

Critical Review of Theories Evaluating Stay and Leave Decisions in Intimate Partner Violence: Implications for Research

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence is an ongoing threat to society and its implications must be scrutinized to understand the predictability of stay decisions and what could lead to terminations. Multiple theories have been provided to determine the nature of these relationships and the causal factors behind stay decisions along with termination. The purpose of this paper is to delineate and critically analyse theories, namely: learned helplessness, traumatic bonding, psychological entrapment, reasoned action and planned behaviour, cognitive dissonance theory, 2-part decision making model, investment model, Stockholm syndrome; pertaining to bonds formed within violent relationships and the decision process behind staying/leaving, the nature of research work undertaken and developed over time and where the focus of research work should be extended.

Keywords: *Intimate partner violence, Learned helplessness, Traumatic bonding, Psychological entrapment, Reasoned action and planned behaviour, Cognitive dissonance theory, Two-part decision-making model, investment model, Stockholm syndrome, stay/leave decisions.*

'Intimate partner violence (IPV) has a wide definition and includes all forms of behaviour that result in sexual, physical or psychological harm to the partner.' - (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002; WHO, 2005).

According to Abel (2001), 'Intimate partner violence is a major health and criminal justice issue on a global scale' and according to Snively (1995), 'Although domestic violence has historically been trivialized or ignored, the costs of these abusive relationships can be measured in terms of loss of human life, serious injury, a decline of physical and psychological well-being, and the consequences for children raised in such toxic environments. In addition to the human costs, there are significant economic costs to the individual, the family, and society as a whole.'

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) manifests into several forms of abuse including but not limited to, physical, emotional, psychological, and/or sexual abuse inflicted by an individual upon their partner. IPV may exacerbate existing symptoms of mental illness and might also

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make a patient uncomfortable to disclose the details of the same out of fear and embarrassment. The response to IPV may be very similar to and in turn mimic symptoms of diagnosable mental illnesses. An individual may appear to show paranoia whereas such diagnostic features are evident in some mental disorders; it could also be a symptom of fear for a severe injury that has been retained from the relationship. It is imperative for a psychologist to determine whether the said patient is likely to be a victim of IPV or alternately be a perpetrator of it and do the needful by informing the patient of the risks of returning to a relationship or informing concerned authorities respectively.

Intimate Partner Violence is highly pervasive and detrimental to individual living, a common aspect of which is the reluctance to remove oneself from this evidently dangerous relationship. This research paper deals with the aspects of said relationship, the nature of the abuser along with the individual's adverse childhood and environmental situations in helping maintain status quo. It also examines the extended process of terminating the relationship and the factors that contributed to the eventual disruption of cognitive dissonance that is expected to have maintained this relationship.

Intimate Partner Violence as the term suggests, is the presence of violence in an intimate relationship, these acts of violence are perpetrated by a partner against the other in the form of physical and psychological harm. The underlying dynamics of such acts are emotional which is incongruous with the idea of the abuse and the gravity of such acts and violence leads to self-preservation and appropriate measures taken in order to protect oneself. This strong emotional bond between the abuser and victim is majorly distinguished by feelings of cognitive dissonance, intense dependence, and certain behavioural strategies all of which is underpinned by a paradoxically strengthened maintenance of bond, which is perpetuated and continued through a vicious cycle of violence. This strong emotional connectedness is termed by authors as a 'Trauma Bond'.

With such bonding, the actuation of the attachment system causes difficulty in termination and or departure from the relationship. Due to such an attachment, the victim seeks refuge in an ongoing state of danger that is perceived and experiences it once the outbreak of danger settles down, this refuge is paradoxically sought in the aggressor. Therefore, it is evident upon following such a pattern of emotions that a dysfunctional affect regulation exists within the relationship which in turn helps maintain the violent cycle. According to Relational Family Therapy, it is vital through therapy to help victims identify and face their painful basic affects and develop regulation of said affects after terminating the violent relationship, otherwise, they are predicted to remain committed to this relationship.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework

Within this paper we will use a psychological explanatory framework to evaluate theories surrounding Intimate Partner Violence and stay/leave decisions. Rhatigan, D. L., Street, A. E., & Axson, D. K. (2006), critically analyse 6 theories to explain termination of IPV: "Learned Helplessness, Psychological Entrapment, Investment Model, Reasoned Action/Planned Behaviour, Traumatic Bonding and the Two-Part Decision-Making Model." This paper reviews the aforementioned theories and the following novel researches- Stockholm syndrome, Cognitive dissonance theory (George, V.).

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Learned Helplessness, proposed by Seligman is widely used in clinical literature surrounding depression and was first introduced by Lenore Walker (1979) with regards to intimate partner violence, in her work, 'The Battered Woman'. Lenore introduces the underlying principles of the theory in order to observe certain behaviours in victimized women. She posits that the passivity post violent events are best explained by the theory. According to Walker, this dependence and inaction might favour the victim in temporarily decreasing the violence but in turn affect the ability to disencumber oneself from the abusive partner. The learned helplessness theory establishes that women experiencing violence despite their consistent efforts to curb or alleviate the severe situations, hold the expectation that their future attempts at ameliorating such situations will be in vain and yield similar consequences, usually violent and severely intense. These are the expectations that evolve into problem solving and affect deficits and are dependent on the ascription made for the abuse. Victims attribute abuse to 3 causes: internal, which is the belief that they are responsible for their own abuse; stable, the abuse is persistent and pervasive and has no end; global, the abuse extends to all parts and facets of their life, all such causes are responsible for the development of learned helplessness related deficits and are repercussions of continuous abuse and maintaining the abusive relationship, therefore, reducing the likelihood of termination.

Although the learned helplessness approach identifies individual differences in reactions to abusive relationships and considers internal barriers that accounts for stay decisions but does not take into account the external barriers that lead to such decisions, it is also dismissive of the discussion surrounding termination and how that comes about. In multiple empirical/atheoretical studies amongst samples experiencing severe violence the expected outcome would be a higher tendency to remain in abusive relationships due to the continued violence and the acclimatization to abuse but it is consistently proven to be otherwise as evidenced by a growing need to terminate relationships initiated by the victims of abuse.

Traumatic Bonding by Dutton & Painter (1981) explains the psychosocial process wherein victims develop strong attachments or emotional bonds with their abusers. The theory of Traumatic Bonding theorizes that these bonds are corollary to a power imbalance experienced within such relationships. Within this dynamic the perpetrator coerces the victim to often perceive their sense of self and base it off of the perpetrator's negative view of them, this process is termed as 'appraisal' by social psychologists and implies the reflected assessment of self or 'the looking glass' wherewith victims 'internalize the views held by significant others', (Cooley, 1902). These feelings precipitate the belief that the victim is incapable of self-care and help. The power imbalance subsequently develops a symbiotic relationship which creates dependency for the partners and there is inherent incapability to leave the relationship. This dynamic is most significantly characterised by oscillating reactions interspersed with periods of abuse and apologies/affection which serve as reinforcements. The victim usually experiences extreme levels of negative arousal when exposed to violence by the partner, the arousal abates following the violence which serves as a forceful negative reinforcer. The calm that follows the violent episode is characterized by paradoxical positive actions such as self-incrimination, apologies, warmth and guilt, which act as positive reinforcers. This cyclical dynamic creates increased attachment and is cause for the reinforced response of remaining in the relationship. It is also hypothesized that if the victims do leave, the established traumatic bonding will lead to predictive acts of returning, it is believed that the attachment grows stronger post separation, it is during this separation

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that traumatically bonded victims ruminate and get attached to the positive and desired aspects of the partner.

