responses on participants'

connections between sibling abuse and IPV. The follow-up email contained four (4) final questions and requested participants to respond either via email or in a subsequent phone interview (see Appendix 8). Three participants responded to the final follow up email.

Initially, I planned to conduct my interviews in person to help build rapport with the participant. Since my goal was recruitment through agencies I worked with, my hope was the participant would feel supported throughout the recruitment process, as well as during the interview and follow-up. However, due to recruitment challenges and complications from Covid-19, all interviews were conducted in via the web video conferencing platform, Zoom. These interviews took place when and where the participant felt safe and could be guaranteed privacy and anonymity. All interviews were video recorded and transcribed into a WORD document. Gift cards were given out for study participation. Each participant was given a 30-dollar VISA gift card per interview for their time. The three participants who responded to the follow-up email were given a 15-dollar VISA gift card.

I created a de-identified folder to be stored on *UABox*. At the beginning of each interview, the participant chose a pseudonym to be used throughout the interview, and that pseudonym was what became associated with that file throughout the interview/transcription/member checking process. All files related to the study (except interviews) were stored on *UABox*: the transcribed data (verbatim) in a WORD document, and journaling and memoing in WORD or scanned in as a PDF (and the originals destroyed). The transcribed interviews and audio recordings were de-identified and stored on my locked and password protected laptop. All handwritten copies of interview notes were scanned, de-identified, and kept on *UABox*; all paper copies were then shredded and destroyed. All data will be kept for 7 years, and then will be destroyed/deleted. I used NVivo software to organize,

categorize, and code data. During each interview, I kept detailed notes of engagement regarding the participant. I noted their affect and body presentation (e.g., tearful, shut down, tense, fidgety, calm, or protected). I also noted the way they tended to describe emotional experiences; often, their affect did not match the emotional meaning of their words. One participant might have laughed when describing abuse, while another participant would try to remain neutral or disconnected as they spoke about a highly charged experience (see Appendix 9).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) ethical and safety recommendations for research on violence against women (2001), there are several ways to put women's safety first when including those affected by IPV in a study. According to the WHO (2001), "all research on domestic violence against women needs to prioritize women's safety...to ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical and appropriately sensitive manner" (p. 10). Safety is above and beyond any objectives or needs of the study and should be the focus of any and all project decisions. Confidentiality is crucial; ensuring there are no identities connected to your participants and the study will help to ensure her safety. To ensure confidentiality, all recording, all notes, and all instances of data were assigned a pseudonym and immediately de-identified. All notes or recordings were kept in separate storage, a locked cabinet for anything in writing, and all audio recordings were kept on my personal computer, which is locked and pass coded.

An eligibility exception was participation from anyone in acute distress in a relationship, or from anyone in an actively abusive relationship. Three of my four participants left their relationship at least six (6) years ago. One participant still saw her boyfriend "sometimes," but he was not actively abusive, and she did not live with him so her participation could be completely unknown by him. The only known risk for study participation was bringing up past trauma, which could impact current mental and emotional functioning. I was mindful of the mood and

attitude of the participant throughout the interview process. Participants were given a resource list in case they needed to speak with a professional regarding feelings that surfaced from the interview. Finally, the ethical obligation to only ask questions about violence that are strictly relevant to the study, and to furthering the protection of women (WHO, 2001), dictated my questions be focused on only what I needed to know, and asked in a way that gave the participant control of the conversation. Participants controlled how deep they dove into their past, and all questions were asked in a non-judgmental and open way. I was careful to only probe deeper with the information participants willingly shared. The informed consent that the participant signed clearly stated they were under no obligation to participate in my study, and that they were free to quit/leave at any time. Participation was completely voluntary.

I was prepared to address several significant issues while working to recruit participants or during the interview process itself. I knew that some individuals may not fully recognize their experience in childhood with their sibling as “sibling abuse” because it may have been ignored and/or normalized within their family system. Based on qualitative and quantitative research (Finkelhor et al., 2007; Meyers, 2014, 2016; van Berkel et al., 2018), parents and adult family members tend to ignore or minimize aggressive acts between children in the family, leaving young children and adolescents to feel that their experience is typical or deserved (Tucker et al., 2013). Therefore, survivors of sibling abuse may not view themselves as having experienced sibling abuse because they were never allowed to view themselves as a victim. However, this was not the case with my participants, as they were aware that what they experienced in childhood was abuse, and they discussed their sibling's actions freely, as well as discussing the impact the abuse had on them in childhood and today.

Finally, a concern was the level of violence in the adult relationship a participant may have experienced could be minimized due to a lifetime of victimization. Because I could not know the participant's views of victimization, the recruitment strategy had to be as benign as possible in order to avoid stigmatizing (potential) participants. The need to enhance a woman's feelings of emotional and physical safety is of the utmost importance (Ellsberg et al., 2017). This was achieved by gentle, open ended interview questions. I understood that some participants may never accept the academic or clinical definition of sibling abuse or IPV, nor would they ever consider themselves victims/survivors of either sibling abuse or IPV. However, my participants did not reject the notion that they were victims of sibling abuse and IPV. They felt safe and confident to share their experience with me, and they trusted me with their story, as I worked to support them and protect their beliefs throughout the interview process.

Openness during the interview to disclose both sibling abuse and IPV depends on the wording of the questions, the setting, and the level of comfort the participant feels. The ability to ask exploratory, yet sensitive questions, to illicit a detailed responses took careful deliberation. The topics I asked participants to discuss were about deeply personal experiences that could have elicited feeling of shame, anger, sadness, and devastation. Thus, the questions were open-ended and asked sensitive way that allowed participants to feel safe and not judged (Ellsberg et al., 2017).

The primary challenge I foresaw was finding women who qualified for the study, survivors of *both* sibling abuse and IPV. This did prove to be difficult, which was why I submitted an addendum to my IRB for recruiting via social media. It was challenging to find those who experienced both types of abuse; many respondents experienced parental child maltreatment and IPV. Once participants were identified, I tried to ensure that nothing I did, said,

asked, or accidentally conveyed make the participant feel stigmatized or re-traumatized; my goals were validation, normalization, and support. My goals were achieved through the rapport I developed with my participants during the interview process, as well as the way I helped participants work through their feelings around the abuse and lack of support for their experiences. Additionally, when participants expressed specific stigmatizing feelings, I supported them through normalizing their feelings with the literature around that topic and assured them they were not alone in that experience or in their response to an event.

My final challenge was to distinguish between potential participants recruited from social media sites who possibly reached out because of the incentive (and could be fabricating details to be in the study), and those who were sincere. I interviewed six (6) women and transcribed all six (6) interviews verbatim. Before beginning data analysis in NVivo, I reread my email communications with the four (4) participants recruited from a social media site. I realized that two (2) of the participants stated one thing in the email, but then disclosed something different in the interview. Due to my uncertainty about the validity of their stories, I decided to exclude them from data analysis and from my study altogether. While I believe they shared someone's story, I do not believe they shared their own story, so the feelings and connections would not be accurate and would potentially diminish the experiences of my other participants. Analysis and results are based on the interviews from the remaining four (4) participants.

Data Analysis Method

I used Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research methodology grounded in phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith, et al., 2009; Aparicio, 2017), to guide qualitative data analysis. IPA is “phenomenological, centrally focused on the lived experience of a particular phenomenon, while it is hermeneutic in attending to the layers of interpretation

involved in both experiencing and researching the phenomenon” (Aparicio, 2017 p. 609). In other words, in IPA, the role of the participant is the interpreter of their world, and their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is shaped by a lens that has been informed and created by both past and present experiences; IPA is both descriptive and interpretive (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Aparicio, 2017). Participants share their interpretations of the phenomenon with the researcher during the interview process; the researcher is involved via the creation of the interview questions, member checking (the hermeneutic circle), and by analyzing the data (Smith et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Aparicio, 2017).

Interpretive phenomenological analysis uses an iterative process for each case in the study (Smith and colleagues, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). There are six (6) steps in IPA analysis. 1) The researcher reads and re-reads the first case. 2) The researcher creates initial notes (descriptive, linguistic, conceptual). 3) The researcher identifies emergent themes. 4) The researcher begins to develop super-ordinate themes across the case. 5) This process is repeated for each case. 6) The researcher develops a final set of themes for all cases. Super-ordinate themes are the culmination of the emergent themes within and between cases.

Table 2

Super-ordinate and Emergent Themes Example

Super-ordinate theme	Emergent themes	Participant	Excerpt
Lack of family support (for sibling abuse)	Parental response: Minimized, Normalized as sibling rivalry, Recruiting the victim to manage the abuser, Parental failure to protect, Self-esteem, Impact of abusive parents	Alexis, Kimberly, Lucille, Denise	" How I felt [about how my mother handled my sister's behavior]? I'm going to say I felt a little on the back burner. And I would also say we worried so much about my sister's feelings, I never got too much to worry about my feelings. I would say undernourished comes to mind. I just wanted once for maybe her [my mother] to speak up for me." (Lucille) "She [mom] would just tell my brother, 'You guys are siblings, why are you guys always fighting?' kind of like enforcing sibling relationship. My dad would never say anything to stop it, he just thinks it's my fault." (Kimberly) "[If my mom had supported me] I probably would have been a lot stronger mentally, surer of myself. And not so much of a latch on to the new, you know? I would have been more confident to try new things like the person I am now." (Alexis)

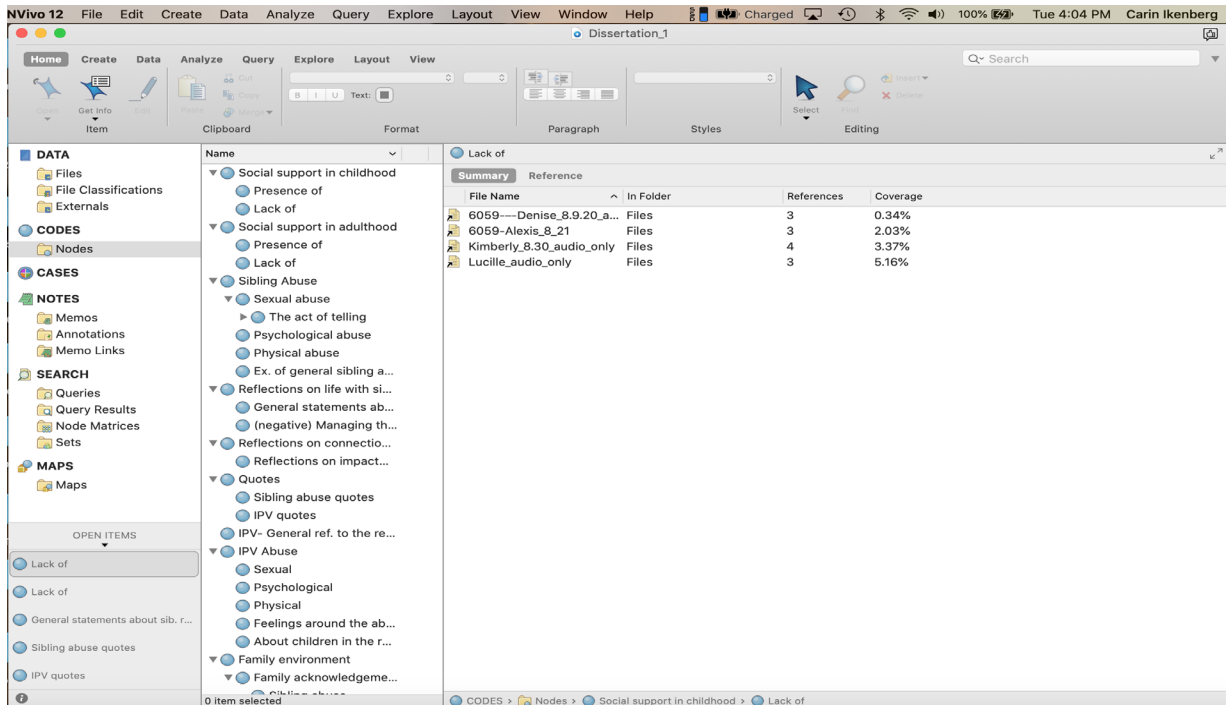
For my study, I read each verbatim, hard-copy interview transcript twice and created initial notes and noted emergent themes by hand (NVivo coding was used for data analysis for the final four (4) participants). This stage is an iterative process and was completed for all six (6) participants. I finished hand coding all six (6) interviews. It was at this point that I reread my email communications with each participant. I realized that for two (2) of the participants, their stories were contradictory at certain points of the interview (e.g., at one point, the participant

stated that she did not have any siblings at all), and I grew more concerned that they had fabricated part or all their stories. I went back through all my email communications with them, and I realized those two participants (Gloria and Javan) shared each other's stories during the interview. What was communicated through email during the qualification process was shared by the other participant in the interview. To protect the integrity of my study, I decided not to use their interviews because I could not be sure they were sharing their own experiences.

Once all four (4) final cases were read four (4) times and emergent themes were established, I imported the WORD documents into NVivo to support electronic data analysis and theme creation. I then created an initial set of super-ordinate themes and emergent themes for all four cases. Coding in NVivo does not share the same terminology as IPA analysis. In NVivo, the *nodes* were my preliminary super-ordinate themes, and the *sub nodes* were my preliminary emergent themes.

Figure 1

NVivo Coding Process



I then read the "node" and "sub node" quotes two additional times in NVivo. Once my super-ordinate themes and emergent themes were created, I imported all those documents back into WORD for further analysis and final super-ordinate and emergent themes creation. This was an iterative process, as I continued to refine or discarded super-ordinate and emergent themes that were not directly related to my study. The outline of the final themes was a document created to begin my findings section; it was a fluid document that morphed multiple times as I wrote and continued to analyze and interpret the data. The super-ordinate themes emerged from the collective data and were the common threads between all four (4) interviews. The emergent themes were created across the data but were sometimes unique to only a couple of the participants. Below is an excerpt from my Themes document (see Appendix 10).

Super-ordinate Theme #1: Lack of social support for survivor

- SA survivors experienced minimal social support throughout childhood.
 - Most of the household energy and attention was spent on managing the abusive sibling.
 - Several parents verbally normalized it as rivalry. Survivors were left feeling marginalized and neglected. Since the SA was normalized by parents, survivors did not view it as abuse in a traditional context.
 - Because of this normalization, dysfunction in the home, and not telling anyone about the abuse, survivors were left alone to deal with the trauma and aftermath of abuse. The abuse could be looked at as a secret, or just as "untold." SA survivors did not report telling anyone about the abuse during childhood.
 - Not only did survivors not receive support from their parents, some experienced additional abuse from the parent.
- IPV survivors had little support throughout their partnered relationships. While most had friends, the participants did not view them as meaningful support because they were not able to provide guidance (to leave) in a meaningful way.

The goal of data analysis in interpretive phenomenology is to discover the essence of the participant's lived experience by presenting a rich description of the phenomenon of interest (Padgett, 2017). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the central assumption in phenomenological research is that there is an essence to an experience that is shared between those who have lived said experience. And as such, that essence can be distilled by focusing on the "life as lived" through phenomenological inquiry (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 106). By highlighting significant statements from the participants experiences, the researcher is able to succinctly describe the essence of their experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As meanings come to life, the researcher can distil the different meanings into essences (Padgett, 2017). An important part of a thick and rich description is an integral part of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Part of my notations included the body language of my participants, specific word choice for certain events, organic emotional responses (e.g., crying or nervous laughter), and body language/expression changes throughout the interview process.

As a researcher whose focus is family violence and the intergenerational transmission of violence, this study represented an opportunity to address a woefully understudied area, sibling abuse, and its potential connection to other types of violence, IPV in particular. As the study facilitator, I developed interview questions that allowed me to explore the lived experience of both sibling abuse and IPV. As a researcher who is immersed in the IPV, family violence, and sibling abuse literature, I remained conscious of how my lens is informed by the IGTV theory. Therefore, my assumptions and interpretations are based on a connection between both types of violence – specifically, the experience of sibling abuse in childhood as a primer for IPV victimization in adulthood.

Reflexivity is a tool used from study design through analysis (McCaffrey et al., 2012). It begins with examining your preconceptions about the study phenomenon and examining them from a professional and a personal dimension (McCaffrey et al., 2012; Aparicio, 2017). As the study progressed, I found I held fewer preconceptions than originally thought and discussed with some members of my committee, but I did find myself sometimes assigning words/meanings to the participants' experiences that were not explicitly theirs. Pausing to reflect on my analysis and word choice is a natural part of the IPA process, and it was useful to have my memos and notes in order to see how I grew throughout this process. Throughout the research process, I took the time to memo in order to stay mindful of my thoughts and assumptions and how they evolved and changed (McCaffrey et al., 2012). When I found myself wanting to lead the participant down a particular and unplanned path, I paused and reworded my question during the interview process. When reviewing the transcripts, I did not find any issues of interviewer bias related to my planned interview questions, their responses, and any follow up questions asked in that moment.

An example of a memoing around the theme "Social support:"

Social Support - April 25, 2021

My interpretation of the absence of support for the participant was that participants were alone to deal with the abuse. Participants reported they didn't tell anyone about their experience of sibling abuse, and in my mind, their parents were not a support in their home the way they should have been. The parents failed to protect the participant from the continued abuse, and some parents abused the participants as well. After reading this through with Cady, I came up with "Unacknowledged" instead of "alone." The participant's experience may have been lonely, but no one said they were alone at any point in the interview.

An important part of transcendental phenomenology, made famous by Husserl, is bracketing. Moustakas (1994) calls this practice epoche, the way the researcher brackets and reflects on his or her personal beliefs and experiences. However, Heidegger, and hermeneutic phenomenology, suggest a researcher could not truly engage in bracketing. Heidegger's creation and use of the hermeneutic circle encouraged the researcher to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in order to interpret it through shared knowledge and experiences with the participant (Laverty, 2003; Kafle, 2011). The double hermeneutic, or dual interpretation process, is when participants are trying to make sense of their own life experiences, and the researcher is trying to make sense of their (participant) making sense (Smith and Osbourne, 2009; Kafle, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Aparicio, 2017).

Heidegger believed a key assumption in phenomenology is that the researcher cannot be truly objective because the goal is for total immersion of the researcher in their work (Laverty, 2003; Kafle, 2011). Heidegger asserted that impartiality was impossible because the very nature of interpretive phenomenology enmeshes the researcher with the participant in the hearing and telling of their story. Additionally, he suggested that researchers cannot come to the research

table without some type of preconceived beliefs or ideas around their topic of interest (Lavery, 2003; Kafle, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Similar to van Manen's (1990) belief that the role of the researcher is enmeshed in the participant's experience and not able to be bracketed, IPA suggests the double hermeneutic organically involves the researcher and the participant's roles in meaning making (Smith et al., 2009; Padgett, 2019). Hermeneutic phenomenology and IPA do not require the researcher to bracket their beliefs and positionality throughout the interview process.

Despite the non-requirement of bracketing in my study, my dissertation chair and I decided I should bracket throughout my data analysis and coding process. Because I share the lived experiences of my participants, we decided the best way for me to stay objective, and not impart my own feelings and experiences to my study, was to make bracketing an intentional part of my study. I spent months discussing created themes and interpretations with my dissertation chair to ensure that my academic understanding of sibling abuse and IPV, and my personal experiences with both types of violence, did not overshadow the participant experience, nor did it unduly influence my data analysis. I regularly discussed my personal experiences with sibling abuse and IPV with my chair to identify my own feelings and emotions around my participants' stories, and how my experiences may influence my interpretation of the data.

An example of bracketing around the word 'chaos:'

(Excerpt from data analysis) Participants reported chaotic family lives, primarily driven by managing the abusive sibling. Because the abusive sibling's behavior created chaos in all environments, not just at home, the parent(s) had to spend extra energy managing the sibling, which was another way time and attention was taken away from the emotional needs of participant.

