Female college students' experiences with coercive control: a qualitative investigation

Larissa Barbaro-Kukade

University at Albany, State University of New York, lbarbaro.kukade@gmail.com

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Counseling Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd/2219

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive.
Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH COERCIVE CONTROL: A
QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

Larissa M. Barbaro-Kukade

A Dissertation

Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York

In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology

2019
Dedication

To the women who trusted me with their stories, thank you. Without your strength, courage, and willingness to share a piece of yourselves and your story, this work would not have been possible. My dissertation is dedicated to each of you.
Acknowledgments

The University at Albany Dissertation Research Fellowship Award and the Initiatives for Women Award supported this dissertation.

My journey to becoming a psychologist would not have been achieved without the support and encouragement from my mentors, friends, and family. First, I want to thank my chair and advisor, Dr. Micki Friedlander, for her unwavering support during my doctoral studies. Thank you for always reminding me that this dissertation is “just one study” and encouraging me to pursue my research interests. There are no words to express how grateful I am for your guidance. You have been instrumental in my growth as a psychologist. Dr. Alex Pieterse, thank you for always being a listening ear. Your kind, encouraging words throughout my dissertation and doctoral journey have been invaluable. I am eternally grateful for you reminding me why we do what we do, and reminding me to be myself as a therapist, supervisor, and researcher. Dr. Chitra Raghavan, your continued support through all of my years of graduate training is something I will always cherish. Thank you for encouraging my ideas, offering feedback throughout each project, and most importantly, for introducing me to the beauty of qualitative research. To Yajaira Cabrera Tineo and Nicole DaSilva, who have spent countless hours coding and discussing themes, thank you. My dissertation would not be complete without your dedication.

My time in the doctoral program would not have been as enjoyable without the friendships I made along the way. To my cohort, Dylan Corp, Megan Cusick Brix, and Laura Longo, thank you for your unwavering support, the many Panera study dates, and reminding me to enjoy my years in Albany. Melanie Lantz, thank you for you encouraging me and providing countless hours of support and laughs from our years at Cedar Crest and every step along the
way. Our friendship is one of the things I cherish most in life. Hannah Muetzelfeld, I am so glad we were matched as buddies! Thank you for your listening ear, enthusiasm, and friendship. Laura Kortz, thank you for always being a listening ear and upping my motivation when I needed it most! To my intern cohort, Viann Nguyen-Feng, Jenna Brownfield, and Cristina Sullivan, I am so incredibly lucky to be on this last leg of my doctoral journey with each of you. Thank you encouraging and embracing all of the tears, for making 40 hours a week fly by, and for making this year so wonderful! The match magic that occurred to bring us together is something I am grateful for each day.

Mom, Dad, and Mike, I never would have started this journey without your love, support, and guidance. Thank you for always supporting my love for learning, encouraging me to follow my own path, and embracing what it means to have a daughter who has been a student for almost three decades. Last, but never least, there are not words great enough to express the gratitude I have for my husband, Deepak. Thank you for all you have done to support my journey, from happy hours while we were at John Jay, to editing papers, to delicious home cooked meals in Albany and St. Paul, and more love and encouraging words than I ever thought possible. Cheers to the end of this adventure and to a lifetime of more adventures awaiting us. I love you, always!
Abstract

The current qualitative study was designed to provide a phenomenological understanding of how coercive control in a romantic relationship is experienced by college women, whose experiences have not been studied. Previous surveys of intimate partner violence (IPV) on college campuses as well as in the community have assessed prevalence rates and types of abuse (e.g. ACHA, 2015; Black et al., 2011; Buhi et al., 2009; Fass et al., 2008; Straus, 2008; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014), rather than survivors’ lived experience of the relationship. To extend this literature, the present study focused on coercive control, a cycle of psychological tactics including intimidation, degradation, isolation, and exploitation that one romantic partner uses as a way to maintain control over the other partner. While coercive control is understood to be a central aspect of abusive romantic relationships, its development and impact on survivors has not been uniquely studied.

Four research questions were addressed in the present study: How is coercive control experienced in college dating relationships? How does coercive control develop in these relationships? What factors facilitate and hinder a woman’s decision to end a coercive dating relationship? How do women understand having survived a coercive relationship after it has ended?