Theoretically the trauma bonding theory delves into the dynamics present in abusive and violent relationships, it elaborates on the cycle of violence and addresses the abuse reconciliation phases. This theory therefore, adequately throws light onto victimization and revictimization as well as multiple risk factors that determine extreme insecure attachment style. To further expand on the concept of trauma bonding in their qualitative research work, “Women of Intimate Partner Abuse: Traumatic Bonding Phenomenon”, Koch, M. (2018) addresses the lack of literature surrounding IPA and the increased longevity of relational attachment and implicit abuse which includes but is not limited to creating a conflicted victim identity, maladaptive attachment and identity enmeshment with the abuser’s portrayal of the victim’s identity. This implicit maltreatment maintains relationship longevity despite the abuse. Following the traumatic bonding theory and evaluating experiences from the lens of the same and a phenomenological study of victims’ experiences and perspectives provides insight into the persistence of IPA. Perpetrator attachment and aggression within IPV relationships is pertinent to the formation of victim enmeshment from conflicted identity and implicitly bonding maltreatment. Insecure attachment in the perpetrator leads to relational and physical aggression, relational aggression is a display of physical violence including but not limited to sporadic acts of non-violence such as intimidation and control over the victim, therefore, frequent oscillations between the physical and non-physical acts of violence.

Such acts of psychological aggression are perpetrated by interspersing physical aggression with emotional manipulation, coercively controlling behaviours and depriving the victim of social contact. Implicit IPA is responsible for influencing and distorting a sense of identity by negatively affecting a sense of self and self-esteem indelibly. Intimate partner abusers skew the victims' sense of relational and personal identity, morphing schemas in order to create susceptibility to maltreatment and creating expectations of the same. The victim is therefore, normalised to injury, instability, vulnerability, danger and maltreatment as the cyclical and recurrent trauma experience solidifies expectations of negative experiences as an act of self-preservation and survival, which ultimately compromises victim self-identity. This self-identity is formed around the dynamics of the abuse marked by acts of disorientation, hypervigilance and erosion of personal identification due to an emotional unravelling that accompanies said abuse (Eckstein, 2016). The perpetuity of relational abuse is mediated and contributed by attachment bond, identity enmeshment and implicit maltreatment, all of which is a convoluted study and to better understand the same it’s imperative to investigate attachment styles and coping mechanisms undertaken such as minimization of aggression, denying and ignoring controlling behaviours. This research paper draws much needed attention to the normalisation of non-physical violence and in turn undermining the potent adverse effect of implicit maltreatment in maintaining IPA relationships, even under normative legal and cultural terms physical violence is seen to be more credible.

For this particular study phenomenological approach was applied to explore subjective lived experiences of women in abusive relationships and their attachment bond, implicit IPA and identity conflicts utilising a phenomenological constructivist design through a qualitative inquiry into said perspectives. The study was conducted on heterosexual females within the age group of 18-65 and having experienced IPA for a duration of at least 1 year with no child at the time of abuse, 60-minute semi-structured interviews utilising the ‘Psychological

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Maltreatment of Women Inventory' and short form standardised questionnaires. Traumatic Bonding theory was utilised to strengthen the conceptual understanding of "abusive relational addiction power and permanence". The traumatic bonding theory identifies the intermittent physical violence within emotional manipulation allowing the victim ample time and space to enmesh emotionally with the abuser. Therefore, the intensity of attachment is determined by the "dysfunction of maltreatment", (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016; Tani et al., 2016). An abuser's insecure relational attachment is responsible for the intense and continued maltreatment. Over time the continued abuse and torment habituates the victim to maltreatment tolerance and conditions them to develop emotional separation in the form of "awareness inhibition, dissociation and adaptation to injury" (Gagnon et al., 2017), this separation is the only escape possible when physical escape becomes difficult. When trauma associations converge, maladaptive attachment, conflicted identity and emotional ensnarement takes place; trauma associations are dissonances or incongruencies in power, intermittent abuse and paradoxical attachment. The paradoxical attachment is created via misdirected self-esteem perceptions, actual trauma experiences and subjective perspectives on partner attachment in relationship dynamics, all of which conflate and coalesce the trauma bond from victim to abuser.

Multiple researches have been conducted to establish the susceptibility to such risks and attachments, namely insecure parent-child attachment and Stockholm syndrome (that will be further discussed within this paper is seen to be a derivative of trauma bonding).

Theories of **reasoned action and planned behaviour** postulated by Ajzen & Fishbein, (1980) has been predominantly used to prognosticate decisional behaviours such as the decision to quit smoking but has been negligibly mentioned with regards to partner abuse. When the model is applied to the IPV paradigm reasoned action is studied within the context of decisions surrounding staying and leaving the violent relationship which can be seen as behavioural intentions that are dependent on anticipations surrounding the outcome and social norms. Outcome expectancies are determined by the appraisal of costs v/s benefits surrounding termination. The costs of terminating could be greater risk for violence post leaving, financial support and dependence for children, etc., outweighing the probable rewards such as freedom, if they determine to remain with the partners. In multiple scenarios encouragement to reconcile is determined by social networks (social norms), culture could dictate such decisions along with the community's customs. Extending reasoned action, planned behaviour accounts for internal and/or external behaviour preventing termination. Therefore, in a lot of scenarios the act of termination is not within the control of the victim such as limited finances and housing alternatives despite maintaining positive attitudes towards leaving and receiving social support, these internal/external barriers can be cause for stay decisions apart from social norms and outcome expectancies.

The investment model branches out from the interdependence theory and was posited by Rusbult (1980). This theory holds the belief that interdependent processes within relationships, such as interactions between partners provides the needed information as opposed to personal dispositions and temperaments, i.e., self-esteem. It essentially hypothesizes the belief that victimized individuals continue to remain committed to relationships to the end that important needs of financial security, intimacy are met. Feelings of commitment are generated and sustained by 3 factors: satisfaction, alternatives and investments. The overall model is defined by the following equation: $COM = SAT - ALT + INV$, and represents the notion that individuals feeling satisfied, with lower quality

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alternatives and with investments in the relationship are likely to continue the relationship and strongly commit.