Feedback from Dr. Carlson - CHAOS Want to check with you about this term. Did any participants use it? Is it your term? Its ok if it is your term, let's just make sure it is appropriate and you are not projecting.

Memo on 'chaos': My notes: Cady and I discussed her feedback to me on this excerpt from a theme (lack of support). I was DEAD SET on using the word chaos in this section. In my mind, sibling abuse causes a tremendous amount of chaos in the home, as well as outside of the home. Because of my experience of sibling abuse with my middle son, my whole world has been chaotic since it began seven years ago.

In order to tell the participant's story without bias or assumptions, the researcher must carefully examine their own thoughts on, academic knowledge of, and experiences of or related to, the chosen research topic. As the researcher, I bring a great deal of my own lived experience of sibling abuse and IPV into my research. My methodological approach and analysis method allowed me to guide participants through their own experiences of abuse. My hope was that my participants could make sense of their own experiences as I guided them through the interview process.

I experienced IPV in a partnered relationship for five (5) years. While I knew I was being verbally abused, I accepted it because I loved him, and believed if I just tried harder, everything would be OK. I finally left the relationship when I decided my emotional and mental health was more important than the business we shared, and I no longer cared about the potential financial repercussions I might face once I left. I am thankful for my experience and the self-discovery I over the years. My experience of IPV has made me a great resource and advocate for women who have experienced IPV, especially for those women whose partners are narcissists - "I get it." I used that experience to make me stronger and unapologetic for protecting anyone who needs support and protection. This strength has served me well in counseling other IPV survivors, as well as in my current job as a social worker in a men's prison.

I am the mother to four (4) children, one (1) grown daughter and three (3) young sons. My sons are all a year apart, and my middle son has a multitude of mental health issues. I have spent the last six (6) years dealing with his aggression and instability in my home, and over the

last four (4) years, I have seen the impact of sibling abuse on an almost daily basis. I have been the parent who must protect the sibling victims, and I have been the parent who must defend the sibling abuser. It is exhausting, heart breaking, and consuming on many levels. Because this is my life, I did not even connect my dissertation topic to my own life until well into my proposal. I chose to study sibling abuse because I believe it is a missing piece in the IGTV; this was inspired by my research over my academic career. I have spent a significant amount of time bracketing with my chair and writing memos so I would not layer my interpretation of my own experience onto my participant's experiences of sibling abuse or IPV.

Phenomenological research is highly flexible, but it is no less rigorous than other types of qualitative or quantitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The goal or aim of phenomenological research is to “achieve an analytic description of the phenomena not affected by prior assumptions” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 106). Through member checking, reflective journals, memoing to identify biases, and leaving two questionable interviews out, I maintained the rigor of this study, which lead to reliable and valid results.

I checked in with my dissertation chair at weekly with phone calls, and throughout the week via email. We discussed themes, biases that arose, biases that had already been identified, and challenges that I faced during the interview and data analysis process.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is a critical element. According to Guba (1981), there are four components of trustworthiness to address: (1) truth/value, (2) applicability, (3) consistency, and (4) neutrality. Wallendorf and Belk (1989) added a fifth concern to Guba’s four: (5) integrity.

In this qualitative study, I addressed these concerns in several ways. In order to address truth/value and integrity (1, 5), the data was transcribed verbatim and coded with NVivo, to

maintain the words and ideas of the participants. My goal was to use member checking to ensure I accurately conveyed the words and experiences of my participants. Only one participant responded to my follow up email to review my findings and share additional thoughts about their participation. I spoke with her on the phone for 45 minutes, discussing her thoughts since the interview, as well as some of the themes I discovered. After two (2) failed attempts to connect with my other three (3) participants, I spoke with my dissertation chair about a follow-up email containing my final four questions (see Appendix 8). Since member checking is an integral part of my study and methodology, I sent out my questions to them via email. Three (3) of the four (4) responded to the email and answered my final questions (see Appendix 8). I consulted with my dissertation chair, and two additional members from my committee, during the analysis process on thematic development to check all generated themes throughout the transcription process.

Second, to address applicability and consistency (2,3), I methodically focused on the circumstances of my participants, in childhood and adulthood, and thoroughly explored the differences and similarities between them. I supported my findings with current literature that speaks to findings in other studies done on topics similar to my study. Finally, I strove to recognize when personal biases arose through discussions with my dissertation chair, consistent memoing, bracketing, and analysis of my own thoughts and tendencies of interpretation, in order to remain as interpretively neutral (4) as possible (Anney, 2014).

Credibility is described as the “confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings” (Anney, 2014, p. 276). Strategies to establish credibility include member checking, topic fluency, and adequate time working with participants (Anney, 2014).

I was careful on how I worded my initial interview questions, as well as my follow up questions during the interview, so they were not leading, nor they did they reveal my preconceived ideas and beliefs. I memoed before and after each interview, and I regularly checked in with my dissertation chair to discuss issues as they arose. Because abuse of any type is a sensitive and private topic, I gently probed with follow up questions when it was reasonable to do so, making sure I did not suggest conclusions to my participants, but rather allowed them to (potentially) make connections with their own words and stories. By using open-ended and non-leading questions during the interviews, participants had the space to answer in as much depth and detail as they desired. I was very intentional with my initial questions and follow up questions, to not “box them in” or to force a prescribed response with my wording.

What is something that actually happened when talking to a participant... when I was talking to X, give a 3-4 sentence example or when I had to check in with Cady.

Example of a probing question from the interview:

You spoke of _____, would you mind giving more detail about that experience?

Example of an open-ended question from the interview:

Were there specific feelings or emotions you experienced during those times of abuse, or in that particular time of your life?

Additionally, I ensured credibility by going back to the interview transcripts ad nauseum to make sure the participants' words were never taken out of context or added to during the analysis process. Because I read my transcripts six (6) times, and I spent months immersed in my data, I was very familiar with my data and the context in which things were said. However, I never relied on my memory when working with the data in the theming process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present data from my interviews with four women who experienced both sibling abuse in childhood and intimate partner violence in adulthood. This section includes the description of my participants and their experiences of abuse. Five super-ordinate themes emerged from the data: lack of family support, experiences of abuse, coping mechanisms, loss and longing, and participant connections. My findings section will discuss each super-ordinate theme and emergent theme in relation to the participants' description of their lived experience of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence.

Participant Descriptions

Four female survivors of both sibling abuse and intimate partner violence met eligibility criteria and voluntarily participated in this study. Each participant selected a pseudonym; the pseudonyms they chose had no particular significance. Ages ranged from 27 to 59; one participant self-identified as White, one as Southeast Asian, one as Creole, and one as Biracial (White and Black). All four females experienced sibling abuse from a biological sibling. Two of the participants were married to their abusive partners, one lived with her partner for 10 years, one never lived with her partner, and one never lived with her partner; all were in heterosexual relationships. Three of the four participants had children with their abusers; one did not have kids with him (or at all). Three of the four reported witnessing IPV and/or experiencing parental child maltreatment in addition to the sibling abuse. Participants all had different homelives and family of origin experiences, yet they described similar abuse experiences in childhood and adulthood.

The following section is a detailed overview of each participant's family of origin environment, and an overview of the experience of both sibling abuse and intimate partner violence.

Table 3

Participant Information and Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age & Racial identity	Sibling abuser-type of abuse	Co-occurring violence in the family of origin	Type of sibling abuse	IPV abuser and former relationship status	Type of IPV	Current relationship status	Number of children
Denise	58 Creole	Older brother	Mother, Physical and verbal abuse	Sexual abuse	Married, husband	Physical, verbal, infidelity	Divorced, single	3
Alexis	45 White	Younger brother	Stepfather, Verbal IPV	Physical & verbal abuse	Married, husband	Physical, verbal, sexual, financial, stalking	Divorced, Remarried	1
Lucille	44 Bi-racial (White and Black)	Older sister	N/A	Physical & verbal abuse	Male partner Lived with	Physical, verbal, financial, extreme isolation	Left past partner, Lives with current partner	2 (with ex-partner) 3 with current partner
Kimberly	27 South east Asian	Younger brother	Father, Physical and verbal abuse	Physical & verbal abuse	Boyfriend, Did not live with him	Physical, verbal	Still in relationship with abuser	None

Participant #1: Denise

Denise is a 59-year-old female who identifies as Creole. She is divorced, and the mother to three children. Throughout the interview, Denise described her childhood as "very trying... my mom was a very abusive mother in every sense of the word: physical, emotional, and mental. That was my childhood, day in and day out." Her parents lived together on an irregular basis. Once her parents divorced, her older brothers would come to stay with her and her mother for random periods of time. When together, Denise shared a bedroom with her two older brothers. Throughout her childhood, Denise witnessed intimate partner violence between her parents and her mother's subsequent boyfriends.

Denise described her mother as her first abuser; she said her father was never abusive to her, but he "treated her bothers like her mom treated her, but not as abusive." Her father was a heroin addict for a large portion of her childhood and was often absent during childhood. Her brothers were several years older than she was, and it was her oldest brother who sexually abused her; Denise was aged 13-15 during the abuse. The abuse stopped when her mother kicked her brother out of the house for using drugs and alcohol. As a child, she never told anyone about the abuse.

Denise's mom's instability permeated her entire childhood. Denise described her mother as kind to her brothers but took out all of her anger and frustration on her and fought with her dad and her boyfriends. Although her life was constantly upended by abuse from her mother, Denise found a way to "excel" in school and sports. In her sophomore year of high school, Denise left home to go live with her best friend, and her best friend's mother became her foster mother.

As a young adult, Denise dated her best friend's brother. He pursued her for several years, and eventually they married. Their marriage was "good" until her husband began abusing drugs and alcohol. Once he began to use regularly, the violence and infidelity began. Even after he became sober, and the violence stopped, issues of infidelity plagued their marriage.

After several years of a violent marriage, her father, a recovered heroin addict now a PhD, was able to help her husband overcome his addiction to drugs and alcohol. Denise wove references of her father into her story in small ways. While he was not regular presence in her life as a child, she felt he was there for her as an adult, once he was recovered from his heroin addiction.

Eventually, Denise left the abusive marriage with her kids and made a new life for herself. Through "therapy and God," she found forgiveness for those who wronged her. She has made peace with her mother; her abusive brother died when she was in her late 20s. She is close with her children, and she encourages their relationship with her own mother.

Participant #2: Alexis

Alexis is a 45-year-old female who identifies as White. Alexis grew up in a home with married parents, and a brother that was two years younger; her parents were married until she was a teenager. Both of her parents were children of Air Force officers, so she described her upbringing as strict but with a reasonable amount of freedom. Alexis stated that the abuse from her brother began as soon as he could walk. Alexis described the abuse by her brother as both physical and verbal. Her brother was also generally violent and aggressive, and he shirked responsibility for anything wrong he did.

Alexis described trying her to help him, she even defended him against school bullies, but her efforts were always met with anger and aggression from her brother. The physical abuse

from her brother continued until she moved out of their family home. Even in adulthood, the psychological abuse still happens, but Alexis now "refuses to tolerate" his behavior.

Alexis dated her future husband for several years before they were married. She described their dating relationship as wonderful. Alexis recalled that he was "good-looking, charming, tall, dark. Prince Charming.... I had a fairy tale wedding on the hottest day ever." However, once the wedding night came, everything changed.

Alexis experienced financial, physical, and psychological abuse, as well as marital rape. The intimate partner violence related to her husband's drug and alcohol abuse. While Alexis considered leaving her marriage several times in the first year, once she found out she was pregnant, she decided she would give it one more try. While Alexis felt she tried hard to make it work, she found her situation more and more difficult to tolerate. She was torn because she wanted to give her daughter a "traditional upbringing," but it was also important to her to raise her daughter in a safe environment.

On her daughter's second birthday, Alexis decided she'd had enough. Alexis decided to leave the relationship. Only after she left, did she have the support of her mother and friends.

She is remarried to a "wonderful man", and the mother to a 9-year-old daughter; her abusive ex-husband is the father of her daughter. Alexis still deals with her ex-husband and manages their adversarial custody arraignment; he is in their daughter's life on an inconsistent basis.

Participant #3: Lucille

Lucille is a 45-year-old female who identifies as Biracial. Lucille grew up in a single parent household; she lived with her mother and older sister. Lucille's dad was never a part of her

life. Lucille's sister is five years older and was physically and verbally abusive to her until she (older sister) moved out; they still get into serious fights from time to time.

Lucille described her sister's moods as unpredictable and avoiding her "bad moods and fits" dominated Lucille's homelife. Lucille reported that once her sister was "upset," she would stay mad "all day" and take it out on her. The outcome from a meltdown with her sister was often verbal and physical abuse. Throughout the interview, Lucille referenced how she and her mother had to manage her sister and "tip-toe" around her. The focus on her sister, and the need to compromise what was best for Lucille, made Lucille feel her needs were unimportant.

When Lucille was 18, she began dating her partner. Their relationship was rocky soon after it began. She and her partner had two children together. He kept her away from her family, she was not allowed to work, she never learned to drive, and she did not have any friends. Lucille suffered physical and verbal abuse from her partner, as well as financial abuse. She did not reference sexual abuse in the interview.

Lucille discussed the lack of support throughout her relationship. Because he did not let her leave the house, she never made friends or had a support network. Lucille faced many obstacles for leaving, and she was torn about taking her children away from their father. She also lacked the financial resources and the ability to leave. Eventually, Lucille left with her children and nothing else; they stayed at a shelter until she could get on her feet.

Lucille has a good relationship with her current partner; they have three children together. She had two children with her first partner, and she is now a grandmother of two. She is close with her mother, who lives with Lucille now.

Participant #4: Kimberly

Kimberly is a 27-year-old female of Southeast Asian descent. Kimberly still lives in the same home as her married parents and brother. Kimberly has a younger brother (two years younger) who has always been abusive; she does her best to avoid any interaction with him at home. Kimberly's father is both verbally and physically abusive to her. Because of the abuse from her brother and father, Kimberly referenced feeling "hated" by her family throughout the interview. Kimberly shared that her mother gets into trouble for helping her, but that she stays in the home because she wants to live with her mother.

Kimberly is the only participant still in a relationship with her IPV abuser. She stated that they are "on again, off again," but they do not live together. Kimberly has been dating her boyfriend for two years, and that their relationship is volatile at times. Kimberly shared that her boyfriend yells at her whenever he is frustrated with her or the situation, and that he occasionally pushes or hits her when he "has not meditated that day." Because Kimberly still lives at home with her abusive father and brother, she does rely on her boyfriend for emotional support with that situation. She described times that her boyfriend was there for her emotionally when she was upset at what happened at home, but his support is unpredictable and inconsistent. Kimberly is the only participant who is still romantically involved with her IPV abuser.

Super-ordinate Theme #1: Lack of Family Support

Lack of Family Support for Sibling Abuse

Participants described feeling a lack of support from family members around their experience of sibling abuse, specifically mothers. Participants discussed their parents' minimization of the abusive interactions; two (Alexis and Kimberly) specifically reported the sibling abuse being normalized as sibling rivalry by their mothers. Additionally, one participant

(Lucille) described her mother's active recruitment of her to help manage the abusive sibling. Two participants (Alexis and Lucille) described common experiences of trying to appease or manage the abusive siblings. According to participants, the abusive sibling's behavior, and the parental response, or lack of parental response, created discord in the home. Fueled by the lack of support from their caregivers, and the normalization of the abuse in their family, survivors did not report telling anyone about their abuse experiences. In addition to sibling abuse, three of the four participants (Alexis, Kimberly, and Denise) experienced parental child maltreatment or witnessed IPV throughout childhood. Because the participants lacked meaningful support for the sibling abuse from their parents, and because they did not tell anyone else what they experienced at home with their sibling, they felt like they had no support for the sibling abuse.

Kimberly was the only participant to report any type of emotional support from a parent; however, it was limited by her father. When Kimberly's mother attempted to intervene between her and her brother, her father would lash out at her (mother). Kimberly described how her mom would "tell him [father] [to leave her alone], but he [father] doesn't listen sometimes." Because of her father's abusive tendencies in his marriage, her mother would "get into trouble" with her father when she tried to intervene on Kimberly's behalf. Kimberly implied a powerlessness on the part of her mother to help her. Although Kimberly's mother was primarily only a listening ear, Kimberly reported feeling "supported" by her mother's attempt to intervene on her behalf.

I told her multiple times, and she knows [about the sibling abuse], but I know she can't do too many things. I know is she tries, and she tries to tell my dad to help... But she just can't do much right. She actually gets into trouble because of me. That's why my dad shouts at her. My dad would say "why are you always protecting her?" or something.
(Kimberly)

In my follow up email with three of the participants (Kimberly, Lucille, and Alexis), I asked them what would have looked different in childhood if their mothers had been a source of

protection from the sibling abuse. Kimberly shared that she would have been "stronger."

Kimberly described needing her abusive boyfriend's support because she lacked the support of her mother.

If my mom was able to support me more, I would be a different person. I would probably be stronger and less likely to lean towards others... like needing my boyfriend for support makes me weak in a sense. (Kimberly)

Kimberly realized the impact from her lack of support in childhood connects to her need to keep her boyfriend in her life, increasing her dependence on him and strengthening his hold on her.

Lucille shared that her mother's lack of support in childhood made her think abusive behavior was "normal or OK." The allowance of abuse by her mother may have set Lucille's expectation for "normal" in future relationships.

Alexis described feeling "resentful" about her mother's life-long preferential treatment of her brother. "Don't get me wrong - I love my mom. Although, I do hold some resentment when I still see my brother getting everything handed to him that he asks for, and I get 'you gotta work for it.'" In her initial interview, Alexis shared that her mother always "gave him (brother) everything." This preferential treatment created a sense of resentment in Alexis, despite being close to her mother.

Participants described their parents' response to the sibling abuse as minimizing what was occurring, which resulted in participants feeling their needs were neglected. In managing the sibling abuse, parents tended to focus on the needs of the abusive sibling and ways to "manage" them, instead of protecting the abused sibling or making the home a physically and emotionally safe place for the participant. Two participants (Alexis and Lucille) described the lack of involvement and protection from their mothers.

Lucille, who was raised by a single mom and never knew her father, shared her feelings around the lack of attention from her mother because she was always managing her abusive older sister. Lucille reported her mother focused her energy on managing her sister, which resulted in Lucille feeling that her needs went unmet because of the focus on her sister. Lucille described that her feelings were "minimized" by her mother's response, and that she felt her needs were not as important as her sister's.

How I felt [about how my mother handled my sister's behavior]? I'm going to say I felt a little on the back burner. And I would also say we worried so much about my sister's feelings, I never got too much to worry about my feelings. I would say undernourished comes to mind. I just wanted once for maybe her [my mother] to speak up for me. (Lucille)

In addition to minimizing the abuse, participants felt their parents often normalized the abusive relationship between their children as "sibling rivalry." By considering the abusive relationships as sibling rivalry, the responsibility was placed on *both* children when there was an abusive incident. Alexis reported her mother's frustration levels were high because of the regular conflict between Alexis and her brother, and often both kids were punished. Alexis discussed internalizing the abuse as sibling rivalry.

If we did argue, and it got to the point where we were like yelling at each other, we got a whipping, and we'd go in our room. At points, my mom would say, 'There's the floor, have it out.' Just to get out the sheer frustrations.... I guess I always thought it was sibling rivalry, you know. But it still happens today, which is the problem. (Alexis)

Kimberly described her mother's response to her brother's aggressive behavior as sibling rivalry, while her father blamed her.

She [mom] would just tell my brother, 'You guys are siblings, why are you guys always fighting?' kind of like enforcing sibling relationship. My dad would never say anything to stop it, he just thinks it's my fault. (Kimberly)

During the interview Kimberly and Alexis discussed how, based on their mother's responses to them as they tried to manage their abusive relationships with their siblings, both participants internalized the interactions as sibling rivalry.