Phenomenological research methods (Giorgi, 1997; Wertz, 2005) were used to provide a rich understanding of participants’ lived experiences in controlling romantic relationships. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 17 female college students who had ended a controlling romantic relationship with a male partner within the previous nine months. All participants and their partners resided on campus at the time of their relationship.
The interviews were transcribed, the narrative data were coded by a research team, and participants were offered the opportunity to respond to the preliminary results. Six broad themes and 36 sub-themes were identified in the narrative data. The themes were Experiences During the Relationship, Development of the Abuse, Factors Contributing to Ending the Relationship, Factors Making it Difficult to End the Relationship, Lasting Impact of the Relationship, and Understanding the Coercive Experience. Consistent with previous studies on this topic with community samples, participants described how their controlling partners used tactics like isolation, intimidation and degradation to assert control. The control experienced by participants was severe and occurring at alarmingly high rates. Results suggested several ways in which the campus environment allows for easy and consistent access to victims. Additionally, results reflected that sexual assault and sexual abuse were occurring in all of participants’ relationships. Results also suggested that throughout their relationship participants engaged in self-censoring behaviors as a way to avoid conflicts with their partners. The thematic results are discussed in relation to the literature and in terms of their implications for counseling practice and campus prevention.
# Table of Contents

Dedication ...................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... iii

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... v

Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables and Appendices .................................................................................... ix

Statement of the Problem and Review of the Literature .............................................. 1

Method ............................................................................................................................. 9

Participants ..................................................................................................................... 9

Design ............................................................................................................................ 11

Instruments .................................................................................................................... 11

Procedure ....................................................................................................................... 12

Qualitative Analysis ..................................................................................................... 13

Research Team .............................................................................................................. 13

Reflexivity ..................................................................................................................... 13

Analytic Process .......................................................................................................... 16

Results ............................................................................................................................. 16

Themes and Sub-themes ............................................................................................. 16

Discussion ..................................................................................................................... 35

Thematic Results .......................................................................................................... 36

Implications for Practice and Prevention Efforts ......................................................... 41

Strengths and Limitations ......................................................................................... 43

Recommendations for Future Research ................................................................... 44

References ..................................................................................................................... 47
Tables ..........................................................................................................................................56

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Characteristics .................................................................56

Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Additional Significance Statements ..............................58

Appendices ................................................................................................................................66

Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire .....................................................................................66

Appendix B: Interview Protocol ...............................................................................................67

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer ..................................................................................................70

Appendix D: Informed Consent ..................................................................................................71

Appendix E: Counseling Services ..............................................................................................73
List of Tables and Appendices

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Characteristics ....................................................56
Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Additional Significance Statements .......................58
Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire ........................................................................66
Appendix B: Interview Protocol ..................................................................................67
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer ..................................................................................70
Appendix D: Informed Consent ...................................................................................71
Appendix E: Counseling Services ..............................................................................73
Statement of the Problem and Review of the Literature

Recently, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (Black et al., 2011) estimated that annually, 35% of women experience some type of abuse at the hands of a partner, with women aged 18 to 24 being at greatest risk. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as, “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, p. 1). It has been estimated that 30% of all femicides were committed by a current or previous partner (Campbell, Glass, Sharps, Laughon, & Bloom, 2007). Aside from harm due to the abuse itself, a substantial body of research (Anderson & Danis, 2007; Hammig & Jozkowski, 2013; Latta & Goodman, 2011; Riger, Raja, & Camacho, 2002; Shorey, Stuart, & Cornelius, 2011) attests to the serious adverse effects of IPV on female college students, including poor physical and mental health, decreased academic performance, and impaired interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of the current study was to understand the phenomenological experiences of female college students who had experienced coercive control in a dating relationship. The central features of coercive control are power and control as a way for perpetrators to make their victims compliant (Stark, 2006; 2007). Surveys indicate that among female college students, rates of IPV range from 15% to 80% (Barrick, Krebs, & Lindquist, 2013; Kaukinen, Gover, & Hartman, 2012; Shorey et al., 2011). Surveys also indicate that psychological abuse (50% to 80%), which includes coercive control tactics (Stark, 2006; 2007), is reported at an alarmingly higher rate than either physical (20% to 30%) or sexual abuse (15% to 25%; Gover, Kaukinent, & Fox, 2008; Shorey et al., 2011).