To study “The impact of intimate partner violence on decisions to leave dating relationships” by testing the Investment Model, Rhatigan, D. L., & Street, A. E. (2005) explored the nature of stay /leave decisions on a sample of college women engaged in heterosexual dating relationships. The sample was divided into a group of 2 to depict victimized and non-victimized women from the same demographic. This paper is also reviewed for the nature of predictability the investment model has in determining stay-leave decisions. The investment model has shown strong predictive utility in vastly different samples in early research work. The nature of this model however is important to discuss because in the purview of a review paper that determines the nature of relationships (violent/non-violent) and what causes stay/ leave decisions, it is important to review the theory within the context of the interdependence/commitment theory that is non-reliant on the impact of violence in relationship outcomes and decision-making. Investment model is an explanatory model for decision-making in relationships but does not necessarily have specific predictive qualities with regards to violence unlike most models (Learned Helplessness, Traumatic Bonding), thus, it could be claimed, that it better predicts leave decisions amongst non-victimized women as opposed to victimized women’s stay and leave decisions. Therefore, this paper by Rhatigan, D. L., & Street, A. E., hypothesizes that similar decisions are made to reach relationship outcomes, and women’s reactions to violence may not be as critical to decision-making as believed earlier and more non-pathological theories for the same can also be considered.

The Investment Model is asseverated on the interdependence theory, that is “a social exchange model that posits the importance of interpersonal dynamics, not individual difference factors, in predicting and understanding relationship stability,” (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). According to this model, commitment in interpersonal relationships evolve on the basis of 3 components- Satisfaction, Alternatives and Investments- satisfaction is discerned as the rewards the relationship affords, alternatives are within the paradigm of rewards operationally as the better alternatives to the relationship, investments are the perceived psychological (time, energy or effort) and material benefits (property, children) in a relationship that help determine stay decisions. Therefore, women who are highly committed to a relationship are highly satisfied, find fewer alternatives and have higher investments that bind them to the relationship.

Results of the study explored the common-sense theory by Gelles (1976), believing that higher the level of violence higher the chances of leaving; contrary to expectations more the psychological abuse, higher is the investment in the relationship (which could be used to explain stay decisions), it may be so due to the enduring exposure to psychological abuse, individuals exhaust and interpose time, energy and effort to resolve conflicts. Therefore, investments are made in order to stay in relationships. The results displayed differential unique effects wherein physical violence predicted greater intentions of stay as opposed to psychological abuse, here the commitment level is assessed and is tied back to the results of investment in a manner that shows that higher the psychological abuse higher the intentions to leave but does not affect their commitment levels, therefore, the chances of returning to said relationship is also high.

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In the second analysis within the study to understand whether IPV predicts satisfaction and commitment in relationships, based on the rational or common-sense approach, women find IPV aversive to the aforementioned variables and this is common amongst both victimized and non-victimized women. Therefore, refuting the notion that women minimize the saliency of violence and abuse in relationships. The final analysis shows that psychological abuse is pervasive and present discreetly and is a huge determinant for leave decisions over violent ones in both victimized and non-victimized women.

This paper provides a comprehensive understanding of violent-relationship stability, specifically depicting both victimized and non-victimized women's decisions to leave with the help of the investment model, therefore, illustrating a steep departure from earlier theories of negative personality traits such as passivity and/or pathological effects of frequent victimization. Slight differences were noted across the dimensions of the model, such as lesser satisfaction and commitment in tandem with greater intentions to leave as compared to non-victimized women. Alternatives also presented as a greater reason to leave amongst victimized women much like investments.

Psychological entrapment is an extension of the cognitive dissonance theory, Strube (1988) in his research distinguishes 5 factors that determine entrapment: Victimized women continue and actively maintain their relationships, this active effort is continued despite the ensuing violence, questioning the rationality and benefit behind the choice and effort, conceding to the choice made while deciding whether or not to stay/ leave, and identifying that the accompanying costs are substantial. As proposed by Brockner & Rubin, (1985) psychological entrapment is marked by an increased/ escalated commitment to violent relationships by justifying initial efforts utilised to make the relationship work, it is an exercise in justification, in which individuals continue to maintain and remain in abusive relationships by investing time and resources to make good on prior investments. To resolve this conflict the individual will reduce the effects of the partners' violence and overstate the partner's contributions in order to justify the decision to remain involved. The appeal of this theory is limited to clinical studies and psychological abuse; most atheoretical studies show that victimized individuals are more likely to make cost/benefit-based decisions as opposed to dissonant ones and less likely to minimize the violence faced.

Choice & Lamke (1997) provide a theoretical approach that is an amalgamation of the learned helplessness, reasoned action/planned behaviour, investment and psychological entrapment models. **The Two-Part Decision-Making Model** identifies common overlapping concepts within the theories such as investment, resources, satisfaction, alternatives, barriers, cost-benefit and adds other components such as social norms. The 2-part decision-making is done with the help of the following 2 questions: "Will I be better off?" the answers to which are determined by the constructs of satisfaction, investment, alternatives and social norms found within the investment, psychological entrapment and reasoned action/planned behaviour models, all of which helps determine the cost/benefit in terminating the abusive relationship. The learned helplessness and reasoned action/planned behaviour model help determine the answer to the second question- "Can I do it?", using the following constructs; personal barriers, i.e., shortfalls associated with learned helplessness and structural barriers, i.e., insufficient access to resources and the inability to acquire financial security. Combining these 2 questions and their answers women make the decision around termination.

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Stockholm syndrome was adapted as a theory by Graham (1995) to develop an understanding of relationship dynamics, specifically linked to intimate partner violence. 4 antecedents are required for the development of Stockholm syndrome, namely; 'A perceived threat to survival, perception of kindness, isolation (social, emotional) and the perceived inability to escape'. The syndrome itself is presented as a coping mechanism against cognitive and perceptual distortions. Graham (1994) developed a 49-item scale to measure the syndrome specifically in relationships measuring attitudes, behaviours and beliefs.

Germane to the theory of Stockholm syndrome is the work presented by George, V. (2015) on "Traumatic Bonding and Intimate Partner Violence", that outlines important hypotheses with regards to the Stockholm syndrome scale and the role of Stockholm syndrome in intimate partner violence and developing trauma bond. 3 studies were conducted, the first study provided a 3- factor solution for the scale upon psychometric testing, the second study evaluated the predictive qualities of the test and the mediating role of several attachment theories in predicting violence with the help of the factors mentioned in the scale, the third study was dyadic in nature and conducted on 86 couples to assess which factor predicted relationship violence both within and across partners.

For the first study the 3 factors identified were: Core Stockholm Syndrome that evaluates and predicts justification of the abusers' actions and an alliance with them. Example of an item that predicts core, e.g., "If I give my partner enough love, they will stop getting so angry at me". The second factor was Psychological Damage- which implies an enduring psychological effect from the abuse and dependency due to said abuse. An item that describes this factor would be, e.g., "I cannot make decisions." The last factor was Love-Dependency; the extent to which individuals believe that their love for their partner is sustaining the relationship. The item that best describes this is, e.g., "My partner's love and protection are more important than any hurt they might cause me". A confirmatory factor analysis showed inter-factor correlations between core and damage and modest correlations between core and love, this proved the hypothesis that factors of the scale are correlated but independent factors.