Another way participants described how their parents handled the sibling abuse was to recruit the abused sibling to help manage the abuser. Lucille did not feel her mother blamed on her if there was a fight between her and her sister; however, her mother expected Lucille to always give in to her sister's demands. Lucille reported that she and her mother were very careful how they approached her sister's outbursts, and that the outbursts consumed them until her sister's mood improved. Lucille described how her mother's approach to parenting her sister resulted in Lucille having to sacrifice her needs.

There were also times when we were very cautious on what you did or say. We tiptoed, and we tried to always let her be first. I would say that we both did things to make sure that we wasn't going to upset her. I would also say that we did a – I want to say a lot of tiptoeing. I would say that when she was in a good mood, everybody would kiss her butt to keep her in a good mood. (Lucille)

There was never a short outburst. There was never a short outburst. If she was acting out, you can trust and believe it was going to be for the whole day. And you could basically tell when she woke up if it was going to be a good day or a bad day. (Lucille)

Although Lucille's mother did not refer to the violent interactions as sibling rivalry, her recruitment of Lucille to help manage and appease her sister normalized the abusive sibling relationship.

Participants, with one exception from Alexis, were not able to recall any incidents when their parent(s) comforted them after an aggressive interaction, nor a time when they put their (participants) needs or feelings before those of the abusive sibling. Despite experiencing many incidents of serious physical and psychological abuse from her younger brother, Alexis reported her parents did not acknowledge his behavior as abusive except for one incident. The following

excerpt also demonstrates that Alexis perceived her parents needing a significant reason, possible loss of adult teeth, to acknowledge her brother's abuse.

It was never about what he [my brother] did to me, except for the night he pulled my teeth out. I remember one night I had a doll, like a Holly Hobby doll. I'd put it in my mouth. He yanked it so hard he pulled some of my teeth out, and he didn't feel bad about it at all... he got into a lot of trouble for that one. Because they couldn't remember off hand if it was the baby teeth or the adult teeth. (Alexis)

Alexis was the only participant to explicitly discuss the significant impact her brother's abuse had on her self-esteem. She was able to articulate how the lack of support or protection from her parents in childhood influenced her psychologically. Because of this regular adversarial interaction, Alexis struggled with feeling insecure and like she always had to "prove a point" to her brother that she could do something.

[If my mom had supported me] I probably would have been a lot stronger mentally, surer of myself. And not so much of a latch on to the new, you know? I would have been more confident to try new things like the person I am now. Does that make sense? [...] and that's probably why today I'll be spontaneous. [Now] I live like - let's go out and just have fun and just enjoy life to the fullest. (Alexis)

The normalization and minimization of the abusive interactions, along with recruiting the abused sibling to manage the abuser, left survivors alone to deal with the trauma and aftermath of abuse. Alexis was the only participant who explicitly articulated the negative impact her brother's abuse had on her self-esteem. However, all participants discussed how their self-worth was negatively impacted through the direct abuse from the sibling, the minimizing and normalizing of the abusive behavior by the parent, and by the parent abandoning their role as the protector of the participant. As parents placed more importance on the abuser than the abused, this conveyed a message of insignificance to the participant.

The Impact of Co-occurring Violence

Two participants (Kimberly and Denise) dealt abuse from a parent, which impacted the level of support participants received. Kimberly's father participated with her brother in the verbal abuse, while also perpetrating physical and verbal abuse against her himself. When Kimberly's mother tried to support Kimberly, her father lashed out at her (mother). Kimberly's father's abuse prevented her mother from truly being able to support her. Kimberly and Denise experienced physical and verbal parental abuse in conjunction with sibling abuse.

Kimberly reported physical and verbal abuse from her brother and her father. She described interactions with her brother as always adversarial.

[Would he ever hit you or hurt you?] Mostly just yell. But sometimes he'll pick on me if I'm by myself. But whenever I see him, and I'm just trying to talk, he'll shout, so yea, I do my best to avoid him. My whole life... he's just been mean. (Kimberly)

Kimberly described her father as physically and verbally abusive to both her and her mother, but not to her brother.

But my dad is also like a bit on the violent side, so he gets mad at small things, and he'll also like hit me or punish me in some way, like he made me kneel down on a hard cement floor for a long time, like those things. Sometimes he can be [physically abusive], but he's more verbally abusive to my mom than physically abusive. It could be anything. He's very strict on small things. He is physically abusive to me and my mother, but he's more verbally abusive with her (mom) than physically abusive; mine is both (physical and verbal). He (dad) very seldom loses his temper with my brother. If he does, he'll just talk nicely to him, not shout at him or those things. (Kimberly)

Kimberly still lives with her parents and her brother, so her descriptions of abuse from her father and brother, as well as her mother as her only support, flowed between childhood and adulthood. Kimberly described her father's tendency to blame her for the adversarial and abusive sibling interactions with her brother, as well as his anger when her mother tried to protect her in childhood from her father's abuse.

Denise experienced significant parental abuse from her mother. She went into depth about what her childhood was like living with her mother. Denise described her mother's mood as "very angry and easily set off by anything." Her parents did not create a stable home environment, nor were they able to provide support for Denise's experience of sibling sexual abuse. Her parents had a contentious relationship with one another throughout her childhood. Their dysfunction, compounded by her mother's mental illness and her father's addiction to heroine, not only made Denise a target for her mother, but her mother's anger against her potentially blinded her to seeing what Denise was going through with her brother. While Denise stated that her father was kind to her in childhood, and not abusive like her mother, he fought his own demons and that impacted his ability to be a present parent.

My father was a heroin addict. I just remember my father tried to be the best parent he could be [...] But because he turned to drugs, that had an impact in my life, and I do remember walking in on him one time, and he had a needle in his arm. (Denise)

It was hard. I had a pretty hard childhood, my mom was a very abusive mother in every sense of the word physical, emotional, mental. She was a very angry person. And so, she just anything would set her off. I mean any little thing. And her set off would be taken out on me.... she used any and every object she possibly can to, you know, get her point across. You know her hand, her bats, her whatever, her belts or whatever. She used any and everything she could to get her point across, whatever that point was. And, so that was my childhood day in day out. (Denise)

Denise described her mother's persistent abuse throughout the interview. In the following quote,

Denise describes how her mother lashed out at her for asking a simple question.

She just made a big pot of gumbo, and I just remember it being her birthday. It was me, her, and her boyfriend. And I just was telling her happy birthday, and I was like how old are you? Like I didn't know how old my mom was at all until... about five years ago. But anyway, after I asked her that all hell broke loose [laughter]. It was crazy, like all hell broke loose. And she locked me in the bedroom for a couple of days. It was ridiculous. I don't know if she's ever been diagnosed. But I learned later on that she's had some type of mental illness. (Denise)

The sexual abuse Denise experienced from her brother during childhood occurred in the context of physical and verbal abuse from her mother. Denise described herself as a target for her mother's "anger at girls and women." Denise stated that her mother was "never suspicious" of the sibling sexual abuse, so there was no attempt to support her in that situation. Additionally, Denise described her mother as favoring her brothers, which she believes has something to do with the level of abuse she experienced from her mother. Denise shared that her mother was raped when she was young and became pregnant. Her parents (Denise's grandparents) made her give the baby up, a girl, for adoption. Denise speculated that her mother's issues with her stemmed around the rape and eventual loss of that baby girl.

She was very abusive, like I said physically and emotionally, every day of my life until I left when I became a teenager. [...] I said I just couldn't do it anymore. Her way of mothering was very abusive, I should say at least toward me her daughter. She had a thing about girls and women; she did not like them, and so as a result of that I bore a lot of the pain –from that. My mom, for some reason, had a gravity toward the boys; she was more fond of boys than she was of girls and females. (Denise)

Due to the abuse from her mother, and her father's absence, Denise did not receive support from either parent in childhood.

Lack of Family Support for Intimate Partner Violence

Participants described a similar lack of family support for their experience of intimate partner violence (IPV) as they did for their experience of sibling abuse. In fact, with few exceptions, the support experiences in adulthood mirrored the support experiences in childhood. Participants reported the sibling abuse was known by family but unknown by friends (Denise's was unknown by parents and friends). In adulthood, participants reported the IPV was a secret from family (and largely friends); the IPV was intentionally hidden instead of just being untold. The only support that Denise and Lucille received from anyone during their years of abuse was during several abusive interactions with their partners *in front of* their mothers-in-law. Although

their mothers-in-law intervened on those few occasions, they did not encourage the participant to leave the abusive relationship or offer any type of additional assistance to protect them.

Lucille discussed the lack of support from anyone beyond her mother-in-law. Her partner isolated her from everyone, "he didn't let me have friends at that time." Although her family was suspicious the few times she had contact with them over the 10-year relationship, there was never meaningful follow through because Lucille would make excuses when she was questioned on her relationship.

I'm gonna say no [no family support] because I really didn't have contact with my family then. He was really controlling. Or if I had seen him out talking with my family and they would ask, I would say it was something else. They were suspicious, though. (Lucille)

Lucille endured her abusive 10-year relationship with no friends, minimal contact with her family, and limited ability to successfully leave the relationship.

In my follow up email contact, Lucille described how her relationship with IPV would have been different had her mother been there to support her. Lucille described a direct connection between lack of support from her mother and staying in the abusive relationship. She shared, "I would not have tolerated it. I mean that - I may have been in the relationship, but I wouldn't have stayed."

The only source of meaningful support Denise received in her relationship with IPV was from her father. However, Denise did not discuss asking her father for help *because of* the IPV, it was solely to help get her husband into recovery (drug addiction). Denise's marriage, though good in the beginning, was falling apart because of her husband's addiction to drugs. When she told her father about her husband's addiction issues, he offered to work with her husband. Denise described how his drug use was directly linked to the physical abuse.

My father, by this time [recovered from heroin addiction], he was well into his practice [addiction recovery]. So, I just remember calling my dad and asking my dad if he could

help him [husband]. And my dad agreed. And he didn't know him from a can of paint. And so, he [husband] went to Chicago, and my dad helped him get off drugs. I mean after he lived with my dad and, you know, went into programs. My father helped him out and then he [husband] moved back to California. (Denise)

Denise was the most vocal about the lack of a maternal presence in her adult life to help guide her in her abusive marriage. Denise grew up witnessing bidirectional IPV in her home. Due to the lack of support in childhood from her mother, coupled with her mother's abuse, Denise described feeling a large void from the lack of a maternal figure in her life to help her as she tried to navigate her abusive marriage.

My mom and I, we didn't even have a relationship. So, it wasn't like, she didn't even know what was going on - you know, outside of her part in it [maternal abuse in childhood]. But as far as him, my husband, she (mom) never knew what I went through with him. So, I didn't have anybody really encouraging me outside of my friends. (Denise)

In my follow up email contact with Kimberly, she described what would be different in her relationship with IPV if she had support from her parents.

If I had supportive parents, it would have been different because they would be my first line of support, and I wouldn't need or have to show my weaknesses or flaws in that sense to my boyfriend. Sometimes they can use that against you and make you more susceptible to abuse. (Kimberly)

Through the follow up email, Kimberly was able to make the connection on how the lack of support from her parents created a dependence for her with her abusive boyfriend.

Denise did not have a relationship with her mother once she moved out at age 15, and Denise never discussed a time in her life when her mother was caring or protective with her, only that her mother was "very abusive." Denise described how her mother-in-law tried to intervene when she saw the abuse. Even in the support she received from her mother-in-law, her abuse experience was minimalized.

You know, there was not really anyone outside of her (foster mother/mother-in-law), there was not really too many older people around to give me any type of advice.

Motherly kind of advice. She was kind of it. She did what she could. Well, I don't think she knew the extent of it. We were about to take a road trip and he started acting out. And she had to pry him away from me. She saw that firsthand. [...] I mean he had been in other relationships prior to that, maybe she had witnessed it. So, she kind of knew. I didn't know until I got in it. And so, she tried to protect me as much as she could. But you know... [Did she ever encourage you to leave?] No, not really. She would say you guys need to stop that [laughter]. I just remember her saying things like that. Like you guys need to cut that out, or you guys need to just stop it. She didn't know what to say, I guess [...] But I mean she knew how her son was, but I don't know. But she would make comments, but it would never really happen around her. (Denise)

In adulthood, both Lucille and Denise referenced a level of acceptance of the IPV in their relationship, despite also describing the abuse as "wrong." They had similar statements regarding the presence of IPV in their lives. Their powerful statements regarding IPV speaks to their childhood experiences of abuse and dysfunction. The association between what became *normal in adulthood* was based on their experience of *normal in childhood*.

(In the beginning) I would say I knew all along that it (abuse) wasn't right. [...] It's sad to say but I thought it was normal (the abuse, seclusion, etc.). (Lucille)

I knew it wasn't normal, and I knew I didn't like the way it felt, and I deserved better than that. It just, it was what I saw. But when you live a certain life, and you watch all the dysfunctional activity, you move away from it as much as you can, and however you can. And so, it just latched on to me. I had friends who were constantly telling me I should leave him. But again, I didn't know at the time that I was in such a dysfunctional relationship, I thought that it was normal [the IPV]. Even though in my mind, I had a picture of what my life was supposed to look like. (Denise)

Kimberly and Alexis never directly referenced accepting the role of violence in their relationships. However, Alexis referenced a level of acceptance of her husband's control as a part of their marriage. Alexis felt that "he knew better than me," so she was quick to give in to his demands and accept what he told her was best.

We're on a resort [honeymoon]. I don't know, I'm not of that lifestyle, you are. I've never lived like that. He told me what I could wear, and what I couldn't wear. And I was like something's not right here, but, OK, whatever. You've been here. I haven't. Maybe there's a dress code or something [...] I think it started out as, 'Oh, I'm just joking.' And then it was like, 'No, you need to do this because you're my wife. I'm your husband. You got to keep me happy.' (Alexis)

Kimberly also learned to navigate her boyfriend's IPV by acquiescing to his demands and accepting the blame so he will not break up with her.

Like, if we fight, he'll be like, it's your fault because you did this, or, if I asked why he lied, he'll say "it's your fault because if I don't lie you're gonna question me, so it's better to lie to you." So, he always pushes it to my fault. [How does it make you feel?] Sometimes I feel really bad, but then sometimes I don't know why I still care about him. But sometimes it does make me feel like why is it always my fault? But then whenever I do that, I feel like he's just gonna break up with me. So sometimes I just say OK.
(Kimberly)

Participants' description of the abuse as "normal," or their failure to push back enough to change the dynamic, could stem from their inability to protect themselves from their abusive sibling and/or parent in childhood. Additionally, participants may have felt resistance was pointless because of their experiences of abuse in childhood, so there may have been an conscious or unconscious acceptance of the IPV.

In adulthood, all participants reported having a strained relationship with their sibling; participants did not report disclosing the IPV to their sibling in adulthood. Each participant described very different disclosure times and experiences. Alexis disclosed the IPV to her mother once she left her husband; she went to her mother's house and called the police. Her mother supported her fully once she left. Lucille did not disclose the IPV to her mother until years after she left. Kimberly described talking with her mother about the IPV in the beginning, and feeling supported, but eventually stopped because it upsets her mother too much. Denise never discussed disclosing the IPV to either parent. As with her experience of sibling sexual abuse, she never told her parents about her experience of IPV.

A unique component of sibling sexual abuse was the secrecy that surrounded it. Denise did not disclose her brother's sexual abuse to anyone in childhood; she finally told her parents in adulthood. Because it occurred in her own home and in her own bed, and her brother was never

"caught;" until Denise chose to disclose it, it remained a secret. Additionally, because Denise lived in an unstable and violent household, any changes in her behavior most likely went unnoticed by her mother. "I didn't think she [mother] would even believe me. I don't know why people never tell people, but I never told my parents. I never told anyone until I got older."

In adulthood, after the death of her oldest brother, her abuser, she came across a letter while she and her father were sorting through his belongings. The letter was written to her but never given to her. Once it was discovered, she and her father had a one-time conversation about her experience of sexual abuse. Denise reflected on that conversation with her father, and how even in the discovery of her abuse, she was heard but not supported, "I just think that at a time like that people don't know what to say... and so, they don't say anything."

I found a letter after he [brother] passed away. We were putting up his stuff and moving things of his, and I found it [...] I told my father. I probably was about 28. And I remember telling him what happened, and we talked about it, but that was that. He wrote it, it was a long time afterwards. He was probably in his 30s when he wrote it. And he was saying how sorry he was, and he hoped that I would forgive him one day.... But he never gave me the letter. I don't know if the letter was for him. [Did you show anyone that letter?] I showed my dad; I kept it. That's how me and my dad had the conversation. [OK, but then your dad just kind of like accepted what you told him and that was just kind of then now we're going to move on with our life?] Yeah, I mean. No one suggested, you know, me get any therapy or anything like that. I don't know. (Denise)

Denise was in her mid 50s when she finally disclosed the sexual abuse to her mother. Denise did not develop a close relationship with her mother until well into adulthood. As Denise sought help and worked through her issues surrounding her experiences of abuse, she began to make peace with her mother.

And then I remember talking to my mom about it probably about five years ago. [...] Because my mom and I, our relationship has always been a little bit strained. Yeah, well, through the process of forgiveness you tend to revisit what hurt you. And so that's how we got on the subject. So, I did talk to my mom about it. I forgot about that. I mean she was very sorry. Of course, she's at a different place in her life today. I do believe that. (Denise)

Denise did not discuss the impact that telling her mother had on her. However, Denise referenced healing and trying to create a closeness with her mother now that she is older and has emotional support from other family, friends, and her church.

Alexis never discussed telling her mother about the abuse from her husband, so there was never a mention of support for the IPV during her marriage. While her mother was present on some level throughout her marriage, Alexis did not give any specifics about what that may have looked like. However, once she left, Alexis' mother did everything she could do to make sure that Alexis and her daughter were safe. Alexis described her mother as "very much supportive. She even had him legally evicted from her [mother's] home... he can't come here, anymore. 'I'm [mother] done.'"

Once Alexis left, her family and friends supported her and let her know they were there for her. Alexis knew they were intentionally silent during her relationship, but she embraced the support from everyone since she left. Alexis described how her family and friends did not want to be a part of her situation. Alexis never referenced she would have left sooner had she had more support, but she did describe the support was how she was able to stay gone.

Only once, when they knew that I had filed the divorce papers and I was absolutely done, they're like, "We've got your back. If you ever need to talk, whatever, we're all here for you." I'm still friends with them, today. But before, they just wanted to be quiet and not be a part of that situation. But now they're all in my life. (Alexis)

Lucille did not go to her mother for help, nor did she disclose the IPV to her mother while she was living with her partner. Eventually, after the relationship ended, she had a "one-time conversation" with her mother about the abuse. Lucille described feeling supported in the conversation with her mother, but she shared she did not discuss it with her again because she "didn't want to get stuck on those feelings."

I would say I told her after the fact, and it was basically a one-time conversation. And we never brought it up again. I would say it was positive. I felt supported during the conversation, and I would say, understanding, too. [And if you needed to go to her again – was it just kind of – does she seek out emotional connections with you as best she can or is it kind of harder for her?] I would say – I’m not sure. I mean we’ve cried around each other before and things but I would say it was mostly a one-time conversation because I was done, and I didn’t want to get stuck on those feelings and have a chance of thinking about things and going back. (Lucille)

Currently, Kimberly only receives support from her mother, even though she tries to downplay the IPV because she knows how much it upsets her. Kimberly's mother tries to help her as much as she can, and Kimberly feels supported by her. Because Kimberly feels responsible for her mother's feelings, she tries not to talk about her relationship issues with her mother.