Empirical research on coercive control is relatively recent. In general, the literature highlights the importance of the context of relationships, rather than the frequency of various
forms of abuse during the duration of a relationship or in a single fight. Several studies showed that when higher levels of coercive control were present in a romantic relationship, victims tended to be subjected to more severe forms of physical and sexual abuse (Arnold, 2009; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Ehrensaft, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Heyman, O’Leary, & Lawrence, 1999; Stark, 2006; 2007).

Much of the literature related to IPV on college campuses focuses on prevalence rates and the types of physical and sexual abuse occurring in romantic relationships (Coker, Sanderson, Cantu, Huerta & Fadden, 2008; Fass, Benson, & Leffett, 2008; Stein, 2009; Straus, 2008; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014). On the other hand, the context and specific relationship dynamics contributing to IPV have largely been ignored. Attention to relationship dynamics is important since surveys suggest that among college women who reported having experienced IPV, 78% to 90% described experiences reflective of coercive control (Barnes, 2001; Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; Coker et al., 2008; Eshelman & Levendosky, 2012; O’Hearn & Davis, 1997).

While coercive control often accompanies physical and/or sexual abuse, coercive partners often use other non-physical types of abusive behavior, including intimidation, psychological abuse, economic abuse and isolation, as ways to instill fear in their victims (Beck & Raghavan, 2010; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Lehmann, Simmons, & Pillai, 2012; Robertson & Murachver, 2011). Indeed, denigration and fear are crucial components of coercive control. Even after a relationship ends, the emotional effects of coercive control often continue (Myhill, 2015).

The current qualitative study was designed to add to this literature by focusing on coercive control in college dating relationships, a context that to date has received little empirical attention. In developing the research questions, it was reasoned that college women living in residence halls have dating experiences that likely differ markedly from women living in the
community due to the unique environment of college campuses, which are contained and thus provide perpetrators with constant access to their victims. Additionally, the forms of control suffered by college women are likely to differ from those of women living in the community, since the lifestyle of students is unique. For example, college students are less likely to share finances with a partner, and less likely than women in the community to be financially dependent on their romantic partners. On the other hand, living in residence halls makes it more difficult for survivors to find safer housing options, such as shelters.

The present narratives of college women provided rich details about the experiences of coercive control in dating relationships, more so than the survey data reported in previous studies on this topic (e.g. Coker et al., 2008; Ehrensaft et al., 1999; Fass et al., 2008; Johnson, 2006; Stein, Tran, & Fisher, 2009; Straus, 2008; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014). Only women in heterosexual relationships were sampled, since most survivors of coercive control are women (Myhill, 2015). Women in same-gender relationships were not sampled, since the dynamics of same-sex relationships are likely to be unique.

Nature of Coercive Control

Coercive control is said to be a fundamental component of abusive relationships (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Straus & Ramirez, 2004). Isolation of the victim through degradation, micro-regulation, exploitation, and surveillance is crucial for the abuser to maintain control (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Lehmann et al., 2012). Typically, abusers use psychological control tactics that include limiting the victim’s daily activities, such as her access to education, work, finances, and social supports, such as friends and family members (Beck \[1\]

\[1\] In this research, the gender pronouns she and her were used to refer to victims/survivors and he and him for abusers, since the study focused solely on female victims/survivors of coercive control by male abusers.
Raghavan, 2010). With a continual use of isolation, micro-regulation and threats, the victim begins to lose her autonomy and confidence in her decisions; she tends to live in a constant state of fear (Arnold, 2009). Over time, she learns when her partner is likely to use various control tactics in order to try to prevent the abusive behavior from occurring (Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2006). When abusers find that isolation, micro-regulation, restriction of autonomy seem to fail in maintaining control, they often turn to physical and sexual violence in order to regain control (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2006).