The second study was conducted to evaluate mediating role insecure attachment plays in Stockholm syndrome and IPV. 2 attachment styles under insecure attachment showed gendered differences in the moderating role, namely anxious attachment style amongst women and avoidant attachment styles in males. Higher scores in both styles predicted higher violence. With regards to an anxiously attached individual, the lack of control over their own tumultuous state (anxiety) and lack of regulation over their own emotions and aggression may create a growing need to control their partners, which can predict violence, and another aspect of the same could be due to the fact that higher levels of aggression can aggravate anxious attachment. Males with avoidant attachments were seen to develop violent tendencies when their partners became defensive and started to withdraw from them. Other studies have shown that the pairing of an anxiously attached female and an avoidantly attached male are cogent predictors of aggression in relationships.

The last study utilised a structural equation modelling to report the association between the 3 components of the scale and reported aggression, to check within participant effects as well as partner effects while controlling for shared variance between male and female partners. The hypothesis for this particular study was that the Core construct is responsible for higher IPV as opposed to the other components. The results conclusively showed that both males

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and females that are seen to justify, rationalise, support and distort reality surrounding the partner, associated with the Core component reported higher levels of abuse and aggression in relationships. No significant association was found between the Damage construct and violence. The love construct showed gendered differences wherein more aggression was seen in females with regards to male relationship violence, it was supposed that this difference could be due to the nature of love and how the reaction is more subtle and ruminative (Fletcher et al., 2013). Due to societal pressures a woman is expected to be more invested and intensely focused in intimate relationships that may lead to aggressive reactions. This research provides resources for further speculation on the concept of dyadic aggression for both men and women being associated with the perception of relationship amongst women in terms of love cognitions.

‘A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957)’ by Leon Festinger is the first synthesis of the cognitive dissonance theory, cognition deals with and describes the mind and the thoughts and beliefs involved. Dissonance is the noted incongruity between multiple beliefs or the conflict that arises from differing beliefs. This dissonance presents itself when discordant beliefs are held simultaneously or when a novel contradictory information is presented and this creates strife with existing beliefs. The conflict arising from the incongruity creates an uncomfortable psychological state and certain strategies are adopted to reduce this discomfort.

In a paper delineating the cognitive dissonance theory with regards to intimate partner violence, Zaitman, D., (1998) suggests that in discussions surrounding IPV the likelihood of othering the existence of violence in relationships is very high, IPV is seen as an occurrence that takes place with “others, and not us”. This concept of dissociating from the act in order to look less vulnerable and following the same paradigm of removing oneself to maintain a spotless or “positive image”, is hypothesised to have been a cause of dissonance, as an individual is predisposed to evade stimuli that implies or directly talks about violence. Therefore, they are most likely to avoid information about abuse while being in an abusive relationship. A sample of 71 women was divided into groups of 3, women that were in abusive relationships currently, women who had separated from the abuser and were separated for at least a 6-month period, and women who had never been exposed to an abusive relationship. Women were asked to choose from a selection of 12 brochures which were roughly along the range of choosing or avoiding dissonant information (brochures pertaining to awareness surrounding abusive relationships). A chi square test comparing the 2 broad choices was conducted to find that although the results were in the direction of the hypothesis, there was very little significance.

Stay/leave decisions

The process of extricating oneself from such relationships as defined by Gilbert, S. E., & Gordon, K. C. (2017) in their paper on “Predicting forgiveness in women experiencing intimate partner violence”, on a sample of women residing in 27 different domestic abuse shelters in Tennessee, highlights the nature of dilemma surrounding leaving the partner despite experiencing abuse. Although some women leave, more than half choose to stay or return after leaving as the possibility of experiencing violence or abuse becomes exponentially higher after leaving in most such cases. Although this was a proposed hypothesis for stay/leave decisions, this may or may not be true and therefore, this particular paper highlights 2 concepts within interpersonal relationships that predict the process of forgiveness which will give us better insight into the nature of the trauma bond and its

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strength. One such idea is the nature of commitment the woman has to the relationship, the commitment theory has multiple frameworks but the suggested frameworks in consideration were Stanley and Markman's commitment theory which posits 2 ideas, constraint commitment and personal dedication. Structural investments in the marriage or relationship, the societal pressure to stay within the relationship, the appeal of substitutes or alternatives, the morality of divorcing or separating from a partner and the availability of other romantic partners in the future are all encapsulated under the broad idea of constraint commitment. The term Personal Dedication whereas, refers to an individual's desire to "improve the relationship, sacrifice for it, to invest in it, to link personal goals to it, and to seek the partner's welfare, not simply one's own" (Stanley & Markman, 1992, p. 595).

Prognosticating stay/leave decisions aside, this research paper also builds onto these decisions based on forgiveness as a mediator, wherein, women's relationship commitment is seen to accurately predict forgiveness. A significant positive correlation has been implied in research dealing with the commitment and forgiveness variable and how the former predicts the latter. Therefore, higher the commitment more the likelihood of forgiving abuse and the subsequent intent of returning.

Further research in this field suggests that a vast majority of women who continue to stay in IPV relationships do so due to a certain dissonance created by positive aspects of the relationship beyond the aforementioned constraints which include "love, respect, and moments of true happiness", (Choice & Lamke, 1997; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000). These important commitment factors are positive behaviors interspersed occasionally within the abusive relationship which create a bond that is emotional in nature and falls under the personal dedication construct and termed as a trauma bond. This bond has been found to be related to forgiveness in victims of IPV. Therefore, a person's personal dedication is also positively correlated to forgiveness. The first goal of this study was therefore to analyze the relative roles of personal dedication and constraint commitment in predicting forgiveness in a sample collected from an IPV shelter population.

Consequently, the next goal was to study the role, minimization of aggression plays in mediating commitment to lead to forgiveness. Cognitive dissonance theory popularized by Festinger (1957) suggests that in situations that call for conflicting ideas, attitudes, beliefs or affects simultaneously a dissonance is formed which causes discomfort, due to which an individual may experience the urge to alleviate this internal dissonance by changing their approach to these attitudes and beliefs and consequently reduce said discomfort. Application of this theory to trauma bonding suggests that victims of abuse and may experience multiple such negative behaviors from their partners and simultaneously positive ones which may create a dissonance the resolution of which is sought by diminishing the intensity or severity of the partner's abuse, as in doing so the discomfort felt while continuing a relationship despite the harmful abuse is mitigated. In fact, Herbert, Silver, and Ellard (1991) suggested that women who remain with abusive partners "appear to employ cognitive strategies that help them perceive their relationship in a positive light" (p. 311). This minimization of aggression due to dissonance might lead to individuals better coping with the daily stressors experienced in such relationships.

Therefore, it was theorized that minimization of aggression acts as a coping mechanism that helps reduce stress experienced in IPV relationships. According to cognitive dissonance theories, the initiation of forgiveness is extremely difficult and can only be aided by

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cognitive mechanisms like minimization of aggression. Therefore, the hypothesis was to study the mediational effect of minimization of severity of abuse/aggression in commitment and forgiveness. Initially when commitment factors were considered separately the hypothesis did not hold true until both factors were taken as a confluence and considered as a whole commitment score.