[Do you feel supported?] Yeah, she always tries to make the food that I like. I feel supported. I told her before, but I stopped because I don't want my mom to be sad. She doesn't show it to me, but she's just crying for me or something. So, I don't try to talk about those things [IPV] with her. (Kimberly)

There was a striking similarity between the lack of support from the parents for the participants' sibling abuse and IPV experiences. Participants did not describe their parents acknowledging the aggression from their siblings as abusive at any point during childhood or adulthood. In adulthood, participants did not disclose the IPV to their parents, but even when family may have suspected it, they did not intervene or attempt to support the participants in any meaningful way.

Super-ordinate Theme #2: Experiences of Abuse

In childhood, three of the four participants (Alexis, Lucille, and Kimberly) reported verbal sibling abuse as a regular occurrence; physical sibling abuse was more sporadic, but it always included a verbal component. Two of the four participants (Denise and Kimberly) reported physical and verbal parental abuse that occurred regularly in their homes. Denise

reported sibling sexual abuse by her older brother; she did not report any other types of abuse from her sibling, but her mother was both physically and verbally abusive. Throughout the interviews, participants described experiences of abuse in their relationships with IPV that mirrored experiences of sibling abuse in childhood. The two most common forms of IPV reported were physical and verbal.

Powerlessness in the Face of Sibling Abuse

In childhood, participants experienced a unique type of powerlessness over their own body and within their home environment. Siblings used physical force to control or punish the participants in childhood, and this abuse was tolerated by parents and normalized in their home environment. With one exception from Alexis (when her brother forcefully yanked a doll out of her mouth and pulled her teeth out in the process), participants never mentioned a parent stopping or condemning the abusive behavior, nor did they mention their parent interfering or protecting them from their sibling abuser. Whether it was a sibling taking a favorite toy, hitting them with an object, "fits" that resulted in physical assault, or fondling them while they "slept," participants felt that they had limited ability to stop abusive behaviors from their siblings.

Lucille discussed multiple incidents of sibling physical abuse from her older sister. In the following quotation, Lucille described how her older sister would become physically "aggressive" when she did not get her way.

Siblings fight but I do know over time the aggressive meltdowns she would have and one thing would just spoil her whole day. She wouldn't get over it. She kept bringing it up. If she didn't get her way, she would take it out on me and hit me and of course, I'm smaller because I'm younger. (Lucille)

In addition to hitting, Lucille also reported incidents where her sister's penchant for violence could have had a serious physical outcome for her.

She has tried to hurt me, she's come at me with scissors trying to stab me when we was little, lots of things. I also remember a time she tried talking to my friends to come with her and beat me up. She wasn't able to recruit them, but she tried. (Lucille)

Alexis also discussed several very violent interactions with her brother in childhood. His severe physical abuse left her with physical reminders of the incident.

I'm riding my bike and he just stands there and hits me with a bamboo pole, and it goes right into my stomach. I still have a scar. [...] Well, he pushed me on the swing, and he pushed me in a direction that my leg got caught on like a nut or bolt, and I ended up getting stitches. (Alexis)

Three of the participants (Kimberly, Lucille, Alexis) and described verbal abuse from their siblings. Lucille's descriptions of her sister's abusive behaviors included verbal abuse that accompanied physical aggression. Lucille tried to not let “verbal arguments” go on for too long to avoid her sister becoming more aggressive.

I would say cussing, a lot of name calling, just trying to be hurtful to get a reaction... things of that nature. I would say a lot of times it would be verbal arguments, but you knew not to argue with her (sister) too long ‘cause of what it could turn into. (Lucille)

Alexis also described verbally abusive interactions with her brother. Throughout childhood, Alexis' brother verbally abused her. He called her "fat," "stupid," and felt the need to put her down whenever he got the chance. His insults took a significant toll on Alexis' self-esteem.

We always got along [...] until he could start talking. And then he would find ways to just get under my skin, and always made me feel not very confident about myself. I went through a very shy stage, where it's like don't even look at me wrong because I'm going to cry. I just always felt – I guess felt fat. Always trying to diet and stuff because of that's what I heard. Or him telling me I'm stupid. You know, it did take its toll on me. (Alexis)

Alexis was in a life-threatening car accident. Alexis' mother made her brother go see her in the hospital because of the severity of the accident. Even in her fragile state, her brother took the chance to insult her.

The physical abuse stopped once I moved out. The mental thing... and then I just totally stopped talking to him. I wanted nothing to do with him, and then I had a really bad car accident. I died. And half of my face was peeled off. They took me to a hospital Trauma unit. I was in there for a while. And he came up to the hospital. I think my mom made him go because it was like, "Look, she may not make it." I remember him saying my face looked like I had been through a meat grinder. And I [used some] choice words [and told him] to get out of my room. (Alexis)

Kimberly described how her brother would yell at her, not for any reason, but that was just how he interacted with her - "aggressive and mean." Kimberly described her brothers verbal abuse as "yelling" at her and always responding in anger to her.

Powerlessness (and Agency) in the Face of Intimate Partner Violence

In adulthood, all participants reported experiencing violence and control in their adult IPV relationships. Abusive partners controlled their time, their money, their access to friends/family, as well as their sexual interactions with them. All participants described feeling isolated, stuck, and alone throughout their relationship. All participants also reported their partners using physical violence to control them and limit decision making. Because of these types of abuse experiences, participants experienced a profound lack of power over their own body and in other areas of their life.

Lucille reported that six months into her relationship, the IPV began. Similar to her experience of sibling abuse with regular verbal and physical abuse, the physical and verbal abuse was a regular occurrence during her 10-year relationship with IPV.

It was probably verbal first, a lot of abuse, physical and verbal. I would say there was no significant event that started it. It was more frequent towards the end. Thank God I'm not in that place anymore. (Lucille)

Lucille described a physical altercation between her and her partner after she told him she did not want to have his friends move in with them.

We had no children at the time, and we was living in a one-bedroom and he wanted to let his friend, his wife and their baby come live with us. And I'm like, "We're already in a

one-bedroom apartment.” And I remember I got a slap across the face with a steak and about a quarter-size of my hair gone, a complete bald spot. I mean it was shining.
(Lucille)

Alexis reported several incidents where her husband used physical violence to prevent her from doing something. Despite their daughter being in the room or being held by Alexis or her husband, he would yell and grab or hit Alexis while she was trying to disengage from him.

I tried to leave multiple times, and he would hold me so tight that it left handprints on my arms, even while he was holding our daughter and she was screaming.... And he started trying to hold me back, again, with her, and then he started hitting me. I just kind of took it for a second. (Alexis)

Like the verbal abuse from her brother that centered around her appearance and weight, Alexis reported multiple incidents of verbal abuse from her husband. She described her husband's criticism of her weight once they got married, which continued throughout their relationship, even while she was pregnant.

He just kept escalating, no matter what. Even when I was pregnant, a round of drinks for the girls behind us and flirting with them right in front of me. And he's like, "They're much more attractive than you right now." I was like, "OK." And I just got up and walked out. I really wanted to say something, but I was pregnant. I can't let my blood pressure get this high." (Alexis)

When I was pregnant with our daughter, he was like, "You know, you could stand to lose some weight. Don't you think you put too much weight on?" And then I had the baby and he started pushing me to lose some weight, again. (Alexis)

In her relationship with IPV, Kimberly reported her boyfriend responds to her in a similar manner as her brother. When he is mad about something, her boyfriend yells at her and will sometimes physically lash out in anger.

He is mostly just yelling and hitting but more yelling at me. Right now, it's OK. My boyfriend still sometimes can be a bit abusive and controlling. But sometimes I just let it go and just try to ignore it when I can. He just yells like really crazy, like very loud yelling, and then he'll push my shoulder or really loud yelling. Sometimes how he acts scares me, too. (Kimberly)

Kimberly described her general interactions with her boyfriend as unpredictable, "I don't know what's going to tick him off," as well as "when he's in a bad mood, even [on] small things, he'll get annoyed very easily, and he'll just shout." Kimberly shared that she has trust issues "in general," but the physical abuse began once they began fighting about her not trusting him. However, Kimberly made it clear that her boyfriend would intentionally do things that made her question him.

It just happened [the hitting] at a certain point, maybe like a year after or nine months, something like that.... When I was having trust issues, I was questioning stuff, like, "Oh, where were you?" And then he just suddenly got mad. He's like, "Why don't you trust me?"- like those things. [What were your trust issues about?] I have trust issues usually, so it's like general. Sometimes I notice that if he goes to an event and doesn't tell me – I know sometimes he can be forgetful - but sometimes he just doesn't tell me intentionally [...] And then when I question him, he begins to yell. [Do you think he doesn't tell you intentionally?] Yeah, I think it's intentional. Sometimes he even told me. Like, if I found out [he went somewhere] like, how come you didn't tell me or you lied to me about this, he admitted it, "I did that on purpose." (Kimberly)

Kimberly referenced trust issues with her boyfriend only after they were together for almost a year, and she shared that her issues stemmed from him hiding things from her intentionally. Her reference to "I have trust issues usually" was related to their relationship and was an outcome of his continual threatening to break up with her or hide parts of his life from her.

Denise discussed the fights between her and her husband; she described them as arguments and not verbally abusive interactions. However, Denise used language implying that some of the fights she had with her husband were her fault, too, and in her descriptions, she took some of the blame for the physical abuse and described a shared a role in the abuse. Denise's willingness to take some of the blame could stem from years of verbal and physical abuse at the hands of her mother. Denise did not report every fighting back with her mother, so she may have approached her husband's abuse from a more determined and empowered stance. However,

during the interview, her descriptions of the interactions came across as her having culpability for his abuse.

A lot of it [the arguing] had to do with unfaithfulness... that would lead to an argument. I wasn't passive. And so, if I was upset about something, I was going to let you know [laughter]. Yeah, and I think it probably because we would argue and so it takes two people to argue. And so anyway, I would probably get upset with him and say something that he may not have liked. Or, I don't know, I may have called him a name. And he'd get upset. I don't know if he'd be high. He'd probably be high, and he'd react [physically abuse her]. (Denise)

Denise described most of their fights centering around his unfaithfulness; if he was high, the verbal conflict would escalate into physical abuse. The relationship dynamic between Denise and her husband resembled the conflicts she witnessed between her mother and her mother's partners.

Similar to their experiences in childhood, participants discussed being stuck in their relationships with IPV; stuck in the house, and stuck in the situation. Lucille experienced the most significant isolation and *stuckness* of all four participants in her relationship with IPV. She reported being *stuck* in the house without a phone and "things of that nature." In the following quote, Lucille succinctly explains that although she stayed, she hoped she would be *saved* from the situation. The need to be saved from her situation demonstrates her belief in her lack of agency and the true powerlessness she felt during that time in her life.

And what gets me is you know, we're right behind the fire station so less than 20, 30 yards, there was a fire station. I don't know. I found myself praying a lot that they would hear and respond. (Lucille)

Lucille described staying in the relationship out of necessity and fear, and not out of love, halfway way through her relationship. She did not know how she could leave, and how she could "leave safely" because if he caught her, it would have been a "nightmare." Lucille was a "non-

driver," and reported that she did not have friends at that time, so there was no one who could physically help her leave and be safe.

And then, you know, a lot of times it was how am I going to get away when I do leave? I wouldn't dare just tell him that. I didn't have money to catch the bus, where am I going with two little kids? You know? So, we ended up just leaving while he was gone. We left everything behind. I had to make sure to make social security cards and IDs but other than that, we left it all. (Lucille)

Alexis reported a similar control/lack of autonomy dynamic in her IPV relationship.

While both Lucille and Alexis' partners used physical abuse to control them, their partners also did things to virtually trap them in the relationship. Alexis did not describe past experiences of control from other partners or family, but she never discussed pushing against what her husband asked, and then eventually demanded, of her. Her willingness to give in could stem from trying to avoid conflict in her married relationship, since she grew up in constant conflict with her brother. Also, Alexis discussed many instances of trying to help her brother in childhood, despite how he treated her. Her experience of sibling abuse created a tendency to work with the abuse instead of push back against him. Alexis described her husband's controlling behavior.

He drove a really nice car and was like, "Here, you can have the keys." You know, not knowing that he was tracking the mileage on it. You know, I'm going to work and coming home. What do you expect? Or, oh, I decided not to take the train today, so how do you know where the car is parked and what position it's sitting in? [...] At one point, he even disconnected my battery cables so I couldn't leave. (Alexis)

Eventually, her husband began telling her she had a limit on how long she could be gone, and who she could talk to, and what she could tell them.

And then it started to be like, "Where are you going?" And then turned into, "You only have so long to be gone. You only have so long to be on the phone." Or don't tell them this. Don't tell them that. (Alexis)

Alexis and Kimberly discussed trying to leave the abusive relationship. However, both participants reported going back and trying again on multiple occasions. While neither

participant verbalized that they deserved the abuse, both women described how they acquiesced to give their boyfriend or husband the control they were seeking.

Two of the participants (Lucille and Alexis) discussed elements of financial control in their IPV relationships. Lucille experienced strict control over all elements of her life from her partner. She was not allowed to leave the house, which meant she was not allowed to work; he totally controlled the financial aspect of their relationship.

I mean, he kept all of his money. I would calculate where am I going to take them to [if I left]? I'm not working. You know? I don't have any money saved. So, I slowly started getting myself sufficient towards the end. I got me a job. You know, he wanted me to be in the house, but I got me a job and started working. (Lucille)

Alexis did work while she was married, but as soon as they were married, her husband asked for a joint checking account, and Alexis lost financial control of her life.

Well, now that we're married, let's get a joint account. I was like, ok, that makes sense. And then I would ask how our bills get paid, or where's the money going... and I was told "It's being handled, don't worry about it." (Alexis)

Even now, years after the divorce, she feels he tries to punish her by withholding child support.

"He doesn't think he has to pay child support. He goes 'You'll get it when I get it.' I'm like whatever, I'm so done."

Participants discussed elements of sexual control and abuse in their IPV relationship. Alexis, who did not report any sibling sexual abuse, described a lack of autonomy over her own body when it came to her husband's sexual desires. "I would say no to any kind of sexual advance, and he wouldn't take no for an answer, even with our child in the bed."

Denise did not report her husband forcing himself on her sexually, but she did report that he was "very unfaithful" throughout their marriage. While her husband's drug use was tied to the physical abuse, getting sober did not change his unfaithful nature.

He did some really crazy stuff. I could go on and on, but it'd take up the rest of the day. But yeah, he did some really crazy things. But after he got off drugs it was totally different. I mean he still was unfaithful, very unfaithful. (Denise)

In stark contrast to the acceptance of abuse for themselves, the three participants who had children with their abusers articulated an understanding of what being exposed to the dysfunctional relationship could do to their children. As they understood the impact of the abuse on their own children, the participants discussed protecting their children as their reason for leaving. However, in the beginning, Alexis and Lucille both reported trying to save their relationships on several occasions for the sake of their children.

Alexis was ready to leave the marriage when she discovered she was pregnant. Her daughter was the reason she decided to stay on several occasions, but she was also the reason she finally left.

I was ready to file for a divorce before I found out I was pregnant, and the whole, "Oh, maybe a baby will make it better... maybe this will make it better." And it didn't... And the police really can't do anything except give you advice. I often left. They would stand there and not let him come out. They told me I could go, and I was like "I'm going to go." And then I'd always go back because I believed it was the right thing to do for our daughter. and when issues continued to arise, she would compromise and agree to "make it work for her (daughter's) sake." (Alexis)

The whole time he was drinking, a lot, and said "I won't do this anymore...." I was like fine, let's try to make this work for her sake. And we moved into a house. (Alexis)

Alexis articulated similar sentiments to Lucille's around protecting her daughter from the IPV by leaving the relationship. She understood the impact that being exposed to the abuse could have on her daughter, and she referenced "stopping the cycle" by leaving her husband.

Alexis also discussed her reason for leaving her marriage. Alexis understood the impact the IPV was already having on her daughter, and she was determined to stop the cycle. Alexis did not discuss why she was so aware of what the exposure to IPV could do to her daughter, but it was the impetus she needed to finally leave.

I'm trying to stop the cycle with her. I'm trying so that she doesn't think that it's OK to go through that or put up with that (IPV)... I don't want her to go through what I did. It was like, "Oh, my gosh. She just turned two and she's starting to talk and catch on to things, and truly feel the emotions." I said I can't let this happen to her. Yeah, I've got to break the cycle so that she doesn't hopefully end up in the same situation." (Alexis)

Like Alexis, Lucille discussed staying in her relationship for her children, and then eventually leaving the relationship to protect them. "I would say – I was always the type that you don't make a family to break a family. And then of course they come with the 'I'm sorries' and that goes out the door."

Lucille shared her reason for leaving her relationship with IPV centered on her desire to protect her children from witnessing her abuse. Although she described all of the challenges she faced in leaving, she knew what she had to do to protect her kids long-term. "I realized it was time to leave after her children were getting older and witnessed the abuse. I would say when I had kids. I didn't want that (IPV) demonstrated for my kids."

In addition to leaving for the kids, Lucille finally decided she had to leave for herself; she understood what his years of abuse and control did to her and how it made her feel. As she described her attempt to remain neutral in her relationship, I asked her if she ever cried or broke down.

I'm not saying that I didn't cry when he wasn't around. I'm gonna say I never wanted him to know that he broke me. You know? I never wanted to give him that power that he broke me. But I would say when I found myself not really caring about myself at that time, it was time to go. (Lucille)

Denise did not have children with her husband until after the physical abuse stopped, and he got sober. However, his unfaithfulness continued throughout their marriage, bringing countless arguments with it, and impacted their family life. Because of the continued instability in her marriage, she left and took her kids with her. Denise reflected on her leaving and the state of their relationship.

We stayed together, and I can't believe I stayed in that; and we had three kids. Eventually I left, and I just took my kids with me, and I raised them on my own. Yeah, the physical abuse stopped, it was a lot of arguing though. He was always unfaithful; he had this thing with women. (Denise)

Super-ordinate Theme #3: Emotional Responses and Coping Mechanisms

Participants described experiencing negative emotional responses that crossed over both sibling abuse and IPV. Participants described that in childhood and adulthood, physical and verbal/psychological abuse happened in tandem and elicited a strong emotional response. For some participants, the sibling abuse experienced was mirrored in their relationship with IPV. In childhood and adulthood, participants described emotions connected to specific incidences and types of abuse.

Emotional Responses to Sibling Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence

Lucille was the only participant to reference feeling afraid of her sibling abuser. This reference was also the only time she mentioned an emotion around her sister, the other times were regarding how the lack of protection from her mother made her feel. All other descriptions of her life with her abusive sibling were about her role in helping to manage her sister's volatile moods and unpredictable behavior.

I would say being around my sister when she was happy, she was happy. But there were also times when we were very cautious on what you did or say. So sometimes I would say they were fearful. (Lucille)

Interestingly, when Lucille described her emotional response to the abuse she endured from her husband, she primarily described the lack of a response to his abuse. For Lucille, attempting to show no emotion was her emotional response. The lack of a response and *blocking* could stem from a childhood full of sibling abuse and her inability to get her needs met or be a priority for her mother. Lucille was able to articulate that behind the *blocking* and *no emotions* was shame and anger.

I would just block it out. I would try not to show any emotion at all because I always heard that if you show your anger or your emotions, you're letting the other person win by seeing you come out of character. I would say I did a lot of blocking out. I would just block it out. I would try not to show any emotion at all because I always heard that if you show your anger or your emotions that you're letting the other person win by seeing you come out of character. But what I was feeling at the time [when he'd attack me] was a lot of anger. I would also say I felt a lot of shame. I tied it to that I'm letting it keep happening. (Lucille)

Lucille tried to cope with her experience of IPV by hiding her emotions so he would not know how the abuse impacted her and how she felt. When I asked Lucille if her husband ever acknowledged what he did to her she replied, "No, I'm not even gonna say he cared."

Lucille was the most descriptive and transparent regarding her range of emotions throughout her 10-year relationship with IPV.