Dutton and Goodman (2005) conceptualized coercive control as a process wherein the perpetrator makes overt or covert demands of the victim and threatens credible consequences if she does not comply. The authors postulated that in a coercive romantic relationship, the perpetrator sets the stage for his partner to become compliant and adhere to his demands in four ways: (a) by creating the expectancy for coercive outcomes (“communicating the ability, willingness and readiness to control one’s partner by punishing her or him or withholding rewards for noncompliance” (p. 748); (b) by creating or exploiting the victim’s vulnerabilities (e.g., targeting areas where a victim is unsure of herself, such as body image or small friend group); (c) by wearing down her resistance (e.g., destroying the resources she has in place to cope with the abuse); and (d) by facilitating and then exploiting the victim’s emotional dependency on him. As the relationship continues, the coercive demands placed on the victim can become so covert that only she is able to understand them (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). Similar to demands, threats can be implicitly understood by the victim due to the perpetrator’s previous abusive behaviors and patterns.

Typically, to maintain control and make the threats more credible, the perpetrator often finds ways to keep surveillance on his partner, either by calling her to determine her
whereabouts, tracking her location using technology or through an informant. Often the victim’s noncompliance is met with physical assault or the threat of assault (Dutton & Goodman, 2005).

Sexual coercion is another central feature coercive control. Although little is known about women’s experiences of sexual coercion (Jeffrey & Barata, 2016), a recent survey indicated its occurrence in as many as 40% of college dating relationships (Raghavan, Cohen, & Tamborra, 2015). Typically, perpetrators use sexual coercion tactics interchangeably with other tactics; and victims tend to comply due to having experienced negative consequences in the past when they did not do so (Raghavan et al., 2015). Notably, when survivors of abuse are asked to discuss their previous experiences with sexual coercion, they tend to blame themselves, minimize or justify what had happened (Jeffrey & Barata, 2016).

**Intimate Partner Violence on College Campuses**

In university samples, researchers have uniquely focused on the prevalence of physical and sexual violence (e.g., Straus, 2008; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014), rather than the psychological dynamics of abusive romantic relationships. In a recent survey by the American College Health Association (2015), 9.4% of college women reported being in an emotionally abusive relationship, 1.8% reported being in a physically abusive relationship, 2.2% reported being in a sexually abusive relationship, and 6.2% reported being stalked.

Fass and colleagues (2008) surveyed 250 college students about their experiences with different types of abuse and the rates of occurrence. Results showed that psychological, physical, and sexual abuse were experienced by 83%, 32.4% and 30.1% of female participants, respectively. Psychological abuse had the highest rate of occurrence (35.9%) while the participants were attending school, with physical abuse occurring at a rate of 24.5%.
In another survey, Buhi, Clayton and Hepler Surrency (2009) reported that approximately 35% of their college student sample indicated having been stalked by a current or former partner. Most commonly, victims reported being watched from a distance (64.9%); being followed or spied on (62.8%); being waited for outside work, class, residence, etc. (53.2%); and receiving unsolicited phone calls (51.3%), unsolicited emails (44.9%) or other communications (69.7%) from a stalker. Buhi and colleagues (2009) also identified several risk factors for being stalked, including belonging to a sorority (29.9%), living on campus (24.3%), being an American (versus international) student (21.4%), and having previously been raped on campus (54.2%).

Although little is known about how college dating relationships become abusive, authors have identified several contributing factors. For many students, attending college is the first experience of living independently, away from their primary support systems, friends and family members. Although living independently can be exciting, many students experience increased stress when they transition to college life (Towbes & Cohen, 1996). Coping with this transition, along with living in a closed campus environment, can lead some students to feel especially vulnerable. Female college students, in particular, are more likely to be victims of violence when their stress levels are high (American College Health Association, 2015; Branch, Richards & Dretsch, 2013; Marshall & Rose, 1987; Shorey et al., 2011; Stein et al., 2009).

It was reasoned that IPV on college campuses has some unique features. Although the campus environment can promote a student’s personal growth and independence, it can also be socially isolating, especially when the student is far from home, struggling to make friends or having general difficulties adjusting to college life. While administrators can change a student’s housing or class schedule for safety reasons, most college students keep the same schedule for a semester and live in the same residence hall for an entire academic year. For this reason,
surveillance of a victim is likely to be easier on a college campus than in the community (Rickgarn, 1989). Campus climate, peer pressure, lack of knowledge about abuse, and being in regular contact with an abusive partner tend to inhibit a victim’s reporting of abusive behavior and increase her isolation (Anderson & Danis, 2007; Branch et al., 2013; Halligan, Knox, & Brinkley, 2013; Rickgarn, 1989).