Anderson, D.K., & Saunders, D.G. (2003) describe the termination process categorically in 4 steps and the stress-process framework to explain psychological difficulties faced by women beyond this termination, ironically being higher than when the individual was in the relationship. The paper highlights and reviews popular theories surrounding IPV and bonding and details the development of work in this field. The initial studies put the onus of abuse and the continued stay within these relationships entirely on the abused partners as opposed to the abuser, the nature of such studies delved with topics such as theories of female masochism stemming from psychodynamic theories that levied the charge of staying in such relationships on women with an inherent need for pain and punishment, these views were discarded, over-time, concepts of learned helplessness brought in the aspect of child abuse and the nature of such relationships conditioning women into believing that every normal relationship is abusive and that asking for help seldom brings no change, therefore, a normalised stance on abusive relationships. “Learned helplessness theory hypothesized that motivational, cognitive, and affective deficits result when abused women repeatedly but unsuccessfully attempt to get the help they need” (Walker, 1984), closely associated theories suggest institutionalised misogyny, sense of dependence and rampant sexism along with victim blaming playing a major role in abetting this sense of helplessness and also in turn make women internalize it. Theories with interpersonal components are also discussed in the paper such as acts of sporadic reinforcements, which was popularised by Walker (1984) as the “cycle of violence”, Traumatic bonding was also theorised as a principle which involved alternating rewards and punishments and a greater fear of harm upon termination, which is the highlight of this following paper. According to Anderson, D.K., & Saunders, D.G., there are 2 broad categories within which the decision of leaving can be found: material resources (income and employment) and socio-psychological factors. The dependency of material resources and the guarantee of security after termination is seen to be a better predictor than psychological ones in multivariate studies. The theory of childhood abuse does not show certainty in terms of consistently predicting stay decisions based on the learned helplessness theory. Four major steps highlighted throughout the study in the process of leaving show that an individual may leave and return intermittently and with each such return learn new coping skills. With women in the process of divorcing before the physical process of leaving commences an emotional and cognitive detachment or leaving sets in, these phases include dealing with the violence and managing it while dissociating from one self and others, becoming aware of the abuse, acknowledging its existence, transforming it and offsetting it with viable solutions and the third would be breaking free and disengaging. It was later realised that another fourth phase is considered and that is the effects of trauma after the abuse, psychological problems like PTSD, depression and other negative outcomes can arise if the environment they are introduced to post trauma continues to be violent, therefore, additional care, social support and various coping resources can help prevent the susceptibility to such trauma.

Engelbrecht, G. C. (2015) in their Doctoral dissertation on “Cognitive dissonance in trauma: The conflict between belief, autobiographical memory and overt behaviour.” Utilises the epistemological framework of social constructionist theories to evaluate autobiographical

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memory recall of trauma, by conducting 3-in-depth interviews of women who had experienced trauma, representing different religions, customs, cultures and languages. Thematic analysis of the content was done to identify common themes of dissociation from trauma, minimization of aggression and denial in order to reconstruct the unbearable memories. Qualitative analysis allowed the scope for insight into recall of traumatic memory without generalising. Common themes identified were never intended to assume similar meaning for trauma due to similar experiences but establish the alteration of meaning making in traumatic recall due to the societal lenses. It is acknowledged by the author that in facing similar symptoms none of the individuals ascribed similar meaning to themes because with their varied backgrounds meaning making is also individualised. The stories narrated were bleak and depicted a shattered worldview that was marred by judgement due to their experience being viewed by their community as being opposing to their customs and norms, which was a censorious and depreciating experience to the participants. Therefore, the interview process provided a much-needed co-constructed reality that allowed the participant to provide their narrative without censure and recalling their individual traumatic memory without judgement and acknowledging them being the expert on their own experiences. This paper throws much needed light on the nature of meaning-making of trauma and how it is directly influenced by society and historically oppressive norms and customs within their respective environments. Therefore, a key takeaway from this paper is the nature of social constructionism or multiculturalism in shaping the dominant narrative of society and, therefore, developing and aligning the lives of every individual belonging to said culture to the truths of dominant society. Social constructionist theories are of the view that it is important to understand the attitudes and meanings attributed to trauma within the context of the community they belong to. If a number of observers agree with one another about their observation then they have come to a co-construction of reality. In other words, “when a group of people agree on a set of rules or norms for their society, this may be termed a socially constructed reality” (Stanton, 2005).

Another literature to direct focus towards would be qualitative research work by Scheffer Lindgren, M., & Renck, B. (2008), to assess intimate partner violence and the leaving process, in a Swedish population aided by the constructivist grounded theory, through in-depth interviews on a Swedish sample of women in heterosexual relationships. The aim in this study was to curate a list of themes indicative of steps within the leaving process. A central theme within this process was seen to be fear, which acts as a determinant for both staying and leaving decisions, therefore, it is important to break this process down by taking into consideration each such dilemma surrounding fear, namely, restraining breakup, balancing between staying and leaving and releasing turning point.

Fear is pervasive and permeates within IPV relationships, fear mediates the entire process of decision-making within such relationships, as the emotions felt after experiencing fear are tumultuous and often range from disquiet, shame, chaos, stress, worry and vacillation, and these different manifestations of fear can have vastly different impacts on women’s stay/leave decisions. The first few stages of the leaving process are marred by a resolute need to stay due to multiple factors which are listed down below and eventually certain points within the relationship become turning points in determining the unyielding need to leave.

The first step within the process of emancipation is the restraining break-up process and as the term suggests it contributes to all the factors restraining and preventing the woman from

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leaving. Factors that were deduced from this particular step showed that passionate love could be restraining, wherein a sudden onset of violence in relationships that have consistently shown love and care can be confusing, and fear and anxiety inducing, further leading to feelings of shame and chaos. Another similar yet independent factor was, oscillating between tenderness and violence, that created an uncertainty especially with regards to the true nature of the violence, where the women were made to feel like the violence was temporary and a minor blip in the radar and it would not reoccur and the ensuing love and tenderness would remain constant and intense. Adapting and then hoping for change is another factor that lends to the believe that reoccurrence of violence will be prevented if changes were made to the victims behaviour by balancing it out with actions of the partner and being more aware and correcting oneself from repeating a mistake that triggered such an extreme reaction, the women themselves claimed that although this thought had crossed their minds and they'd performed in a similar manner, no concrete change was observed in their partner's behaviour. Another powerful factor against leaving was the co-parenting of their child, there was a certain need to protect the child from witnessing such acts of violence and disagreement. Wilkinson (2005) well describes how we all are concerned with our worries, how we are seen by others and the link between feelings of shame, fear and social anxiety. This was seen to be another restraining factor, as the possibility of being termed a failure in maintaining relationships seemed very high to these women, in a lot of scenarios they were made to feel responsible for the violence meted out to them and this created a sense of shame and guilt. Although all of these subcategories lend to reasons for continuing a relationship, decisions to leave are originated from deep within from the first step itself, in a lot of scenarios the resolution to do so takes a longer time.