Denise experienced sexual abuse from her brother when she was aged 13 - 15. All three siblings shared the bedroom when her brothers stayed with her mother. Denise reported that the experience of sexual abuse made her feel "frozen;" frozen in anticipation of him touching her, and frozen while being touched. In those times of feeling "frozen," her brother held all the power, and continued to hold it long after he stopped touching her.

He would always wake up in the middle of the night when I thought I was asleep, but I would never be able to sleep because I would be frozen. I would never really be asleep. But, he would wake me up at the same time, and he would just start putting his hands on me and inside of my underwear. He'd do his fondle thing, and I would turn over and then he'd stop. And then he'd get up and do it again. It was really, you know, it was hard. We never discussed anything. I would say stop. [...] He never threatened me. I was frozen, I didn't know what to do. (Denise)

The sexual abuse stopped when Denise's mother kicked her brother out of the house for continuing to come home drunk.

Denise, the only participant to experience sibling sexual abuse, described the long-term impact of the sexual abuse. The unique outcome of sibling sexual abuse produced feelings of being frozen that Denise discussed throughout the interview. "The sexual abuse was hard. I think

that made me not want to connect to guys, to men. That really put me in a frozen state." This 'frozen state' affected her literally and figuratively. Denise described how she could not move when the sexual abuse happened, and she could not feel or emotionally connect to men in the same way again.

"Stuck" was a theme that emerged when the participants talked about their experiences of IPV. However, Denise was the only participant who referenced feeling stuck around her experience of sibling sexual abuse. Part of Denise's struggle with feeling stuck came from the belief or feeling that no one would believe her. Also, because she "did not know what would happen to him" if she told, Denise kept her brother's sexual abuse a secret.

It was a hard time. You know, I wanted to leave. I wanted to get out of there. I didn't know what to do. I never told anybody. [...] And I don't even know to this day why I let it go that far without even saying anything. I don't know why people do that. (Denise)

Denise was the only participant that expressed wanting to leave and "not knowing what to do" to deal with, or handle, the sibling abuse. The lack of support Denise experienced from her parents, and the significant abuse she endured from her mother in childhood, could have contributed to her stuck and frozen state.

Kimberly discussed feeling hated by her brother and her father in childhood and adulthood; she was tearful for much of the interview. Kimberly handles the feeling of being hated by them (father and brother) by doing her best to avoid them whenever possible. Kimberly discussed both types of abuse, sibling and parental, throughout the interview. The abusive partnership between her brother and father against her left Kimberly feeling hated.

Sometimes I just think like they hate me so much. It's gotten better over time because I don't see him (brother)... I just try to avoid him (brother). My dad usually sides with my brother. [...] He (father) is always mad at me, ever since I was a little girl. It's rare now that I'm bigger (the physical abuse), but then there are still times. I try to avoid my dad as much as possible. That's how I – whenever he sees my face - I feel like he just thinks of

stuff, and then he'll get mad. So, I just try to avoid him and not talk to him as much as I can. (Kimberly)

All four participants drew from their emotional experiences in childhood in their partnered relationships. Participants learned to accept the abuse and not fight back because of never being heard or protected as a child, or because of the normalization of abuse in childhood. Additionally, patterns may have been created by participants learning to take the blame or block their true feelings from their experiences of childhood sibling abuse.

Denise was the only participant who referenced survival and being numb, or having a protective *shell* in childhood or adulthood. Denise's entire childhood was unstable; she grew up with her mother's abuse and neglect, a largely absent and heroin addicted father, but it was the sexual abuse from her brother between ages 13 and 15 that caused her to "not feel normal." Her first reference to surviving was in relation to life as a teenager who also had to deal with parental abuse and sibling sexual abuse.

I never stopped to process any of it. I just was moving right along, and no one ever told me [anything was wrong]. I always had in my mind what I wanted my life to look like, but no one ever told me how to get there. You're too busy trying to survive. You're too busy trying to feel normal. (Denise)

Specific to IPV, Denise reported that she was the "kind of person... to handle everything on my own." Even though her marriage was full of violence and instability, she lived her life as "normally" as she could amidst the dysfunction; no matter what, she "handled" it.

Yeah. And you know what, the biggest thing about it is you don't even know that you're handling it. Because you're in it. So, you don't even realize that you're in it, I don't even know how to explain it - people on the outside would not have known. I always had a job. I was in school; you just do whatever. But all I can say is survival. I maintained a lifestyle on the outside. (Denise)

Denise discussed how the abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother, her brother, and her husband had a tremendous impact on her in her life. Denise was equally clear that the

outcome of all the abuse created an emotional "shell" that protected her. The coping mechanisms that allowed Denise to survive years of abuse and abusers created a unique feeling for her.

It was like I was in a dream. I don't know if that makes sense to you. *I was numb for all my life.* I mean it really blows me away because I stayed numb for so long. And I think my mom and my brother, no I take that back. All three of them [including her husband], you know, had a really huge impact. So, with all those three things combined, I just had this, I don't know, I had this shell. (Denise)

Denise also made a connection between her mother, brother, and husband. She articulated that she had only realized this connection in the last few years and not earlier in her life, because she was previously "numb" and not thinking of such connections.

You know, it's so weird because I didn't feel that [there was a connection between abusers], or I didn't start even saying those things to myself up until a couple years ago. But when I tell you when I think of certain things, I was like wow, I don't know what protected me or why I was in such a shell, or I was so numb – I just did not think of stuff like that. And I didn't even think to put any of that together. I didn't think why did I leave my mom and go to my husband? I didn't think after dealing with my mom and my brother, why would I choose a marriage like that? I didn't make the connection - no I didn't. (Denise)

Throughout her interview, Denise reflected on the many challenges she faced to grow into the woman she knew she wanted to become. She reflected that college, good jobs, church, and her auto pilot response, "survival," eventually got her there.

Super-ordinate Theme #4: Loss and Longing in Childhood

All four participants referenced feelings of sadness and loss in childhood. Participants articulated, oftentimes emotionally, a desire for closeness in childhood with their sibling; they also expressed sadness at the loss of a close family. They were able to see a difference in their peers' family relationships, which created an awareness and longing for connection within their own family.

I would say when I would go over to people's house and spend the night and you know, they would sometimes have a brother, or they could have a sister. But it was like, "Wow, it's really different over here." (Lucille)

And I really get envious when I see or hear anyone that my friends talk about, oh, their brother went – and they went somewhere together or something. Like, I just get really envious sometimes. (Kimberly)

Alexis spoke about her brother and the conflict between loving him and wanting a close relationship with him, and then hating him for how he treated her and made her feel. Alexis described several incidents in childhood where she physically defended her brother against his peers, and tried to help him in school, but he was never receptive to her help and attempt to be close. In adulthood, Alexis still finds herself feeling torn about their relationship, and she resents him for his continued adversarial behavior with her and their mother.

I did [feel like I hated him], and I told him [I hate him]. A few times I would tell him. And then I would regret saying that because I would feel like that's not what you're supposed to do to family. [Crying] I still love my brother. I really do. You only get one family. But I have so much resentment against him today. (Alexis)

Denise described a different type of loss with her brothers that came from not knowing them as siblings. They were both older than she was and lived with their father in California much of her life. Denise lived with her only mother, but her brothers would come and go between households.

I didn't know my brothers. I never really knew my brothers even though we lived in the same house, you know, at the same time. I just know the time that I went through what I went through with my oldest brother [sibling sexual abuse]. We didn't have a relationship at all. We went to the same school, and we went to the same house at some point, but no one cultivated a relationship. He started drinking at a very young age, that's what I remember. Like I said, he would go back and forth between my dad and my mom. It was sad. It was a very sad place [her house]. (Denise)

Participants reported longing for a closeness with their family throughout the interview. They knew their family was different from other ones, and the loss of something they never had, or would have, made them sad.

No, I always just think about like whenever I see like other people, I see they're close. They go do things together. And I always think like we've never done anything together

and then just asking for simple help – there's like no relationship at all. Yeah, because it always seems like some of my friends or colleagues that are really close with their dad or their family... so I always think "why isn't my family like that?" And they would do things with their family, and I don't get to. (Kimberly)

But it makes me sad that I just don't even know what that feels like [a loving family]. It makes me sad to not have ever experienced that unit of family. I can't even tell you what it feels like, so that's the part that kind of makes me sad.... It makes me sad, and this is the only part that I try to get past. (Denise)

While they knew other families were close and functioned differently from theirs, when I asked Kimberly if she had friends with similar issues to hers, she replied "I think it's just my house." Lucille described there were times that she and her sister got along, but their relationship was mostly negative. "... I would say the meanness outweighed the good parts." In adulthood, as in childhood, the participants continue to have a strained relationship with the abusive sibling.

In my follow up with participants, I asked them what would look different for them if they had a close relationship with their family members. Kimberly and Lucille shared personality traits that would be different if they had a close relationship with their sibling and parent(s). Lucille described how the loss of closeness impacted her ability to "trust" people and "connect" with them, as well as her negative relational expectations. "Well, I would be closer with people, more trusting, not always expecting the worst."

Again, Kimberly tied her lack of family closeness in with her dependence on her abusive boyfriend. She realizes what she is missing in her family relationships she is seeking with her boyfriend. Kimberly believes she would have better self-confidence and fewer "hurdles" in life if she were close with, and had support from, her family.

If I had family closeness and good family relationship, I will less likely need support from others or find a relationship to help me cope. I will be more independent and stronger, thinking I will always have my family's support. I will be less reliant on my

significant other and it will create a better image for me. There will be less hurdles with everything I want to accomplish. (Kimberly)

In my follow up phone call and email with Alexis, she shared how the loss of closeness with her brother, and her mother's partiality towards him, strains her relationships with her family.

I think that if there weren't those suppressed emotions then I could probably let the little things go a little easier. I wouldn't feel like I had to do everything (physical labor) for my mom with her growing age and could truly count on my brother to help out. Like mentioned before, I'm 45 min away from her and he's 2 minutes yet I'm still the one that gets asked, and he gets handed things since a young age. Don't get me wrong - I love my life and where I'm at, but maybe I wouldn't have felt so alone during those dark times or when I was on my own. (Alexis)

Alexis described feeling alone in her "dark times" because she lacked family support to from those she loved most and needed.

It is important to note that this super-ordinate theme did not appear when discussing the relationship with IPV; it is unique to the sibling relationship and with the family of origin. The loss of sibling relationships and a close family were discussed by all four participants using very similar language.

Super-ordinate Theme #5: Participant connections

All four participants shared stories and memories that demonstrated similarities between their experience of sibling abuse and IPV, but most did not make explicit connections without gentle probing. However, when asked more directly about potential connections between childhood and adulthood experiences of abuse, they were able to identify some similarities and connections between abuse experiences and their abusers. As participants discussed similarities in their experiences, some teared up, while others discussed needing time to process the connections once they happened. In my follow up communications with participants, they were

able to make more definitive connections between types of abuse experiences and the impact that the lack of maternal support had on their experience of IPV.

Mirrored Experiences of Abuse

Toward the end of the interview, Alexis began identifying similarities between the types of abuse she experienced between brother and her ex-husband. Both abusers were psychologically abusive, they both attacked her appearance regularly, and both were physically aggressive when they lashed out at Alexis. As Alexis made connections between her brother and ex-husband, she began to cry as she realized how similar the abuse was.

I'd always thought, well, that's just my stupid brother. Never... not once until now, thought about any of it [connections between my brother and my ex-husband] until talking with you. It's very weird... I'm going to be up thinking about this. I don't know, I'm sorry. (Alexis)

During our follow up phone call, Alexis casually described how much her brother, new husband, and herself have in common. However, she quickly added, "My new husband is the nice version of my brother."

Kimberly indirectly described similarities between her father, brother, and her partner's abuse. She shared that while all three had similar tempers and reacted to her in similar ways, her partner could be supportive of her when listening to her struggles with her father and brother, while neither her father or brother were ever supportive of her or caring in any meaningful way.

I actually told him [boyfriend], 'Sometimes you remind me of my dad.' You know, and he just apologizes sometimes. Sometimes he can be caring when he's in the mood, or I guess if like we're not fighting, more so than my dad for sure. (Kimberly)

During my follow up contact with Kimberly and Lucille, they shared more about potential connections between their experiences of sibling abuse and IPV. I asked them if they felt their sibling experience of abuse made the more susceptible to IPV, and what was the connection, if any.

Yes, I feel like it makes me more susceptible to abuse from my boyfriend because it's something personal that I usually, at some point, will reveal to my boyfriend thinking that he will be able to provide some support. And if they [boyfriend] see that image, depending on the boyfriend, it can make you [more] susceptible. Also, because of those experiences, I may have developed some bad attitudes that made me susceptible too. (Kimberly)

Again, Kimberly shared her reliance on her abusive boyfriend because of the sibling abuse and parental abuse she continues to experience, and how the reliance and her attitude (beliefs) have been shaped by the experience.

Lucille described the impact between sibling abuse and IPV succinctly. She stated, "I would say yes for me [the sibling abuse made her more susceptible to IPV]. It made it more acceptable because that's what I was used to." Lucille connected the experience in childhood with her adult response to IPV. Lucille described the impact of her mother's lack of protection as making her think her sister's abuse was "normal," so when her partner began abusing her, Lucille believed it was "ok."

"On the Backburner" to Protected

During the interview, Lucille did not discuss a connection between the abuse she experienced from her sister and her experience of IPV. However, Lucille did draw a connection between the way her mother handled her sister, and her mother-in-law's actions on her behalf.

It may sound strange, but I felt kind of guilty because this was her son that she was putting out of her house. Well, I felt supported, too, but I would definitely say I felt guilty as well. [Did anything feel familiar about the experience?] You mean where the feeling guilty came from? Maybe because, you know – the only thing that comes to my mind when you say that is the way my mother protected my sister. I would say that I felt more inclined to not speak up about it (the IPV) or just to smooth things over. (Lucille)

Lucille did report seeing the comparison between protecting the abused versus protecting the abuser, and she described the way she learned to deal with conflict was to not advocate for her own needs or protection. Her experience in childhood taught her to accept abusive behavior with indifference. She knew that her acceptance of her partner's abuse, and the guilt she felt for

having someone stand up for her, came from her experience of sibling abuse and how her mother ignored her needs in favor of pacifying her sister.

"It was a Generational Cycle"

Throughout the interview, Denise made clear connections between the types of abuse she experienced throughout her childhood, and her experience of IPV in adulthood. As Denise was reflecting on the physical abuse she endured during her marriage, she paused and said, "You know, it just was a cycle (IPV). It was a curse. It was a generational cycle."

When Denise described her parent's relationship and her mother's interactions with boyfriends, she described the cycle of violence she grew up in and replicated in her adult life.

And I guess it was a very volatile relationship [her parent's relationship]. They came from very dysfunctional backgrounds or at least my dad did; they just had a very rough marriage. I think my father was like that [abusive] with my mom, they fought all the time. One time I witnessed my mom stab her boyfriend.... Sometimes you become what you see when you grow up, and so that's what I saw, and I chose the same. (Denise)

When first comparing her abusive brother and her husband, Denise stated that there were "no similarities." But, as she continued to talk about how different they were, she started discussing what they had in common. Like Alexis, Denise said she had never stopped to think about similarities between her brother and ex-husband until this interview. However, unlike Alexis, the similarities that Denise saw between her brother and her husband were personality and addiction traits, not abuse types.

They were different, but they were best friends. Similarities between my brother and my ex-husband, no [...] they both struggled with addiction - that's what they had in common. My brother and my ex-husband were very intellectual, smart men. But in any other way, that's a good question. Because I never even thought to process that. They were a lot alike but very different. (Denise)

While abuse types were not always duplicated in adulthood, the participants' emotional response to IPV was shaped by their experience of sibling abuse and the lack of support

surrounding it. All participants were able to connect feelings of abuse, and/or abusers, towards the end of each interview, but a majority of their connections came as a result of me restating what they had said about their abusers or experiences of abuse.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss key findings from my study, how they converge and diverge with the current state of the literature, and the potential applicability of family violence theories. Additionally, I will describe implications for research, practice and policy, and my conclusion. The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of my participants and their experience of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV). My hope was to discover what, if any, common experiences, patterns, or connections may have occurred between childhood and adulthood around types of abuse and relationships with abusers. Finally, this study was designed to explore if current family violence theories - trauma theory, object relations theory, attachment theory, and the intergenerational transmission of violence (IGTV) - might explain the potential connections between sibling abuse and IPV.

My study found connections between participants' experiences of sibling abuse and IPV. Participants described a lack of parental support in both experiences, and they described how that lack of support in childhood created a vulnerability for IPV in their partnered relationships. Although the participants' experienced physical, verbal, and sexual abuse from their siblings, and did not receive support from their parent(s), they still longed for close family relationships. My participants were able to connect similarities between types of abuse and abusers, as well as articulate ways their parent(s) lack of support negatively impacted them. Because of their experiences of abuse, and lack of support in childhood, participants reported generally negative emotional outcomes from childhood that carried into their partnered relationships with IPV.

The lack of parental protection in sibling abuse was a dominant theme among all four participants. A unique contribution to family violence literature, and literature on poly-victimization, this lack of parental protection was replicated in the participants' adult experiences of IPV. Participants described how the lack of parental protection made them more vulnerable in their relationships with IPV. Participants also described a willingness or necessity to accept the abuse from their intimate partner, which originated in their experiences of sibling abuse in childhood. Not previously applied to the dual experiences of childhood sibling abuse and subsequent IPV in adulthood, attachment theory may explain why survivors of sibling abuse are more vulnerable to IPV through the disorganized attachment created from lack of parental protection and the sibling abuse itself. Finally, my findings contribute to the current state of the literature on sibling abuse, by particularly highlighting how it is a potential contributor to the IGTV, and how parental lack of protection, when combined with sibling abuse, creates a combined effect on the victim.

Interpretation of Findings

Through this study, I was able to gain insight into the similarities and dissimilarities between each participant's experience of sibling abuse and IPV and discover patterns and experiences that may have created connections between both types of abuse. This chapter discusses my findings in the context of the current state of the literature, how my findings support sibling abuse as a potential contributor in the intergenerational transmission of violence and poly-victimization, and the relevance of established family violence theories on long-term victimization outcomes. Additionally, I address the limitations of my study and offer suggestions on practice, policy, and future research.

Sibling abuse is another siloed area in family violence research. Only recently has research demonstrated that sibling abuse is potentially as emotionally damaging as parental child maltreatment or witnessing IPV. However, little progress has been made on identifying unique factors in homes where sibling abuse occurs or the long-term effects of sibling abuse. My findings broadly suggest that sibling abuse must be studied in the context of the parental protection, or failure to protect, in order to adequately identify long term outcomes. I suggest it is the combined experience of sibling abuse and parental failure to protect that influences future victimization outcomes.

Parental Failure to Protect

A unique finding of my study is how survivors of sibling abuse reported, and suffered from, a lack of parental support in both childhood and adulthood. Three participants shared how their parents lack of protection in childhood made them believe the way they were treated by their sibling was "normal" or "OK;" Denise's parents did not know about the sibling sexual abuse in childhood. Participants could not recall a time their parents protected them from their sibling's abusive behavior, nor was there a time the participants went to their parents in order to receive help in their experience of IPV. There was a physical and emotional toll on the participants due to the parental failure to protect.

Three of the participants (Kimberly, Lucille, and Alexis) described the ways that they internalized messages of "unimportance" from their parents' lack of protection, or as Lucille described it, "being on the back burner." Because they learned their parent(s) would not protect them in childhood, they did not go to them for support of any kind in adulthood. Alexis described how her mother's lack of protection made her resent the preferential treatment her

brother received from their mother, whereas Kimberly reported had her mother been able to fully support her, she would have been "stronger emotionally" throughout her life. Lucille reflected on her childhood and what life was like trying to manage her abusive sister alongside her mother, "I just wanted once for maybe her [my mother] to speak up for me." A key study finding was that participants reported the significant role that parental failure to protect played across their lifespan, and because of this experience in childhood, they described being more vulnerable to IPV in adulthood.