On college campuses, as in the community, many perpetrators of IPV use technology to maintain psychological control over their romantic partner. Surveys indicate that this method of control tends to be used by 15% to 73% of perpetrators (Bennett, Guran, Ramos, & Margolin, 2011; Burke, Wallen, Vail-Smith, & Knox, 2011; Finn, 2004; Marganski & Melander, 2015; Shorey, Cornelius, & Straus, 2015). Victims of cyber aggression reported that their partners had their passwords to various accounts; victims had received threatening emails, instant messages, and a high volume of text messages; their social media sites, emails, phone calls, and text messages were monitored; and perpetrators used a GPS or tracking software to monitor their movements (Burke et al., 2011; Finn, 2004; Shorey et al., 2015; Stephenson, Wickham, & Capezza, 2018). In a recent survey of the relation between cyber aggression and IPV among college students (Marganski & Melander, 2015), participants reported experiencing this type of aggression as well as experiencing abuse in person. In fact, almost all the respondents who had experienced physical (96%), psychological (94.8%) and sexual abuse (92.6%) also reported having experienced cyber abuse.

The impact of IPV on college victims tends to last long after the abuse or dating relationship has ended (Myhill, 2015). In addition to the potential for long-term psychological effects, including anxiety and depression (Shorey, Sherman et al., 2011; Witte, Hackman, Boleigh, & Mugoya, 2015), increased substance use has been associated with being the victim of
abuse (Straight, Harper & Arias, 2003). Furthermore, IPV victims can experience a myriad of physical complications, including sexually transmitted infections, irritable bowel syndrome, pelvic pain, stomach ulcers, back pain, neck pain, and arthritis (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000). Higher rates and more severe forms of physical ailments have been linked with being dominated and intimidated (Coker et al., 2000). The victim’s friends may also be affected by the abuse; in some studies, friends reported feeling fear, helplessness and anger about the victim’s suffering (Anderson & Danis, 2007; Latta & Goodman, 2011; Riger et al., 2002).

The Current Study

While there is evidence that college women experience high rates of IPV, no research has specifically focused on coercive control on college campuses. A phenomenological methodology (Giorgi, 1997; Wertz, 2005) was used in current qualitative study due to the complex nature of coercive control in college dating relationships and the importance of eliciting survivors’ unique lived experiences in a dating relationship.

Although previous studies on this topic focused on the details of abusive behaviors, such as how often and when they occurred in the history of a dating relationship, no studies focused solely on coercive control. Moreover, most of the literature in this area has focused on physical and sexual abuse, relying on survey data rather than in-depth analyses of the experiences of survivors who suffered extensive coercive control. Based on interviews with college women who had experienced coercive control but not severe physical IPV, the present study was designed to provide a rich understanding of the nature and extent of coercive control, which tends to coincide with, if not precede, physical/sexual abuse (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Stark, 2006).

The following research questions were addressed: How is coercive control experienced in college dating relationships? How does coercive control develop in these relationships? What
factors facilitate and hinder a woman’s decision to end a coercive dating relationship? How do women understand having survived a coercive relationship after it has ended?

Due to the dearth of information about coercive control in college relationships, counselors, residential advisors, and college administrators have limited knowledge about how to provide adequate services to protect and counsel victims and survivors of coercive control. It was anticipated that the current results could be used to inform college administrators about potential prevention efforts, safety measures and other resources for victims and survivors. Moreover, the results could also be used to inform counseling interventions and campus outreach efforts.

Method

Participants

Consistent with previous phenomenological studies and the recommended sample size in qualitative research (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989), the current sample included 17 female participants aged 18 to 22 years living on a northeastern university campus. Eligible individuals were undergraduate students who identified as female and had previously been in a romantic relationship with a male partner whom they viewed as controlling. Additionally, the romantic relationship needed to have ended three to nine months previously, and both the participant and partner lived in on-campus housing during their dating relationship. International students were excluded since it was possible that their experiences on a college campus could be different from those of domestic students, who tend to report higher rates of IPV (Buhi et al., 2009).