The next step in the leaving process is: balancing between staying and leaving and 2 broad factors have been noticed under the same. Gradual escalating violence, the paper has women recount certain points in their relationship that had them acting in order to protect themselves, most such were defined by the idea that it was usually an escalation of sexual abuse, several recounts of abusive relationships display an initial sexual drive that seems appealing but does not stop upon reproach, one such account states that they believed this was the gradual progression of most relationships and that it would reduce and upon asking so they were usually accused of cheating, this sustained act of sexual abuse later lead to urinary infections and abrasions to the anus and other sensitive regions. Other accounts surrounding rape within the relationship, highlight the insensitive and callous nature of men not seeking consent and eventually showing no concern over the deep physical and emotional abuse displayed. Consistently these were seen to be breaking points in relationships wherein women decided to act and push the partner out. Unfortunately, within this step is the process that leads to the partner holding on when persecuted. It is seen that either the threats escalate or there are promises to act better, which create ambiguity surrounding the initial act of violence. Most of the times threats were directed in terms of further acts of violence upon leaving the relationship and women mostly perceived this threat as a lack of control outside, multiple women claimed that they at least felt like they held some control within the relationship but leaving would create further uncertainty surrounding their fate.

The last and most important step undertaken is the Releasing turning point, wherein a point is reached for women to believe that a definitive break is essential and required. It was noted early on those victims of abuse are made to feel dependent and isolated from family and friends in order to restrict termination, psychological abuse debilitating women's faith in

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themselves is seen. A dilemma that strikes early on is the facade and personality and not necessarily substance related. A final realisation sinks in when women directly address this nature and gain an awareness surrounding their partner's duplicity. Most men in these narratives were seen to maintain a perfect facade that alluded to a superficial sense of superiority and genuineness to other people, maintaining a veneer of calmness in public, in certain scenarios the partners had less control of their outbursts in public. Multiple realisations such as the possibility that such behaviour is ingrained and can be attributed to a personality disorder also led multiple women to believe that this was beyond their control, in a few other scenarios it was an extreme case of violence and no amount of pleading could turn that around and in a few more cases the women started realising that such violence was perpetrated in the partners' past relationships too and that create a sense of fear that pushed them to leave. External support in a lot of scenarios was seen as reassurance and motivation to leave. Some women reported relationships with a non-violent man helped understand healthy relationships, in other scenarios family and friends came in as support along with support organisations and shelters, in most of these scenarios' healthcare professionals were not mentioned, moreover, the women believed that had they been asked certain questions and their injuries were inquired into they would have had much better support. A lot of decisions were made with the feeling that they were at the brink of death and that this was simply a matter of choosing life over death. Acute decisions to flee were made even when choosing between 2 extremes such as leaving the abuse and running into the woods. Another driving force is protecting the children, this has been a factor early on and this transforms from a restraining factor to a decision to leave when women fear that the escalating violence could be directed at the children too. In certain scenarios young children were seen to come in between and this became untenable and a definitive cause for leaving, in other scenarios it was a realisation that the violence would not be limited to them that mobilised them to take action.

Therefore, the decision to leave is a long-lasting process that extends for a period of time until the physical act of terminating the relationship.

According to Freyd's (1996) betrayal trauma theory within the context of child sexual abuse and trauma bonding in IPV, the likelihood of CSA committed by a caregiver or trusted individual causing severe dissociation is high, similarly, for IPV the likelihood of dissociation in order to protect these attachment bonds and to restrict compromising such bonds through maintaining "knowledge isolation" or partial "unawareness" surrounding the relationship is also high, this maladaptation theory is the point of departure for the paper by Zerubavel, N. et al., (2018) to study the moderating effects of child sexual abuse and fear of abandonment on the relations of IPV to severity of dissociation.

Within IPV dynamics abuse is cyclical- tension build-up, outbreak of abusive behaviours and repentance or contrition (a phase marked by expression of remorse, devotion and tenderness). This intermittent abuse oscillates between aversive arousal (punishment) and relief (reinforcement), this alternation leads to the formation of traumatic bonding- which are extremely potent bonds that are difficult to extinguish. "IPV dynamics are complex and insidious because traumatic bonding and other patterns of abuse essentially promotes intense attachment to the abusive partner" (Dutton & Painter, 1993; Herman, 1992) and dissociation is employed to restrain awareness of threatening incoming information to maintain psychological security.

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Within pathological dissociation amnesia and depersonalization are identified as 2 sub-types by most researchers. Amnesia involves the segmentation and compartmentalization of memory which often leads to impairment of memory. whereas Depersonalization involves estrangement from one's body implying an out of body experience. IPV victimization is exacerbated and maintained by dissociation, when observing women with severe dissociation remaining in violent relationships as opposed to those without dissociation. (DePierro, D'Andrea, & Pole, 2013; Dorahy, Lewis, & Wolfe, 2007; Iverson et al., 2013), with Stein (2012).

This research paper relies on prior research work supporting the notion that CSA victims are more likely to dissociate to reduce and restrict awareness in order to cope with IPV, therefore, although susceptibility is not exclusive to CSA victims, they are hypothesised to be much more susceptible and vulnerable to pathological dissociation.

As mentioned earlier, betrayal trauma theory implies a need to dissociate in order to conserve the attachment relationship, therefore, leading to unawareness surrounding abuse. Fear of abandonment (FoA) may mediate this relationship by increasing investment in the attachment bond, thereby leading to using dissociation as a coping strategy for IPV. Individuals displaying a clinically relevant FoA will continue an abusive relationship as this prospect is much more palatable than the idea of being abandoned and staying lonely, therefore, provoking the need to restrict awareness of abuse and violence via dissociation. Dissociation acts as a psychological system of self-preservation that can allow the victim to cope with the harrowing context of the abuse in a manner that preserves the attachment, therefore, making it less probable for the victim to leave. Therefore, findings from the study support the hypothesis that historical accounts of CSA and FoA may interact in synchrony to increase reliance and dissociation. Partial support is also seen for the hypothesis that stronger dissociation originates with respect to IPV among women with much more extreme and severe CSA. Even more specifically with women displaying clinically relevant FoA the relation between IPV and dissociation is bolstered as severity of CSA is seen to increase. Thus, supporting the betrayal trauma theory's supposition that the disposition to maintain attachment bonds is prevalent amongst individuals with a susceptibility to maintaining the relational function of dissociation to the same and with an investment to preserving a relationship. Therefore, revictimized women cope with abuse through dissociation. It was also noted that FoA had no mediating role between IPV and dissociation unless it was within the context of historical CSA. Therefore, this highlights the impact of childhood experiences (e.g., CSA) in aggravating beliefs such as FoA, with the potential to influence revictimization FoA which when interacted with CSA severity increases relational strength between IPV and dissociation. Therefore, FoA develops in hostile and inconsistent environments (e.g., IPV) which does not alleviate the fear of losing the relationship but rather fosters attachment anxiety and FoA.

In a qualitative study by Enander, V. (2011) emotion work in the context of Intimate partner violence was assessed. More specifically the initial conceptualisation of the abusers as good (Jekyll) and the reconceptualization of the abuser as bad (Hyde) due to the subjection to violence. The response to this cognitive-emotive dissonance is emotion-work which gradually changes emotions from warm to cold.