In a phenomenological study on the type of support survivors of physical sibling abuse received, McDonald and Martinez (2016) reported parental failure to protect as a significant finding. Survivors described feeling isolated and lonely when parents minimized the abuse. Because parents did not keep them safe, participants reported feeling anger, hostility, and disappointment (McDonald and Martinez, 2016). As reported by Simonelli and colleagues (2002) and Meyers (2014; 2017), the failure of the parent to intervene on behalf of the victimized child serves to enforce the victim's sense of being unimportant and not worth protecting. To my knowledge, my study is the first one to make the link from parental failure to protect, and the resulting feelings of unimportance, to an increased risk for IPV victimization in adulthood.

Application of Family Violence Theories

The current state of literature on sibling abuse generally lacks a theory or theories to explain the impact of sibling abuse on the victim, as well as any long-term outcomes that explain how, and if, sibling abuse may create a pathway for future victimization. However, it has been suggested by Meyers (2014, 2016) that object relations theory and trauma theory may explain how sibling abuse, like parental child maltreatment, create a pathway for victimization in adulthood. Another common theory in family violence literature, attachment theory, may also

provide a potential explanation for victimization outcomes from sibling abuse. In the next section, I will discuss the application of these theories to my findings. I will focus on their potential for explaining the impact of parental failure to protect and the experience of sibling abuse using my participants' stories, and how the current state of research supports these theories and the potential negative long-term outcomes.

Attachment Theory

All four participants described a lack of parental protection with their experiences of both sibling abuse and IPV. In childhood, three participants (Kimberly, Lucille, and Alexis) reported serious incidents of physical and verbal abuse, but they did not discuss their parents protecting them by intervening on their behalf or condemning the behavior of the abusive sibling.

Reflecting on either type of abuse experience in childhood, participants described how their parents chose not to intervene or protect them from the abuser. The participants described the abusive interactions in childhood and adulthood and discussed their parents' "lack of response" as a response.

Participants described the parental failure to protect through their parents minimizing and normalizing the sibling abuse, and that lack of support or acknowledgement was a factor in their acceptance of IPV in their partnered relationships. Alexis reflected that her mother's response to the sibling abuse modeled a relationship pattern for her, which made her more vulnerable to a relationship with IPV. Kimberly and Lucille suggested the lack of parental support with sibling abuse led to a tolerance of violence in their partnered relationships. Because their parents were not supportive during their relationships with IPV, participants shared they were dependent on their abusers for support of any type - emotional, financial, and parenting.

The quality of the parent/child relationship determines the attachment style of the child: secure attachment, anxious-ambivalent attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment (mix between anxious and avoidant) (Babcock et al., 2000). Attachment theory emphasizes the critical role of a stable, predictable, and positive relationship between parent and child, and how this relationship influences a child's interpretation of their world and self-concept (Bowlby, 1979; Collins & Read, 1990; Scott & Babcock, 2010). Children who grow up in homes with secure parental attachments, and warm sibling relationships, have a stronger sense of self and are better able to better handle challenging situations throughout their life (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Kumar et al., 2015; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018; Mangold & King, 2020). A secure and loving relationship with a caregiver creates a confident and secure child who becomes a confident adult who seeks out safe and appropriate attachments to romantic others (Alexander, 2009; Scott & Babcock, 2010; Sousa et al., 2011).

Children develop internal beliefs about how relationships work based on their primary and earliest attachment figure, typically a caregiver; this internal model then shapes experiences in subsequent relationships (Tucker et al., 2014). This initial parental, or caregiver, attachment creates a model for future relationships with siblings and peers (Tucker et al., 2014). According to attachment theory, the outcome for children who experience trauma in childhood *and* report the support of a parent or other significant adult *decreases* the likelihood of negative long-term consequences (Bowlby, 1969; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Godbout et al., 2014). Woollett and Thompson (2015) suggest the parent-child relationship acts as a prototype for future relationships. The secure attachment may contribute to a more positive and deserving perception of self for the victim, whereas a non-supportive parent contributes to a further damaged sense of self and greater sense of unworthiness (Godbout et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2015). Additionally,

Godbout and colleagues (2014) found when children had parents who not only supported them, but then intervened on their behalf, their emotional outcomes were better than those with support only.

Based on my study findings, attachment theory may explain how, through the combined experience of sibling abuse and parental failure to protect, a disorganized attachment is created for the victim, which then creates a greater vulnerability to IPV victimization in adulthood. Babcock and colleagues (2000) and Scott and Babcock (2010) suggest there is an association between insecure attachment style, disorganized attachment style, and IPV. When a child experiences unpredictable responses from their caregiver, their self-concept becomes distorted, and they experientially learn those closest to them cannot be trusted to care for them or provide stable emotional support (Kumar et al., 2015; Woollett & Thompson, 2015). As explained by Alexander (2009) "attachment theory can be used to explain how the child's experience of her family of origin may lead to vulnerability in intimate relationships in adulthood" (p.79). When family relationships create a disorganized attachment, unresolved trauma is created (Alexander, 2009). Survivors may experience significant affect-regulation problems, which has been demonstrated to be a significant predictor of revictimization in adulthood (Alexander, 2009). To my knowledge, attachment theory has yet to be applied to the understanding of sibling abuse and its impact on future victimization.

A disorganized attachment may have been created in participants in my study in two ways - parental failure to protect and the experience of abuse by a sibling. The parental failure to protect created a painful and unpredictable relationship between the victim and the parent (Bowlby, 1988; Herman, 1997; Black, 1999). The failure to protect could have resulted for many reasons, but based on my participants' stories, parents minimized and normalized the abuse

throughout the participant's life; the protective relationship that should be a hallmark of a healthy parent/child bond was absent. Additionally, the sibling that should have been close to them in a warm family relationship was instead abusive throughout childhood. All of my participants shared, often tearfully, that they wanted a close relationship with their siblings and parents. However, all of my participants learned they could not trust the person(s) who are supposed to protect them, so again, a contradictory system was created for the victim to navigate. My findings suggest that the experience of sibling abuse, and the parental failure to protect, may set the victim up for those same relational qualities in their intimate partner relationships in adulthood.

The long-term outcome of a negative sibling relationship may create a vulnerability for IPV victimization in adulthood (Bloom, 1999; Ornduff et al., 2001; King et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019). Prior research indicates that children who develop insecure or disorganized attachments with caregivers or family members are more likely to become the victims of IPV (Alexander, 2009; Scott & Babcock, 2010; Sousa et al., 2011). Therefore, the same way parental child maltreatment creates an insecure attachment, attachment theory explains how and why the experience of sibling abuse makes survivors more vulnerable to IPV in adult relationships.

Trauma Theory and Object Relations Theory

Trauma theory provides an overarching explanation for any type of persistent violence in the home and suggests long-term victimization outcomes through the impact of an unpredictable and unsafe home environment (Herman, 1997; Bloom, 1999). According to this theory, survivors of an unstable home environment learn to ignore emotional responses to events, positive or negative; they learn how to not feel their emotions (Bloom, 1999) through disassociation or

avoidance. These coping skills predispose the survivor to repeat these patterns in intimate partner relationships in adulthood (Bloom, 1999; Meyers, 2016; Jawaid, 2018).

Findings from my study suggest the impact from sibling abuse and IPV left participants disconnected from their feelings and experiences. Denise described feeling "numb and frozen" in childhood and adulthood. She described feeling "frozen" when her brother touched her, and "frozen" when trying to connect to men in adulthood. Her experience of sibling sexual abuse created a response that, as she directly acknowledged, carried into adulthood. Lucille described trying to "block her emotions" and having "no emotional response" as coping mechanisms to survive her experience of IPV. In childhood, Lucille's needs were put "on the back burner" by her mother in order to manage her sister's behavior. Lucille discussed feeling "undernourished" emotionally by her mother in childhood. Lucille's childhood did not allow space for her emotional needs, and this experience was replicated in her partnered relationship with IPV. Both Denise and Lucille shared stories from childhood that illustrated a pattern of *no emotional response* to the abuse in their home, which then carried over as coping mechanisms into their partnered relationships with IPV.

Object relations theory suggests the parent-child bond should bring pleasure and security through predictably positive parent-child interactions (Mitchell & Black, 1995; Bowlby, 1992). The long-term outcome for children who experience negative parental interactions may be a propensity for adult relationships that are painful and aggressive (Ornduff et al., 2001), suggesting survivors are at a higher risk for victimization in adulthood (Ornduff et.at., 2001; McCluskey, 2010; Meyers, 2016). As suggested by Meyers (2016), object relations theory offers a potential explanation for victimization outcomes for survivors of sibling abuse.

All four participants described adversarial relationships in childhood with their abusive sibling. Participants described how the sibling abuse impacted their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Their experience of parental failure to protect may have taught participants that their feelings around abuse did not matter to even those they loved most; and because of that belief, participants did not tell their family about the IPV. As suggested by Meyers (2016), object relations theory offers a potential explanation for victimization outcomes for survivors of sibling abuse. Based on my findings and the literature, object relations theory suggests experiences of sibling abuse, combined with my finding of parental failure to protect, may make victims more likely to seek out painful adult relationships and look to create connections with partners prone to violence and aggression.

Sibling Abuse, Poly-victimization, and the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

The goal of my study was to understand the experience of women who have experienced both sibling abuse and IPV, and to identify patterns and connections that made them more susceptible to IPV in adulthood. Additionally, a study aim was to suggest if a current family violence theory explains the transmission process, and how sibling abuse contributes to poly-victimization and the IGTV.

The intergenerational transmission of violence, suggested by George C. Curtis (1963) decades ago, is one of the most rigorously researched hypotheses in family violence research (Kim, 2012). The IGTV hypothesis suggests that victims of abuse in childhood (witnessing or experiencing violence) are more likely to become perpetrators (Widom, 1989; O'Leary, 1988; Harris & Dersch, 2001; Savage et al., 2014; Woollett & Thomson, 2016) or victims of violence in adulthood (Noll et al., 2003). While the IGTV and violence experiences are not deterministic, the IGTV is a vetted hypothesis that explains the mechanisms and connections between

experiences of abuse between childhood and adult perpetration or victimization outcomes (Kim, 2012). When a child experiences unstable family relationships, he or she is more likely to seek out and repeat those same experiences in adult relationships, particularly with intimate partners (Bandura, 1971; 1973; 1986; O'Leary, 1988; Widom, 1989; Harris & Dersch, 2001; Savage et al., 2014; Woollett & Thomson, 2016). Although both attachment theory and social learning theory inform the IGTV, I did not focus on social learning theory because most family violence researchers agree the tenants of social learning theory suggest victims of abuse in childhood are more likely to become *perpetrators* of violence in adulthood (Bandura, 1971; 1973; 1986; O'Leary, 1988; Harris & Dersch, 2001; Savage et al., 2014; Woollett & Thomson, 2016), and the goal of my study was to focus on adult victimization outcomes.

Poly-victimization, the occurrence of multiple types of abuse or abusers, has been demonstrated to be more common than previously understood. Poly-victimization describes a cycle of abuse for some children. Victimized children are at a greater risk of additional victimizations occurring in close proximity, suggesting that for some children, victimization is not a specific event but an ongoing condition (Duncan, 1999; Finkelhor, et al., 2007; Gilbert et al., 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2011). When parental child maltreatment, sibling abuse, or IPV is present in a home, this trauma often begins the first experience of poly-victimization for that child (Herrenkohl et al., 2003; Finkelhor et al., 2007). A dose response exists between the number of adverse experiences a child faces and a higher likelihood of negative outcomes in adulthood; physical and mental health outcomes are significantly worse for those children exposed to multiple traumatic events (Anda et al., 2006; Flaherty et al., 2013; Richard et al., 2019; Mangold & King, 2020). Family violence literature has begun looking more closely at co-occurrence households, a common cause of polyvictimization for children. Finkelhor and

colleagues (2011) found it is not the chronicity or the severity of one type of abuse that leads to more significant mental health issues and negative outcomes, but rather to exposure to multiple forms of trauma, further demonstrating that trauma of any kind is rarely a singular event (Finkelhor et al., 2011; Sperry & Widom, 2013; Featherstone et al., 2014).

The experience of co-occurring violence in the family of origin has a far-reaching effect. Research demonstrates that witnessing IPV in your family of origin, or experiencing parental child maltreatment, can have long-term, deleterious effects, and may lead to adult perpetration or victimization of IPV. Prior research indicates that the co-occurrence of IPV and parental child maltreatment creates a combined impact on the victim and may be the most robust predictor of future perpetration or victimization in the IGTV (Pinna, 2016; Maneta et al., 2017; Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015). In homes with co-occurring violence, higher incidents of sibling abuse were reported (Kumar et al., 2015), along with child to parent violence (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Goodlin & Dunn, 2010). Parental child maltreatment, even more than witnessing IPV, continues to be the most consistent predictor of sibling abuse, specifically severe sibling abuse, as it creates more adversarial sibling relationships (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Finkelhor et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2015; Menger Leeman, 2018). When the family system is aggressive and disorganized, children may learn it is acceptable to react in an aggressive manner with their siblings. As Kumar and colleagues (2015) explain, "sibling relationships develop within a family system" and "parenting and parent-child relationships have an impact on the quality of the sibling relationship" (p. 440).

Among participants in my study, sibling abuse often occurred alongside of other types of abuse in the home. Denise, Alexis, and Kimberly experienced multiple forms of abuse by more than one perpetrator in childhood. Denise grew up with severe verbal and physical parental

(mother) abuse, sibling sexual abuse, and witnessed bidirectional IPV in all her mother's intimate relationships. Alexis grew up with sibling abuse, and in her mother's second marriage, she witnessed verbal IPV between her stepfather and her mother. Kimberly witnessed IPV perpetrated by her father against her mother, sibling abuse, and verbal and physical parental (father) abuse. Denise and Kimberly described the parental child maltreatment as more prevalent than the sibling abuse, and both participants referenced it more often during the interview than their sibling abuse experiences. Only one participant, Lucille, did not report any abuse in childhood other than sibling abuse.

While not all participants reported child maltreatment, they all reported what could be considered child neglect in the form of parental failure to protect. All four participants in my study reported a lack of support and protection from their parent(s) in the experience of sibling abuse. Three participants (Alexis, Lucille, and Kimberly) described how their parents did not protect them from their abusive sibling; sibling abuse was known and allowed to happen in the home. Participants reported their parent(s) minimizing or normalizing the abuse; one participant even reported her father joined in with her brother and his abuse. Normalizing the abuse included punishing both kids and actively recruiting the victim to help manage the abuser. The continued minimization and normalization for the participant left no room to be identified as a victim. A significant finding from my study is the combination of parental failure to protect and sibling abuse that created another form of poly-victimization for my participants, and it is a noteworthy contribution to poly-victimization literature. The combined effect of parental failure to protect and sibling abuse had a severe negative impact on participants' self-esteem and feelings of worthiness, making them more vulnerable to IPV in adulthood.

Participants in my study reported wishing their parent(s) had protected them in childhood, and they shared how parental support would have allowed for a closeness with them in adulthood, and then support from them in their relationship with IPV. Participants shared their mother's support in adulthood would have given them the strength to leave the relationship; they would not have "tolerated the abuse."

The failure of a parent to protect their children equally has been suggested as a contributor to sibling abuse in the home (Kumar et al., 2015; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018). In response to an inability to control the aggressor and stop the abuse, parents may ignore the abuse and normalize it as sibling rivalry (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Tucker et al., 2013; Martin, 2016; Mangold & King, 2020). The conflating of sibling abuse with sibling rivalry is common (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Tucker et al., 2013; Martin, 2016; Mangold & King, 2020), and may be why sibling abuse has been neglected in the family violence literature and also *not* identified as a contributor to the IGTV.

McDonald and Martinez's (2016) participants reported the most common response from a parent to the sibling abuse was minimization, normalization, and victim blaming. Parental failure to protect was a dominant theme among their participants as well. Participants reported parents as unable or unwilling to stop the abuse, as well as dismissing the seriousness of the abuse in order to justify their lack of a protective response (McDonald and Martinez, 2016). Evidence from my study demonstrates the significant impact from a non-protective parent, especially the mother, on victimization outcomes in adulthood.

Participants in my study describe how sibling abuse and parental failure to protect made them feel they were more susceptible to IPV. Findings from my study revealed the negative impact on the participant's self-esteem, sense of self-worth, and confidence made them more

susceptible to IPV. In both childhood and adulthood, participants referenced the toll the abuse took on them emotionally. Because of their childhood experience of sibling abuse, participants reported feeling like abuse was "the norm" for them, so the aggressive personalities of their partners were what they were "used to," and that the violence was "acceptable" in their partnered relationship.

The literature is clear on the importance of a warm or close sibling relationship on self-esteem outcomes. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's unbiased assessment and self-knowledge that demonstrates the internal belief of that others see them as worthy and capable (Ziegler Hill, 2013; Kumar et al., 2015; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018). Self-esteem translates into feelings of self-respect and self-love, but perhaps more importantly and relevant to abuse, it translates into a feeling of *worthiness* (Rosenberg, 1965; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018). Individuals with high self-esteem "respect themselves and consider themselves worthy... while individuals with low self-esteem show feelings of rejection" (Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018, p. 340).

Prior research supports study findings on how the impact of sibling abuse on the survivor's self-esteem has a significant impact on their future relationships (Kumar et al., 2015; Mangold & King, 2020). Sibling relationships play a primary role in self-esteem development and encourage prosocial behavior and emotional regulation in childhood (Noller, 2005; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018). Not only does a warm sibling relationship help create positive self-esteem, but it also creates stronger and more successful peer and partnered relationships (Wiehe, 1997; Simonelli et al., 2002), and it serves as a protective factor for mental and physical health issues (Ziegler-Hill, 2013; Kumar et al., 2015). Research also demonstrates dating violence as an outcome of childhood abuse and low self-esteem (Feiring & Furman, 2000;

Simonelli et al., 2002), adolescents with abuse histories may accept or view abuse as normal (Adams et al., 2019). These attitudes and beliefs may attract more hostile partners (Feiring & Furman, 2000), thus making them more susceptible to experience and tolerate dating violence (Feiring & Furman, 2000; Simonelli et al., 2002; Adams et al., 2019).

Siblings help teach us who we are and how to navigate the world of peer relationships (Kumar et al., 2015; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018; McElvaney et al., 2021). If the sibling relationship is unpredictable, painful, and adversarial, victims may learn to seek out those relational aspects in adulthood (Ornduff et.al., 2001; Smith, 2004; McCluskey, 2010; Morrill-Richards & Leierer, 2010; Meyers, 2016; Morrill et al., 2018), leaving victims of sibling abuse, like victims of parental child maltreatment, more susceptible to victimization outcomes in adulthood (Ornduff et.al., 2001; McCluskey, 2010; & Meyers, 2016). Victims of sibling abuse may be more likely to seek out painful adult relationships and look to create connections with partners prone to violence and aggression because of their experiences in childhood (Mangold & King, 2020). Attachment theory demonstrates the impact on self-esteem for victims of family violence. Again, my study found the combined impact of parental failure to protect and sibling abuse attacks a child's sense of worthiness (Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018), making them more vulnerable to IPV victimization outcomes. When a child's self-esteem is shaped by these two events, they have a negative self-image, feel rejected, and may not feel worthy of a good, partnered relationship.