In order to ensure participant safety, the controlling relationship needed to have ended within the previous three to nine months. Nine months was selected to ensure participants could readily recall details of their previous relationship.
Only volunteers who indicated having experienced at least three controlling behaviors on a screening questionnaire (described below) were included in the sample. A minimum of three controlling behaviors ensured a sustained pattern of coercive control.

Since the study focused only on coercive control without physical abuse, volunteers were excluded if they indicated having needed medical attention due to physical abuse or if they had experienced physical abuse repeatedly during the relationship. Women who were married to a perpetrator were excluded due to differences in commitment and relationship dynamics between married and dating couples. Finally, women who were in a controlling same-sex dating relationship were excluded due to the uniqueness of experiences in these relationships.

Forty-eight individuals accessed the screening questionnaire, with 40 (83.33%) meeting the inclusion criteria. The investigator contacted 28 eligible participants in the order in which they completed the screening questionnaire. In total, 18 participants were interviewed; the final sample was 17, since one participant requested that her interview be removed from the analyses.

Participants were between 18 and 22 years of age ($M = 20.18$, $SD = 1.55$) and reported being between 14 and 21 ($M = 18.06$, $SD = 2.14$) at the start of the relationship discussed in the interview, with the controlling relationship lasting between 6 to 72 months ($M = 24$, $SD = 18.99$). The diversity of the sample in terms of race and ethnicity reflected the student body at the university where the study was conducted. Ten (58.88%) participants identified as White, 2 (11.76) as Hispanic, 1 (5.88%) as Ecuadorian, 1 (5.88%) as White and African American, 1 (5.88%) as Black, 1 (5.88%) as West Indian American and Black, and 1 (5.88%) as Chinese. At the time of the interview, 2 (11.76%) participants were first year students, 5 (29.41%) were second year students, 5 (29.42%) third year students, and 5 (29.41%) were in their fourth year of college. As a group, participants endorsed 3 - 9 of the controlling tactics listed on the screening
questionnaire \((M = 5.47, SD = 1.70)\). Ten participants \((58.82\%)\) reported having sought therapy during or after the relationship had ended, and 11 participants \((64.71\%)\) were single at the time of the interview. Table 1 shows additional demographic characteristics of the sample.

**Design**

Phenomenological methods were used in the current study, due to the objective of gaining a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, Clark & Morales, 2007; Giorgi, 1989; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Wertz 2005). According to Giorgi (1989), the overarching goal of phenomenological research is to enter an experience with the participant with no pre-conceived notions about the phenomenon. That is, any previous knowledge that an investigator has about the phenomenon under investigation is acknowledged and “bracketed” (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81).

**Instruments**

**Screening questionnaire.** A nine-item questionnaire used to screen participants (Appendix A) was developed from the literature on various coercive control tactics (Myhill, 2015; Stark, 2007; Tanha, Beck, Figueredo, & Raghavan, 2010). For example, one question asked whether the partner “did not want you to have female friends.” As indicated above, only volunteers who indicated experiencing at least three of the nine behaviors met the study’s inclusion criteria.

**Interview protocol.** The interview (Appendix B) included a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit a rich description of each participant’s experience of coercive control in a dating relationship. Some questions were based on the literature (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Lehmann et al., 2012; Robertson & Murachver, 2011; Stark, 2006; Tanha et al., 2010), such as the methods (e.g., surveillance and isolation) used by perpetrators to initiate and maintain control
over their victims. The protocol was developed for an interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

The structure of the interview protocol was based on Englander’s (2012) recommendations for phenomenological research. Specifically, questions were designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question rather than a breadth of information. All of the open-ended questions were semi-structured, which allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions as needed in order to obtain rich descriptions of each participants’ phenomenological experience.