As described earlier, abusers may adopt varying controlling strategies such as social isolation, verbally breaking down self-esteem, harassment, control over finances and

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destroying personal items, threats and intimidation of physical and sexual violence, with interspersed displays of affection, which leads to confusion and higher bonding to abusers. This alternation as previously noted is a key controlling feature. Graham et al. (1994) direct attention to the pattern of abuse that displays such oscillation as confounding to the victims, as this perception of kindness provides hope which helps deny feelings of danger and reduce the overwhelming rage, especially as the expression of the same can lead to retaliation, this denial allows the victim to initiate a bond to the positive side of the abuser and can also be interpreted as “emotion-work”.

The concept of emotion-work is elucidated in the works of sociologist Arlie Russel Hochschild (1979, 2003[1983]). How emotions are directed and managed in multiple ways to orient to cultural prescriptions, trying to manage this alignment would be directing one's emotions in a manner that one deems right to feel toward an intimate partner following the rules of commitment. Therefore, emotion-work would direct focus towards the abuser's positive sides when inclination is towards maintaining the relationship and when contrarily, trying to fall out of love, it would entail focusing on the abuser's negatives.

Researchers believe that the leaving process is a continuous and ever evolving process and the redefinition and reconceptualization sets in after separation. Therefore, as identified by Enander and Holmberg (2008) emotions of guilt, hope, fear, love and hate bond the victim to the abuser. This paper conducts semi-structured and focused interviews with 22 women who have left their abusive partners consisting of 2 informant groups, group 1, consisting of 10 women from women's shelters throughout Sweden and group 2, consisting of 12 women enrolled through public notice. The themes noted through the study were abusive ex-partners being labelled as Jekyll and/or Hyde, justifications for stay/leave decisions, and affects and cognitions related to this.

Hochschild's work on emotion-work sets the premise for Enander's paper, wherein 2 kinds of emotion-work are envisioned: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting requires an individual to display emotions that are expected and therefore, playing an appropriate part; i.e., the aim is to exhibit feelings that are thought necessary for the situation without actually feeling the emotions, such as show of feigned interest or a show of cordiality that is unfeelt. Deep acting, however, is not limited to pretence and feigning and occurs in 2 ways: 'by directly exhorting feeling' and 'by making indirect use of a trained imagination' (2003[1983]: 38). In the first scenario we expect and command ourselves to direct our emotions appropriately and measure the amount of feeling, therefore, we address our feelings directly, in the second situation we picture an alternative situation that is more palatable to us in order to invoke emotions. e.g., upon seeing an individual hurt instead of directly manipulating our feelings we envision a friend having gone through a similar situation and feel moved enough to react appropriately. Relevant to the study, individuals may evoke bad memories of the abuser in order to stop loving them and therefore, gradually manage to fall out of love, a modification that is difficult to achieve when ordering oneself to stop loving.

Dissonance is also a central theme throughout this paper, the concept of cognitive dissonance proposed by Festinger (1957) believes that people harbouring contrary views will undergo distress, therefore, they will be motivated to reduce this by changing one of these thoughts in order to achieve uniformity. Hochschild proposes an analogous principle to cognitive dissonance for emotion-work. Managing the incongruence between feeling and

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feigning leads to emotional strain and distress. In order to reduce this strain, the need to either change what we feel or feign is high, this dissonance plays a mediating role in the act of staying or leaving abusive relationships. Emotion-work relates to the private sphere and emotional labour to the public, the latter is responsible for the act of displaying managed emotions and selling it as a product that is viable. Therefore, the art of managing emotions ranges from being public and private. Private emotion work is difficult to discern as no individual consciously makes these changes, and retrospectively analysing has its own emotion-work.

To review this emotion work interviews are conducted in a manner to gauge the differences in the initial relationship and the leave decision, in doing so parallels are drawn to establish the differences in managing the incongruencies through emotional dissonance and how it was regulated through the varying steps. Initially the most common descriptions provided by informants was that the individual was warm, considerate, kind and empathetic. The descriptions of being validated by this man is also a recurrent theme. Therefore, the man they fell in love with is a 'good man' and continues to remain so for an extended period of time. In compliance with the Jekyll/Hyde metaphor, the informants claim to have fallen in love with Jekyll and not Hyde. The duality was realised much later and this perception of the perpetrator as being 2 different people was noted in multiple descriptions.

It is evident through the interviews that the shifting conceptualisations of the abuser leads to active emotion-work throughout the relationship. Initially the abuser is still identified as being largely good, therefore, informants tackle the developing incongruency (feeling disappointed, hurt and offended) by focusing on the larger good and their good aspect as illustrated by their remorse, their considerate and caring nature. Therefore, the alignment of feelings is with the pretence that the relationship is still loving and the partner is good. Increasing violence and debasement makes this initial conceptualisation unsustainable. The abuser is finally conceptualised as more, bad than good; this leads to conflicting emotion work, the direction of conceptualisation changes and is evident through the informants' descriptions. With counter-conception (good to bad) emotions shift from warm to cold. Through modes of selective perception, attention and interpretation, emotions are managed as claimed by Rosenberg, which points to the intricate emotion-cognition relationship. The opposing emotion-work towards Hyde away from Jekyll is most evident in the post-leaving experiences. There was an evident need to restrict oneself from sliding into the relationship and forgiving the perpetrator, deep acting by directly encouraging feelings seems to be the most frequently employed method.

Therefore, this study supports previous works describing gradual cognitive shifts in leaving process studies, brought about by catalysts such as greater violence, reduced number of good periods and violence being directed towards the children (Anderson and Saunders, 2003), by proposing that these catalysts and triggers are contrasted with the positive conceptualisations of the abuser creating an emotive-cognitive dissonance. This shift is proposed to occur when the image of Hyde is indisputable and the dissonance is too large to contradict with emotion-work toward Jekyll.

Additional notes with regards to such relationships discussed in this paper addresses the conflict in the role played by the abuser, a violent individual could be regarded as a good parent with whom the partner is supposed to cooperate during custody. There is an increasing need to understand the idea that policy and legality makes it imperative for

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women to continuously interact with Jekyll and perceive him as such, which can extend the duration of emancipation and disentanglement from abusive relationships.

CONCLUSION

A critical review paper by Rhatigan, D. L., Street, A. E., & Axsom, D. K. (2006) examining the theories surrounding termination of violent relationships and its implications for future research and interventions for the same should be taken into account for its implications in this particular paradigm. This review paper asks a pertinent question with regards to the lack of research in the field of intimate partner violence and how this lack of address has led to growing casualty, it begins by establishing the true nature of earlier theories and research work surrounding this topic and how a majority of said theories aimed at directing the blame on the victims especially when interventions targeted the victims by erroneously forcing termination. An empirical review within this paper shows that women who developed and directed negative attitudes and blame attribution towards the abuser were more likely to terminate the relationship as opposed to individuals that blamed themselves. The study also reiterated previous papers and established the fact that economic independence and stability post termination is also a determinant for stay/leave decisions. It was also realised that the process of termination is not a single event in time but a dynamic one that involves an ever-evolving change in the relationship dynamic with multiple attempts made to leave and come back with coping mechanisms.