Participants from my study discussed the long-term impact of having dysfunctional family relationships, including a lack of a close sibling relationship. In turn, they described how these feelings of loss and longing contributed to their susceptibility to an IPV relationship. For example, Kimberly shared the biggest impact on her lack of family closeness was her reliance on

her abusive boyfriend for emotional support in adulthood. She described a "catch-22" with her boyfriend and her family. Because her boyfriend can be sympathetic and "sometimes supportive" with her relationship with her father and brother, she is stuck relying on him, even though it means she remains in an abusive relationship with him.

Minimal research exists on the emotional experiences of loss and longing for survivors of sibling abuse. The feelings of loss and longing, for a positive sibling relationship and a protective relationship with parent(s), impacted the survivor into adulthood, and it created a vulnerability for re-victimization in a partnered relationship. In a study by Tener (2021) on survivors of sibling sexual abuse and their adult relationships with their abusers, some participants yearned for "love and recognition" in an adult relationship with their abuser (p. NP6846). Participants in Meyers (2016) study on trauma, recovery, and resilience factors with survivors of sibling abuse described complex emotions of loss around experiences of choosing to let loved ones go in order to heal. Additionally, those survivors described different layers of loss in their sibling relationships, as well as in their family of origin. The loss and longing survivors of sibling abuse feel may create a vulnerability in them for adult partners who share similar qualities and character traits of their abusers. Loss and longing may play a role in the IGTV when looking at the transmission process from sibling abuse and IPV victimization. As attachment theory suggests, the impact of a disorganized or insecure attachment with parents and siblings creates a sense of loss in survivors of sibling abuse. In their attempt to connect with someone and feel *close*, they may inadvertently seek partners who are reminiscent of dysfunctional sibling or parent dynamic in hopes of recreating a close relational outcome, but instead re-experience victimization.

Power and Control

An important study finding was the power and control dynamic existed in the sibling relationships, as well as the partnered relationship. All sibling abusers were older or male. Power and control are dominant themes in family abuse literature, but not as commonly examined in the sibling abuse or child maltreatment literature. Typically, research focuses on an imbalance of power between the husband and wife (Goodlin & Dunn, 2010; Capaldi et al., 2012). However, some research suggests that sibling abuse is a way to attain power and control in the family (Wiehe, 1997). When a child feels empowered by the adults in the home, they may be more prone to use their power on those they see as weaker, or even be encouraged by an abusive parent. This may be due, in part, to cultural norms, structural power inequities in society, parental favoritism, and preferential treatment of a particular sibling (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Kumar et al., 2015; McDonald & Martinez, 2016; Cameranesi & Piotrowski, 2018; Buccieri, 2019). According to Kumar and colleagues (2015), verbal and physical abuse from a younger brother to an older sister may culturally signify male dominance and control, even at a young age. The desire to establish themselves as in charge is often allowed or encouraged by parents and society; this behavior may even be rewarded in homes with other types of violence present (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Kumar et al., 2015; Dirks et al., 2015; Tener et al., 2020). Sibling sexual abuse, most often seen between an older brother and younger sister, has also been suggested as a way for one sibling to establish power over their victim (Tener, 2021).

Power and control were also themes in the partnered relationships with IPV. Abusers limited participants' ability to leave the house, control or earn money, have friendships, or even communicate with family. Additionally, marital rape and infidelity were prevalent in Alexis and Denise's experience of IPV. As in childhood, abusive partners controlled the participants by

physical and emotional abuse. Some types of abuse in childhood were repeated in their partnered relationships, i.e., violence to limit decision making, verbal abuse around appearance, and yelling or insulting participants in order to gain acquiescence. Power and control, from sibling abuse and partnered relationships may create another link in the IGTV.

Implication for Practice and Policy

Findings from my study reveal several implications for practice and policy. There is a critical need for parents to be educated on the differences between normative and non-normative sibling behavior and the potential long-term negative effects of abusive sibling behavior. Parents and professionals alike need to understand the difference between sibling abuse and sibling rivalry in order to successfully identify victims and to prevent minimization and normalization of abuse (McDonald & Martinez, 2016).

My participants all reported parental minimization and normalization of sibling abuse in childhood. McDonald and Martinez's (2016) study demonstrated a substantial need for parental education on the difference between sibling abuse and sibling rivalry based on their findings. Their study found that parents have a strong inclination to minimize even severe instances of sibling abuse as normal or acceptable, placing the sibling victim at a high risk for serious injury and negative mental health outcomes (McDonald and Martinez, 2016). Results from this study, as well as my own study, demonstrate that normalizing sibling abuse may also contribute to future victimization in adulthood. Conflating sibling abuse with sibling rivalry is perhaps the most common way parents excuse abusive behavior. Two of my participants (Alexis and Kimberly) reported early memories of their mother's frustration with the aggressive sibling interactions, and the belief that what was occurring was sibling rivalry. Creating parenting

programs focused on normative sibling behavior and interactions, could help educate families on the occurrence of sibling abuse within a family.

Social work professionals should be well versed on sibling abuse within the family setting, and how such experiences may have long-term impacts on risk of future victimization. When working with survivors of sibling abuse, it is imperative to remember the entire family system has been impacted, and all members of the family must be a part of the healing process. The impact of sibling violence on a child's physical and emotional health is equal to any other form of abuse (Finkelhor et al., 2006). In my study, three of the four participants grew up in household with other types of family violence - witnessing IPV and parental child maltreatment. Sibling abuse is often only a symptom of a dysfunctional family system and should not necessarily be treated as the primary family issue. The literature around co-occurring family violence suggests parental child maltreatment and IPV often co-occur, or are the predecessors of, sibling abuse (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009; Goodlin & Dunn, 2010; Kumar et al., 2015). Two of my study participants, Alexis and Denise, described how substance abuse and mental health issues impacted the participants' family or origin, as well as their partnered relationships. Both mental health and substance abuse created and intensified abuse in childhood and adulthood.

There is a profound need for social work professionals to create curricula for the classroom and for child welfare agencies. Intervention programs should flow out of the curricula to help those already impacted by sibling abuse, children and adults alike. Intervention programs should be tailored for families at a higher risk for sibling abuse due to co-occurring violence, parental child maltreatment and/or IPV, and for families where sibling abuse is already occurring (or co-occurring). Both programs' aims should be to address the layers of experienced trauma,

family system issues, with a goal of preventing any future victimization. Prevention programs should be available for families where there is a higher likelihood of any type of family violence.

Another potential implication for practice is in creating an awareness for the occurrence and harmful nature of sibling abuse, and long-term impacts on future victimization, among medical professionals, teachers, and child protective services. Sensitizing medical professionals and teachers could be the first line of defense for victims of sibling abuse. My participants did not discuss disclosing the sibling abuse to anyone outside of their home. Because siblings have greater access to one another, abuse is often more chronic and potentially more traumatizing to younger children (Finkelhor et al., 2006). Training medical professionals and teachers to be aware of sibling abuse and how commonly it occurs may help identify sibling abuse in a family earlier, and then allow for education and intervention to occur.

Since we know that victims of IPV may have experienced other types of trauma in childhood, social work practice should focus on program creation for victims of IPV using modalities that address multiple types of childhood trauma—including sibling abuse. We know that exposure to any type of family violence increases the likelihood of victimization outcomes in adulthood. Because sibling abuse is understudied as a contributor to any type of experience of violence in adulthood, best practices should include identifying previous experiences of abuse and be rigorously incorporated in IPV services. Additionally, primary prevention programs should be created that focus on preventing IPV in populations impacted by sibling abuse, as well as the family systems where sibling abuse tends to occur.

Child protective services need to be trained on sibling abuse and be given the tools to identify this abuse in a home. Currently, there is no protocol for identifying and supporting families with cases of sibling abuse, irrespective of other types of abuse in the home. A budget

should be created to better train child protective workers and agencies, as well as all other mandated reporters, on sibling abuse – the differentiation between abuse and rivalry, the most common presentations of the impact of abuse (internalizing versus externalizing symptoms), the family system it is most likely to occur in, and how to detect minimization or normalization when speaking to the parents and other family members.

Changes need to be made in state policy regarding mandating reporting and the prosecutability of sibling abuse. Currently, sibling abuse is only prosecutable by a parent. Based on the data, we can be reasonably sure most parents will not choose to report the abusive sibling because they do not recognize the behavior as abusive, and they may want to protect the abusive sibling. However, parents should be legally responsible for failing to report or intervene unless there are extreme extenuating circumstance of other types of abuse and control in the home.

Recommendation for Future Research

Sibling abuse is grossly understudied and underrepresented in family violence literature, particularly as potential contributor to the IGTV. There is a general gap in the literature on victimization and perpetration outcomes from sibling abuse, as well as what long-term outcomes may be for victims. Three of my four participants (Alexis, Kimberly, and Denise) grew up in homes with co-occurring violence, creating polyvictimization within their family of origin. Sibling abuse needs to be established as a contributor to poly-victimization, as well as to the IGTV. Currently, much of family violence research is siloed. A majority of intersection research discusses risk factors for intergenerational abuse, as well as risk factors for cycle initiators. There is ample evidence of nuances of sibling abuse and its role in the IGTV, and these nuances evidence directions that need more investigation through both qualitative and quantitative research.

A substantial gap exists in the literature around the impact of a protective versus non-protective parent in long term outcomes for survivors of sibling abuse. There are few phenomenological studies on the experience of sibling abuse; I was only able to find two other phenomenological studies (Meyers, 2014, 2016, 2017; McDonald & Martinez, 2016). However, those studies, in line with my own findings, highlight the negative impact of parental failure to protect on victims of sibling abuse. Again, all four of my participants described the lack of parental protection in their experience of sibling abuse. None of the participants were able to recall a time when their parent stopped the abuse or chose to protect the participant from the sibling abuser. In addition to my study findings, this theme - parental failure to protect - permeates survivors' stories of abuse and terror (Meyers, 2014; 2016; 2017; McDonald & Martinez, 2016). As researchers, it is critical we identify long-term outcomes for survivors when the parent has a protective versus non-protective role. When we are better able to understand the role a parent plays in experiences of sibling abuse, we will be better able to inform practice intervention and prevention efforts.

Family violence research exists in silos; there are few research area crossovers between the multiple types of abuse that occur regularly in the home. We know that witnessing IPV and/or parental child maltreatment raises the risk significantly of adult perpetration or adult victimization, but when parental child maltreatment and IPV are co-occurring, there may be an additive effect on the likelihood of eventual perpetration and/or victimization of IPV and/or parental child maltreatment. Because we know that any type of family abuse rarely occurs in a vacuum, as family violence researchers, we need to conduct more research to establish what is the additive effect of sibling abuse in the family system, and what role does the parental failure to protect play in victimization or perpetration outcomes.

There is also a need for more empirical research examining how existing family violence theories explain sibling abuse, and its role in the IGTV. While object relations theory and attachment theory offer guidance on the pathways between sibling abuse and future victimization, they better explain the role of parental failure to protect as a significant factor in future victimization outcomes. Current family violence theories may offer germane explanations on long-term outcomes, but they fail to address many of the nuances in a family where sibling abuse, as well as other types of violence, occur.

Based on the need for a theory germane to sibling abuse, there is a significant need for more studies with larger sample sizes, as well as longitudinal studies across the lifespan to prospectively identify which events in childhood connect to which outcomes in adulthood. Within those studies, it is critical to also collect data on all other types of familial abuse, traumatic events that occur outside of the home, as well as the type of relationship with all siblings and the role of the parent in the participant's experience of abuse, supportive or non-supportive. Within new studies, there is a need to comprehensively examine and compare all types of family violence, including sibling abuse, and do not only include reports on an "index child" or only use parental reporting measures.

Finally, future research should look at the IGTV of sibling abuse and future *perpetration* outcomes. Looking at all types and experiences of abuse would shed light on the transmission process for perpetration in adulthood, as well as intervention research to evaluate best practices in preventing sibling abuse and its negative consequences, particularly as a potential approach to interrupt the cycle of violence.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are several potential limitations to this qualitative study. A limitation with nearly all violence research is that participants may not see their experiences as abusive. Violent experiences become normative, and this could be a reason recruitment can prove challenging. When participants shared their experiences or thoughts that "I am the only one who..." I took the time to normalize their experience and share parts of the literature that were appropriate for that experience and individual.

My study relied on childhood recall when looking at the participant's experience of sibling abuse. Because of the chance of poor and/or inaccurate recall, I may have obtained fewer details of the abuse the participants experienced as children, as well as an exaggerated or suppressed version of events and emotions.

Three of the four participants' experiences of IPV were six or more years ago, which could also impact their ability to recall events, details around events, and their ability to recall the intensity of the experiences. The impact of the childhood experiences may have also served to lessen or alter the feelings surrounding their experience of IPV as an adult. Participants may also be conditioned from life experiences to answer certain ways or minimize either experience of abuse.

In order to achieve the most accurate recall from childhood and past IPV experiences possible, I spent a significant amount of time discussing family dynamics, restating what the participant shared, and asking additional questions to clarify their statements. I made sure I thoroughly understood what participants were sharing with me to ensure what I shared in my study was their words and feelings and not my interpretation of their feelings around particular events.

I faced several challenges with recruitment due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of agency response; this impacted the number of women I was able to interview. Another challenge within this area was determining if the women I recruited on social media were sincere or were participating for the incentive. To ensure credibility, I only used four (4) of the six (6) interviews since I could not be sure that two of the participants shared a story that was their own in order to be eligible for the incentive.

There was also a limitation due to examining a small sample size with all different types of sibling abuse. While the purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology is not generalizability, a limitation was that participants experienced different types of sibling abuse, with different gendered sibling abusers and a variety of age differences (younger brothers versus older sister).

My study focused on experiences of sibling abuse and IPV, and not on positive aspects of either relationship. I did not create questions around positive experiences with siblings or partners. On their own, two participants (Alexis and Lucille) referenced trying to bond with their abusive siblings. None of the participants referenced any good times or positive relationship aspects with their IPV abuser, nor did I explore that part of their relationship with them.

There were several delimitations within my study. The study was focused on women who reported both sibling abuse and IPV, which meant it was delimited to any alternative outcome to examine from the experience of sibling abuse in childhood other than IPV. This study was focused on heterosexual adult relationships, so it was delimited to exclude lesbian romantic relationships. I only interviewed females about their victimization experiences, which delimited my study from examining outcomes for males who experience sibling abuse in childhood. Finally, my study was delimited by looking at only IPV victimization outcomes in adulthood and not both perpetration and victimization outcomes.

Conclusion

Sibling abuse is the most common type of family violence (Eriksen & Jensen, 2009) and potential contributor to future IPV victimization, yet it is the most understudied (McDonald & Martinez, 2016). Perhaps most notably lacking in family violence literature and practice is the role that sibling abuse has as a critical component of poly-victimization, and a contributor to the IGTV. Decades ago, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) first described sibling abuse as pervasive and problematic, yet little progress has been made since then on creating a place for it in family violence research.

The main goal of this interpretive phenomenological study was to discover the essence of participants' experiences of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence. Once each experience was distilled, the goal was to discover any similarities and dissimilarities the impact the abuse created on an individual level and/or on a group level, and to connect my findings with literature surrounding the experience of sibling abuse and IPV. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to understand the "whatness" of each type of experience for each participant individually and then as a group. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze and organize the data and to create super-ordinate themes and emergent themes.

The primary research questions guiding this study were:

- 1) How do adult female survivors of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence experience and make sense of abuse by a family member?
- 2) Did, or how did, participants experience the relationship between sibling abuse and IPV?

Data were collected via an interview with each participant, as well as member checking in the form of phone calls and emails. The initial interviews were transcribed, coded by hand, and coded within NVivo. Five super-ordinate themes emerged from the data: lack of family

support, experiences of abuse, coping mechanisms, loss and longing, and participant connections. These super-ordinate themes, along with emergent themes, were explored in detail to expound on my findings from the study.

This study explored experiences of sibling abuse and IPV and discovered similarities between both types of abuse and abusers. Although the experience of sibling abuse itself created pathways for future IPV victimization, I found the parental failure to protect the participant in childhood was as impactful as the sibling abuse itself. The lack of parental support and the experience of sibling abuse created a disorganized attachment for my participants, which increased their risk for IPV victimization in adulthood.

While family violence theories exist that can be used to explain the outcome of sibling abuse, I would suggest they still, in fact, explain the role of parental child maltreatment due to the parental failure to protect. Attachment theory and object relations theory explain a combined impact on the victim, which may explain why victims of sibling abuse, who do not have a protective relationship with their parents or caregivers, are more susceptible to IPV outcomes than those who experience sibling abuse but have a protective parental relationship. My study supports the significance of sibling abuse on survivors, including its potential for future victimization in IPV relationships, and the need for more social work research and practice to address and prevent this pervasive issue.

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APPENDIX 1: IRB Approval Letter



June 20, 2020

Carin Ikenberg
Social Work
Box 870314

Re: IRB # 20-02-3289: "Survivors of Sibling Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence: What Are the Ties that Bind?"

Dear Mrs. Ikenberg,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR 46. You have also been granted a waiver of written documentation of consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The approval for your application will lapse on June 19, 2021. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB-approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Sincerely,



Carantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer

cc: Dr. Catherine Carlson

How do female survivors of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence make sense of abuse by a family member?

Rationale: There is a gap in the literature on the long-term outcome for those who experienced sibling abuse in childhood, and there is no literature to suggest that the experience of sibling abuse may be a contributor to the intergenerational transmission of violence. By gaining a deeper understanding of both experiences (sibling abuse victimization in childhood and intimate partner victimization in adulthood), I hope to discover connections that may explain how and why sibling abuse may lead to intimate partner violence victimization, and why sibling abuse should be considered a contributor to the intergenerational transmission of violence.

Goals of this study:

- Through in-depth interviews, to understand the lived experience of survivors of sibling abuse and intimate partner violence.
- To uncover the nuances in transmission between sibling abuse and intimate partner violence victimization.
- To understand the participants' feelings about their abuser.
- To discover connections or similarities between family environments and responses.

For more information on this study, or to learn how you can participate in this important research, please contact the researcher, Carin Ikenberg, by email or phone.

Email: ccikenberg@crimson.ua.edu | Phone: 4**-8**-7***

All information is kept strictly confidential. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and no identifying information will be used in any material this research generates.

Research participants needed:

Have you or a female friend experienced both sibling abuse and domestic violence?

Are you willing to talk about your experience?

<p>Did you, or a female friend/relative, experience abuse by a sibling(s)?</p>	<p>Have you, or a female friend/relative, been in a romantic relationship where you experienced domestic violence (intimate partner violence)?</p>
<p>A sibling is defined as an individual who is related in a variety of ways: biological, half, step, foster, parent’s partner’s child, or fictive kin. *You do not have to have grown up in the same household, or be biologically related, to have experienced sibling abuse.</p>	<p>An intimate partner is defined as anyone with whom you were romantically (emotionally and/or physically) involved with.</p>
<p>What is sibling abuse? Sibling abuse is the recurrent pattern of intentionally aggressive and/or damaging physical, psychological, or sexual acts with the intent to harm a sibling.</p>	<p>What is intimate partner violence (IPV)? Just like domestic violence (DV), IPV is a behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors (financial, isolation, etc.).</p>

If you or a friend have experienced sibling abuse and domestic violence (abuse by any partner (and any gender) since you were 18 or older, you qualify to participate in this study.

Participation in this study makes you eligible for a \$30 gift card (1-1.5 hours).

Please contact Carin Ikenberg (researcher) if you are interested in participating.

Email: ccikenberg@crimson.ua.edu | Phone: 4**-8**-7**

All information is kept strictly confidential. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and no identifying information will be used in any material this research generates.