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited for the study on a mid-size, northeastern university campus through flyers (Appendix C) posted, for privacy purposes, in the stalls of women’s lavatories. The flyers indicated that the purpose of the study was to “gain a deeper understanding about college women’s experiences of psychological control in a previous romantic relationship.” The term *psychological control* was used in order to recruit women who viewed their relationship as coercive but who may not have considered their experience to have been “abusive.”

The flyer directed women interested in the study to a website where they were asked to complete the screening questionnaire. Volunteers who did not meet the demographic inclusion criteria or respond affirmatively to at least three of the screening questions were thanked for their time and provided with a list of local counseling resources for survivors of IPV (Appendix E).

Volunteers who met all inclusion criteria were directed to an informed consent screen (Appendix D), which explained that participation in the study was voluntary and confidential, and that participants had the option to withdraw at any time. Further, it was explained that the interview would be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis, that all identifying information
would be omitted from the transcript and from any publication resulting from the study. Participants were also told that they would have the opportunity to review the transcript of their interviews for accuracy and the initial results of the study. Individuals who clicked “continue” after reading this page were considered to have provided informed consent.

Among the 28 individuals who were contacted to participate in the study, two individuals were not eligible, one individual canceled the scheduled interview, two individuals did not attend the interview, and six individuals did not respond to follow up emails about participation. The 12 volunteers who were not contacted to schedule an interview were informed that data collection for the study was complete. These individuals were provided with a list of local counseling resources for survivors of IPV.

The investigator met with participants individually in a private room on the college campus. Upon completion of the interview, participants were given a $75 gift card.

The audiotaped interviews were recorded and transcribed by the investigator. One participant was contacted following her interview to clarify her response to one question; she responded by email. No participants indicated a desire to review their transcribed interviews.

**Qualitative Analysis**

**Research team.** The research team was composed of the investigator and two female counseling psychology PhD students. Prior to the analysis, the investigator met with these coders to discuss the coding process and provide readings about phenomenological research methods (e.g., Giorgi, 1997; Wertz, 2005) and coercive control (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Myhill, 2015).

**Reflexivity.** In phenomenology the overarching goal is to enter an experience with the participant with no pre-conceived notions about the phenomenon of interest (Giorgi, 1989).
Since the perspective taken by the researcher is directly linked to the experience he or she has with the phenomenon and/or the population being investigated, it is necessary for researchers to reflect on their own values, experiences, and how their biases may influence how they approach the results (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). For this reason, all members of the research team wrote about their personal views of IPV and healthy romantic relationships before beginning the analysis, as described below.

As another part of reflexivity, the investigator kept an audit trail (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004) of thoughts, feelings, and reactions throughout the study, that is, during the data collection, transcribing and coding processes. She reviewed this audit trail as the themes from coding were developed to ensure that she was remaining close to the narrated experience of the participants.

The investigator, a 31-year-old, white, female PhD candidate in counseling psychology, became interested in researching IPV during her college years after learning about the connection between abuse and the use of power and control. This topic also has personal meaning for the investigator, who had previously experienced a heterosexual romantic relationship with coercively controlling partner.

During her master’s program in forensic psychology, the investigator’s coursework and research was centered on gaining an understanding of the experiences of survivors of IPV. As she spent time interviewing victims and reading the literature on IPV, she was introduced to the concept of coercive control, which led to her master’s thesis, which focused on male perpetrators’ understanding of their use of coercively controlling behaviors with their female partners. In addition, the investigator had worked in a domestic violence agency that provided services to victims and perpetrators of IPV. Her work in this agency was largely with
perpetrators, which led her to question the nature of coercive control in college dating relationships as a potential precursor to violence in subsequent relationships.

One of the two coders was an advanced PhD student who was developing a dissertation proposal on relations between Latinas’ experiences of coercive control by male romantic partners, their satisfaction with and commitment to their relationships, and their traditional gender role beliefs. In her clinical work, she provided therapy to men and women who identified as survivors of abuse from romantic relationships. She also had friends and family members who were navigating relationships in which IPV was present. She wrote that she expected participants to express shame and self-blame during the interviews. As a white, heterosexual woman, she believed that when IPV occurs in a heterosexual relationship, the man is likely to be the perpetrator.