The Aftermath

Post-traumatic impact of Intimate partner violence can lead to a shift in worldview, creating a shattered worldview and shattered self, Freedman, K.L. (2016) discusses this shattered worldview and the accompanying realities that are unpleasant to face in the aftermath of trauma and forms the basis of cognitive dissonance. Consequently, another effect of the aftermath is seen in the shattered self and a severe personal misery and distress that confounds the individual, it is not just the world that has altered but also the individual themselves- “I used to be” and “my old self” are common ruminations.

Response to such a traumatic event is not singular and cannot be pigeonholed into a certain set of reactions but is largely intended to inspire feelings of helplessness, constant fear and terror, which results in the individual that is traumatized to react to danger in a manner that one wouldn't ordinarily, their responses to danger are shot. According to Herman “When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defence becomes overwhelmed and disorganized” (1992,34). Accompanying effects of the same are seen on the physiological, psychological and emotional self of the individual, displaying most of the symptoms of PTSD, such as hypervigilance, hyperarousal, intrusion etc. Therefore, it is hardly a surprise that the individual feels detached from the person they were before the assault. The impacts of trauma can be so severe that they cause complete destruction of the world and self.

Hyperarousal leads to responses such as getting startled at even being approached, according to Robinson (1995), “Startle is a reflex, an involuntary response that requires no prior learning and occurs too rapidly for there to be any cognitive activity at all”. Therefore, to have rational thoughts around a process that occurs so quickly is highly unlikely which would imply that the response is physical and instinctual. It is often believed that trauma is stored in the body and as Herman establishes, “Traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the present”, the overstated startled

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response exemplifies this notion. According to Freedman, referencing her personal journey with sexual assault and other accounts, it would seem as though a traumatized part of the body keeps the experience in store and is triggered by situations that cannot be predicted, this is not cognitive because no rationalisation mitigates this fear and response. Even cognitively, an individual may feel safe at a particular place and time yet experience a state of hyperarousal. Cognitive and emotive responses to trauma might seem to overlap but are mostly independent. The creation of this distinction is of utmost importance to the narrative of the trauma survivor as with concomitance the 2 beliefs are often mistaken for emotions and due to the volatility of emotions these beliefs are discarded as irrational and unjustified.

As mentioned earlier with regards to intimate partner violence and stay and leave decisions, cognitive dissonance plays an active role but we must also take into account Festinger's theory post-trauma and the impact it has on the individual. Previously sustained and held beliefs about the world, about the self are all lost and, in its place, a new set of beliefs that is contrary to the previous ones crops up this leads to a psychological state of anxiety (dissonance).

Within the previously held beliefs were notions that Aphrodite Matsakis (1998) calls "just-world philosophy," the belief that the world is safe and fair and if you take the necessary precautions and are careful, moral and intelligent, you can adequately avoid misfortune. Individuals prior to the trauma believe that they were capable of protecting themselves and after it feel incompetent and helpless.

Brison (2001) also phrases the idea of the "myth of our own immunity," which is a strongly held notion that we are personally immune to vicious acts of violence and this myth gets destroyed in the aftermath of violence. The evidence of violence, sexual, emotional, physical is so vast that the beliefs giving rise to the alternate worldview are justified. Despite overcoming a few challenges in accepting reality, a vast number of obstacles stem from the fact that in a lot of these scenarios the socioeconomic, legal and pragmatic aspects are not under the victims' control and they are usually at the behest of the abuser. A woman in Freedman's survivor group when left penniless by her husband stated, "Look what happens to you when you tell." In such scenarios this dependence (that was developed by the abuser as part of the violence) creates the unwillingness to part with dissonant beliefs.

A debilitating impact is on the psychological state of survivors wherein embracing this alternate worldview would imply accepting the idea that a certain aspect of themselves is cause for their abuse, that they might be fundamentally unsafe by virtue of their sex. A major reason for self-blame relies on the idea that in an otherwise safe world their choice and their inability to protect themselves is what led to the violence and abuse.

To assess each theory and throw light on the nature of studies surrounding intimate violence, it is important to identify problem areas that arise from the simple enquiry and narrative building through each paper, upon analysing most papers it is evident that multiple theories stem from research that pigeonhole a certain reaction and talk over lived experiences. It is only recently that epistemological studies have highlighted the varying experiences and decision-making processes without implying that the individual facing abuse is not unaware of the situation and or incapable of rational thinking, they are simply a victim of their circumstances and even when the realisation of the nature of their relationship is evident, victims of abuse have multiple other scenarios to process.

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Theories like learned helplessness cannot simply be understood in isolation and most definitely shouldn't be ascribed to in that it blames the victim but to establish the process of learning this helplessness within the context of betrayal trauma theory and how the fear of abandonment is responsible for aggravating this sense of detachment from ones ongoing abuse in order to preserve attachment bonds and maintain the relationship.

The traumatic bonding theory evaluates the nature of turbulent relationships marked by a cycle of negatively and positively reinforced acts. To evaluate this theory within the context of Intimate Partner Abuse it is extremely important to view the relationship with sensitivity from the lens of the victim, especially being mindful of the nature of abuse and creating an environment that acknowledges their beliefs and rather than associating blame with the victim for revictimization, realising that the nature of the relationship is based on extremely strong emotional bonds and insecure perpetrator attachment that can only be assessed by understanding and empathising with the victim. A derivative of this theory, the Stockholm syndrome incorporates insecure attachment of the perpetrator, a similar tumultuous experience and the cognitive dissonance theory in order to justify the recurrent rationalization and forgiving process. Similarly, the psychological entrapment model accounts for entrapment based on emotional disturbances following the cognitive dissonance model. It is therefore, advisable to look at the following theories that take into account violent relationships and how the justification of violence is more in line with an act of self-preservation and used as a coping mechanism but what must further be incorporated into these studies is the notion that such responses to violent relationships are expected when faced with deep emotional and psychological turmoil and that the act of violence itself and the decision to remain is manufactured by the abuser as opposed to the victim actively seeking the relationship, it is never their fault.

The reasoned action/planned behaviour model, the investment model along with the 2-part decision making model, are responsible for establishing the fact that situational experiences and contingency planning is incorporated within stay and leave decisions and the choice made is never a 2-pronged decision and is dependent on multiple factors that lend to decisions made appropriate to their situations. As seen with the investment model a need to remain in the relationship is yet again bound through psychological abuse, which in turn promotes investment within the relationship due to the time invested in resolving said conflicts.

It is important as a researcher investigating intimate partner violence and causal factors that dependence based on needs of intimacy, security (financial and emotional), are all constructed by the abuser and is not an active choice made by the victim of abuse and that the decisions to leave made eventually may/ may not be contingent upon individuals finally realising that the perceived isolation was just that, a perception, and not reality, or certain circumstances lead the individuals to identify the greater need for freedom as opposed to these needs.

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