APPENDIX 4: Informed Consent

In-depth interview: Adult Informed Consent Form

Research study on sibling abuse and intimate partner violence

Please read this informed consent carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Consent Form Key Information:

- One interview lasting 1 to 1.5 hours.
- This study will include up to six (6) participants.
- Anything you say will be kept private, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.
- Participation in this study could cause unpleasant memories to resurface. You can pause or stop at any time.
- The following resources are available to you, should you need to speak with someone in the future:
 - Georgia Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-33-HAVEN (42836)
 - National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (V/TTY)
 - National Partnership to End Dating Violence 1.866.331.9474 or 1.866.331.8453 (TTY) Live chat, www.loveisrespect.org Text “loveis” TO 22522 8200Childhelp
 - National Child Abuse Hotline 1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453)
 - National Sexual Assault Hotline 1.800.656.HOPE
 - Jewish Family & Career Services, Shalom Bayit Program: 770-677-9474.

Is it ok to discuss this further?

- No. [THANK the participant for her time]
- Yes. Great. Please let me tell you a little more about the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to discover if experiences of sibling abuse in childhood have a connection to experiences of intimate partner violence in adulthood. My goal is to use the information from my interviews to understand if there are feelings and experiences that are similar between sibling abuse and intimate partner violence. If successful, my research may help inform pathways for the intergenerational transmission of violence (trauma passed on from one generation to the next).

Procedures: What are you being asked to do in the study?

The interview will last 1 to 1.5 hours, and it will be audio recorded on Zoom, an online meeting platform. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your experiences of sibling abuse and domestic violence/intimate partner violence. The questions will be focused on the types of abuse experienced, feelings associated with the abuse, and your family's response to the abuse.

All participation is voluntary. If at any point of the interview you do not wish to continue, the interview will stop immediately, the audio recording deleted promptly, and all information will be permanently deleted.

Time required: The study will take between 1 and 1.5 hours of your time.

Risks: While there are no anticipated risks in for participation in this study, participation in this study could cause unpleasant memories to resurface. You can pause or stop at any time.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits for study participation. Participants may benefit from knowing that their study participation may help us understand if there is a link between experiencing sibling abuse in childhood and intimate partner violence in adulthood.

Confidentiality: All data will be collected anonymously. All data associated with your answers will only ever use a pseudonym (chosen by you the participant at the beginning of the interview). The contact list will be kept in an electronic file (in UABox), and it will be permanently deleted once the data collection and analysis are completed. Once interviews are transcribed, the audio recording will be destroyed. De-identified electronic data will be kept on a file on UABox. All findings from the research will be generalized to ensure that no one participant in the research can be identified. All data associated with this study will be kept in UABox until deletion.

Data not linked to identifying information: The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You are not required or compelled to participate in any way.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you wish to stop your participation in the interview, the audio tape will be destroyed immediately, and no part of your answers will be included in the study findings.

How to withdraw from the study: If you want to withdraw from the study, simply tell the researcher you wish to stop the interview. There is no penalty for withdrawing. You will still receive the \$30 gift card for participation of any kind.

Compensation/Reimbursement: Your participation is voluntary. However, a \$30 gift card will be given for interview participation (1-1.5 hours).

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue please contact, contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Carin Ikenberg
Title: LMSW, Doctoral Candidate
Department Name: School of Social Work
Telephone: (404) 849-7082
Email address: ccikenberg@crimson.ua.edu

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. Catherine Carlson
Department Name: School of Social Work
Telephone: 205-348-0204
Email address: ccarlson5@ua.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns about the research study, please contact: Ms. Tanta Myles, the University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints

and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may email the Office for Research Compliance at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

Agreement:

- I agree to participate in the research study described above.
- I do not agree to participate in the research study described above.
- I agree to have my interview audio recorded in the research study described above.
- I do not agree to audio recording in the research study described above.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Print Name of Research Participant

Signature of Investigator or other Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Print Name of Investigator or other Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX 5: Referral list

Referral list

Participants were given resources to follow up with, should they find themselves needing someone to talk to post-interview.

This information was given verbally and offered in writing if desired by the participant (with the safety of the participant in mind).

Georgia Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-33-HAVEN (42836)

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (V/TTY)

National Partnership to End Dating Violence 1.866.331.9474 or 1.866.331.8453 (TTY) Live chat

www.loveisrespect.org Text “loveis” TO 22522 8200Childhelp

National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1.800.422.4453)

National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-HOPE

Jewish Family & Career Services, Shalom Bayit Program: 770-677-9474

APPENDIX 6: Full Interview Script

Interview Guide Questions

Review Informed Consent

- Explain the informed consent form the participant received before the interview.
- Highlight that participation is voluntary; answer all questions the participant may have.
- Begin recording with participant verbal consent (waiver of written consent), as all interviews will be conducted on Zoom.

Introduction to interview

“Thank you for speaking with me today. I truly appreciate your time and your willingness to share about some really difficult times in your life. Everything you share will be kept in strict confidence. Before we begin, I want you to choose a name for this interview. In the interest of confidentiality, the name you choose will be how I will refer to you throughout this interview, and it will be what I use if I need to refer to you ‘by name’ in any of the findings. So, please take a few minutes and decide on a name for me to use.”

Pause while the participant decides on a name.

“Great! Thank you, _____ (use chosen pseudonym throughout the interview). Please remember that you can skip any question(s) that you do not want to answer. Please also know that you are free to answer in as much or as little detail as you are comfortable. Let me know if you need to stop for any reason and take a break; I do have a few breaks planned, but feel free to take as many as you need. If there are any questions you don’t feel comfortable answering - that’s okay, too. We can skip to the next question. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?”

Part 1: Ice breaker/background (10 min) (*Brief with purpose to orient them to recall experiences around family life in childhood.*)

- Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your family was like?
- Were there activities that you all did together that you enjoyed?
- Was there fighting in your family, and if so, what typically started the fight?

***5-minute break**

Part 2: I’d like to talk to you about some of the difficult moments that happen in childhood in some families.

4. Thinking back to childhood, most siblings fight and argue, but sometimes that fighting and arguing turns into abuse. Did this happen in your family?
 - a. Can you please tell me about the sibling who abused you?
 - b. What was your experience of sibling abuse?
 - c. Do you remember having specific feelings about the sibling who abused you?
 - d. After the abuse ended, can you recall how you felt?
 - e. Do you recall your parent, parents, or caregiver's response responses to the sibling abuse you experienced?

***5-10 -minute break**

Part 3: Now we are going to discuss your adult relationships, with your spouse/partner and any children you have.

1. Are you currently married or living with your partner? For how long have you been living with her/him [current partner]?
2. Can you please tell me how many biological children you have (*ask separately for boys and girls*)?
3. When you think about your family now, what is (or was if your children are grown) your favorite way to spend time together?

Part 4: Now I'd like to talk about the past relationship(s) that you indicated, dating or married, where you indicated that you experienced abuse.

Even the best of dating or married relationships can involve conflict. However, conflict resolution should never involve violence. Thinking back to a relationship in your past, did you ever experience conflict in your relationship that involved physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual violence, or other types of controlling or aggressive behavior?

- a. What has your experience of abuse from a partner/boyfriend/husband been as an adult?
- b. Were there specific feelings or emotions you experienced during those times of abuse, or in that particular time of your life?
- c. Did you have supportive family or friends during that difficult time?
- d. How did you come to the realization that you needed to leave this relationship?

***5-minute break**

- e. Thinking about both types of abuse you've experienced, in what ways were the experiences similar or different?

Examples of follow up questions may be:

- 1) You spoke of _____, would you mind giving more detail about that experience?
- 2) When you mentioned _____, I noticed your body language changed

(did not match your words), would you mind telling me more about that relationship/incident?

Ending

Thank you so much for sharing your story with me today. I really appreciate your willingness to share difficult periods of your life. This means a lot to me.

APPENDIX 7: Notes from Follow-up call with Alexis

	<p>Alexis 7:20-21 45 mins. Phone call 2nd contact Um, fro ex</p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Appendix G</p>
	<p>Si jointured</p>	
	<p>Her dad - talking about daughter's growth spnts, etc.</p>	
	<p>Family unit She just vented + discussed current family sita (step kids, etc.)</p>	
	<p>Shared about loss/longing → not in IPV Wants to make sure her daughters she can walk away from a bad situation. In +</p>	
	<p>Reflected on parents divorce, father not being animal, relat. before - like a pattern. Fright + self doubt when she sees her ex - Realizes how hard it is to get over. Verbal + emo. abuse did so much damage - 7 worse than physical abuse. Found myself @ age 4 1/2 Don't want my daughter to be like me - be diff from my mom - she supportive + not controlling. I was that person Mom admitted history to step-kids - if their</p>	

APPENDIX 8: Email follow-ups and Final Four Questions

Member checking, first email

5-22-2021

Good morning, Lucille.

I hope my email finds you doing well - this has been a challenging year for many of us. I want to thank you, again, for your willingness to share your story with me. In many ways, your experiences have become a part of my daily life, and the more I read and write about them, the more I appreciate your willingness to share. As I begin wrapping my paper up, I wanted to take some time to check back in with you and see if there is anything additional you would like to tell me/share with me. It could be thoughts about what you told me, or thoughts you've had since we talked. I would also love the chance to share some of my findings with you. If you'd like to talk again for 15-20 minutes, I would love to reconnect. It would be the same format as before, on Zoom.

With gratitude,
Carin Ikenberg

Member checking, second email follow up

6-14-2021

Hi Kimberly,

I hope you had a good weekend! I wanted to check back in one more time to see if you wanted to hear about any of my findings, or to see if you had any final thoughts you'd like to share with me before I finish? If you'd like to talk again, it would be about 10-15 minutes on Zoom, or we could just do a phone call.

With gratitude,
Carin Ikenberg

Third email follow up with questions

7-10-2021

Hi again, Kimberly.

I wondered if you'd be willing to answer a few more questions that have come up as I write? I know you're busy, so I thought this may be easier than trying to schedule a phone call. I can't send my document out until after it's published, so I need to check in with you via email or phone call if you're willing. If you'd be willing to respond via email, I would like to offer you a \$15 thank you for your continued participation. Feel free to just respond to this email with any thoughts or statements about the questions below.

- 1) Do you believe the abuse you experienced from your brother and father as a child made you more susceptible to abuse from your boyfriend? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 2) As an adult, how do you think the abusive relationship with your partner would have been different if you had had support from your parents?
- 3) If your mother were able to support you more with the abuse from your brother, how would that have impacted you?
- 4) You discussed feeling "loss and sadness" regarding your strained relationship with your sibling, as well as the lack of family closeness. What would have been different in adulthood if you'd had a close relationship with your sibling or family?

If a phone call is easier, please feel free to let me know.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,

Carin

APPENDIX 9: Detailed Notes from Denise Interview

Lived w/ aunt Mary til 5; bro dad took bros to Calif. - reconciled @ 5 → move to CA from Chi. - brief reconciliation
 Lived w/ mom → brothers w/ dad

Appendix I

Denise #1 Interview Guide Questions

Review Informed Consent

- Explain the informed consent form the participant received before the interview.
- Highlight that participation is voluntary; answer all questions the participant may have.
- Begin recording with participant verbal consent (waiver of written consent), as all interviews will be conducted on Zoom.

Choose name

Introduction to interview

"Thank you for speaking with me today. I truly appreciate your time and your willingness to share about some really difficult times in your life. Everything you share will be kept in strict confidence. Before we begin, I want you to choose a name for this interview. In the interest of confidentiality, the name you choose will be how I will refer to you throughout this interview, and it will be what I use if I need to refer to you 'by name' in any of the findings. So, please take a few minutes and decide on a name for me to use."

Pause while the participant decides on a name.

"Great! Thank you, _____ (use chosen pseudonym throughout the interview). Please remember that you can skip any question(s) that you do not want to answer. Please also know that you are free to answer in as much or as little detail as you are comfortable. Let me know if you need to stop for any reason and take a break; I do have a few breaks planned, but feel free to take as many as you need. If there are any questions you don't feel comfortable answering - that's okay, too. We can skip to the next question. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"

Part 1: Ice breaker/background (10 min) (Brief with purpose to orient them to recall experiences around family life in childhood.)

- Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your family was like?
- Were there activities that you all did together that you enjoyed?
- Was there fighting in your family, and if so, what typically started the fight?

*5-minute break

Part 2: I'd like to talk to you about some of the difficult moments that happen in childhood in some families.

mom raped at young, had Khild (girl) [Mum raised by G.G.] → adoption
 → married to Ill; then had 3 kids w/ husbands
 Her mom - abusive to her (hated girls/women)

SA and IPV themes

1. Lack of social support for survivor

- Sibling Abuse survivors did not feel they had social support for sibling abuse throughout childhood.
 - **Alone/Unseen:** Most of the household energy and attention was spent on managing the abusive sibling; survivor's needs went unmet. Sibling abuse survivors did not report telling anyone about the sibling abuse during childhood. Because of the normalization of the abuse within their family, survivors were left alone to deal with the trauma and aftermath of abuse. The abuse could be looked at as a secret, or just as "untold."
 - Additionally, two of the survivors experienced additional abuse by a parent living in their household.
- IPV survivors felt they had little support throughout their partnered relationships in adulthood. While most had friends, the participants did not view them as meaningful support because they were not able to provide guidance (to leave) in a meaningful way.
 - **Lack of maternal figure:** Survivors mentioned wanting a maternal figure to guide/advise them in their IPV relationship.
 - In adulthood, she protects her mom about ongoing dysfunctional sibling relationship (Alexis)
 - Protects her mom in adulthood from her IPV relationship - doesn't want to upset her anymore (Kimberly)
 - Never had support from her mom during her IPV relationship; years after her abusive brother died, one time conversation about sibling sexual abuse (Denise).
 - Never told her mom about IPV; one time conversation once the relationship was over (Lucille).
 - **Alone/Unseen:** Some survivors reported having no friends or family in their life while in the IPV relationship; others reported not telling anyone or minimizing the experience to peers/family.

2. Emotional experiences of sibling abuse and IPV.

- **Emotional impact of physical and psychological abuse from sibling or intimate partner**
 - Survivors experienced similar types of negative emotional responses from both sibling abuse and IPV. Physical and psychological abuse, because it was often in tandem, caused significant damage to the survivor's self-esteem.
 - Survivors described the emotional impact of abuse. Survivors reported feeling: broken, awful, confused by his behavior, insecure, angry, *never let*

him know he broke me, fat, ashamed, stupid, negative self-image, insecure, hated, frustrated, ridiculous, insecure, and hurt.

- **Emotional impact of lack of protection from a parent**
 - Perhaps more significant than actual abuse from sibling was the lack of support from the mom with the abusive sibling, as well as dealing with the IPV relationship alone, without the active involvement of mom.
 - An impact from the lack of parental protection left survivors feeling marginalized and neglected. The abusive sibling was catered to in order to manage them. Survivors described feeling “on the back burner”, and “undernourished”.
 - **Rivalry**: several parents verbally normalized it as rivalry. Since the SA was normalized by parents, survivors did not view it as abuse in a traditional context.
- **Emotional impact of psychological and physical abuse from a parent** - Two participants also experienced parental abuse; this abuse was experienced in tandem with sibling abuse. Survivors reported abusive incidents as:
 - Survivors reported being hit with hands and belts, made to kneel for hours, "bearing the brunt of their mother's anger at females," being yelled at, avoiding/hiding from father's wrath, all hell broke loose. And she locked me in the bedroom for a couple of days. It was ridiculous," and being "hit with anything and everything."
 - The emotional outcome (psychological consequence) was described as:
 - feeling hated and made to feel worthless
- **Emotional impact of sibling sexual abuse**: The impact of sexual abuse produced a more unique emotional outcome (psychological consequence): numb, frozen, shell, dream, insecure.

3. Loss, longing and protection (for the relationships and protecting the abuser)

All SA survivors referenced the loss of a close sibling relationship, they saw how other siblings got along and discussed missing out on that closeness, as well as the loss of a close and happy family. They were torn about their feelings, about hating the abusive sibling, and sad to have never experienced a "normal" family life. Survivors protected abusive siblings in several ways in childhood - possibly tied into wishing they had a normal family and close sibling relationship. Contrarily, survivors did not share those same feelings about their adult intimate partner or the relationship ending. While they described the experience of IPV, their tone and descriptions were largely sterile and removed from the experience.

- Loss and longing:
 - Torn, sad, regret, and overwhelmed
- How they coped/ways the protected their abusers:
 - Helped mom constantly manage older sister's moods
 - Didn't tell because she didn't know what would happen to him
 - Tried to include him/protect him from bullies at school, looked out for him
 - Tried to avoid contact with him
 - **Why they protected them**: Each participant identified an issue with the sibling, such as ADHD/anger issues, did poorly in school, no friends, Bipolar, Drug/alcohol use, and general anger issues. Also, the abusive siblings could be described as the favored child, since much of the family energy was spent on

them. It is important to note in adulthood, all of the participants continue to have a contentious relationship with their abusive sibling.

4. Lack of power (in adulthood and childhood affected experiences of abuse):

- **Sibling Abuse - Favored role gave the abusive siblings power and protection from the parents, males and/or older sibling**
 - **Allowed it:** Whether supported by an abusive parent, or allowed by a weak parent, the abusive sibling had the power in the family and was allowed to abuse the sibling.
 - **Privilege/favored** of being the son in a traditional Vietnamese family brought privileges the daughter did not have and may have influenced the abuse from the father and the tolerance of the brother's abuse. Participants also described the abusive sibling's role of favored child in the home, and the child that was catered to as a way to manage their outbursts.
 - **Excuses:** Parents made excuses for abusive sibling's behavior which empowered their behavior.
 - **Stuck:** The survivor could not leave the relationship or escape the abuse; because they were children and had to rely on adult protection and resources, which they did not have.
- **IPV - Survivors reported feeling stuck with the abuser, had nowhere else to go**
 - **Financial control:**
 - Survivor was not allowed to work or control the money
 - **Role of gender:**
 - Traditional gender roles, the man could physically control her through marital rape, or he was not afraid to lash out with physical abuse.
 - **Isolated:** No/little contact with friends/family; they could not help if they did not know. Controlled or no access to a car.

5. The juxtaposition of *acceptance and refusal* of IPV in adulthood

Acceptance

- IPV survivors all referenced accepting their life or being resigned to it. All of the IPV survivors who left the relationship spoke of a level of acceptance and used "I guess this is my life now" verbiage. They grew up in dysfunction and violence, and they were not surprised that it was happening in their adult relationships as well.

Interestingly, no one reported feeling afraid of their abusers (IPV) or overwhelmed by the abuse in adulthood; the abuse descriptions were matter of fact. The lack of shock, fear, or overwhelm could be from the chaotic and violent households they grew up in. Their acceptance could come from being desensitized to abuse, as many of the abusive experience's survivors shared from childhood were mirrored in adulthood.

- **Deserved it/Came to expect abuse:** When describing their relationships, they did not reflect on a close relationship with their partner, but it was a protected relationship - emotionally, as well as protecting them from being discovered by others. Because of the experience of sibling abuse, they may have come to expect abuse as a normal part of their interpersonal relationships/acceptance of mistreatment.
- **Distant with partner, but also protected the abuser:** The language used to describe the IPV relationship was not filled with loss or sadness. Survivors didn't engage emotionally

in the relationship, nor did they speak longingly of "what could have been." The only survivor to do this was the one who is still engaged in the dysfunctional relationship with her abuser.

- protected partner IPV - played it off when family asked (Lucille)
- protected IPV abuser (and her mom's feelings) in adulthood by not telling and taking the blame (Kimberly)
- baby will save the relationship, try harder; lose weight to please him (Alexis)
- took some of the blame for the physical abuse because she'd argue with him (Denise)

Refusal

- Refusal for their kids to grow up in a violent household. Survivors described not wanting to have their kids "repeat the cycle," or see the violent IPV relationship. They knew how detrimental it was for their kids to be exposed to IPV, so that gave them a reason, other than themselves, to leave. The one participant who does not have kids, and lives with her (childhood) abusers, is still in the IPV relationship.