The other coder was a second-year PhD student who identified as a Latina, heterosexual woman, who had previously experienced a romantic relationship with a controlling male partner and had some clinical experience working with a client in an abusive relationship. She wrote that she expected participants to blame themselves for the abuse, that their partners would exert control through intimidation and manipulation but also apologize to their victims for the abuse.

As the objective of phenomenological research is to enter participants’ lived experiences (Giorgi, 1989), participants’ individual experiences were honored. For this reason, all experiences described by participants are reflected in the themes, even those only mentioned by single participants. Additionally, coders did not seek to find specific codes from the interview data. This coding procedure reflects the trustworthiness of the data and the qualitative research standard of fairness and ontological authenticity (Morrow, 2005).
Analytic Process

The two coders independently reviewed each transcript, to identify codes, or meaning units (Giorgi, 1997) whose content addressed the four research questions. After all 17 transcripts had been coded; the two coders met to discuss the codes or sub-themes, come to consensus over discrepancies on the phrasing and place the sub-themes into thematic categories. Coders identified significance statements from the narratives to include for each sub-theme.

Next, the investigator reviewed the team’s initial list sub-themes and made several suggestions to better reflect some participants’ responses. The investigator also made some changes to the thematic categorization of the sub-themes, as recommended in phenomenological data analysis (Giorgi, 1997) to reduce the possibility of the coders’ inaccurate interpretations of participants’ narratives.

After the initial theme and sub-theme list was assembled, the investigator contacted each participant by email. Participants were asked to provide feedback about the extent to which the initial themes accurately captured their personal experiences. Three participants agreed to review the themes; one individual provided the feedback that the themes seemed accurate from her perspective.

Finally, the investigator reviewed the list of themes and sub-themes once again and provided them to the coders, along with selected significance statements, for final revisions. Upon review, the coders agreed with the investigator’s final organization of the data.

Results

Themes and Sub-themes

Six themes and 36 subthemes were identified in the data. The six themes were (1) Experiences During the Relationship, (2) Development of Abusive Behaviors, (3) Factors Contributing to Ending the Relationship, (4) Factors Making it Difficult to End the Relationship,
(5) The Lasting Impact of Surviving the Relationship, and (6) Understanding the Coercive Experience. These thematic results are described with illustrative significance statements.

Additional significance statements are listed in Table 2.

**Experiences During the Relationship**

**Controlling their appearance.** Participants explained how their partners would comment on their appearance, try to make them change their clothes, or tell them they should not wear certain clothing or makeup. Moreover, partners would repeatedly attribute participants’ physical appearance to their desire to find a new romantic partner or to attract the attention of other men.

For example, Participant 1 explained that her partner would accuse her of only wanting to go to the gym to get in shape in order to meet other men:

And even going to the gym was hard because he would be super controlling about that as well. Because I guess to him me going to the gym means I’m going to get skinnier to get prettier for other guys. He would always tell me that.

As another example, Participant 14 described the difficulty she faced before going out: “I couldn’t wear what I wanted to wear. Yeah, that was a big thing and like, uh, wearing things to like parties or like out.”

**Limiting, controlling, or sabotaging relationships with others.** Participants described how their partners caused difficulties in their relationships with friends or family members. That is, their romantic partners would tell them that they could not be friends with certain individuals or try to sabotage their relationships with other individuals. For example, Participant 6 stated, “He wouldn’t tell me not to be friends with guys, but he would tell all my guy friends not to talk to me, which I didn’t know until months later.” Participant 8 described a slightly similar
experience of her relationships being sabotaged, “He even blocked some people that weren’t boys [on social media]. He just blocked mostly everybody.”

As another example, Participant 16 explained that her partner tried to limit the contact she had with her family:

I was like, “Oh I’m going to go home,” and he got so angry. Basically kind of like pushed me off of him and like wouldn’t talk to me and I was like, “Hey is everything okay? Like I can stay if it’s going to make you that upset.” And he basically just started screaming at me. Telling me I’m too close with my parents.

**Experiencing being physically threatened or abused.** Partners also described as using physical strength to intimidate participants, in some cases assaulting participants to gain compliance or to express disapproval. Participant 14, for example described being physically abused while sleeping: “I woke up to him like throwing the phone on my face, and it like shattered.”

As another example, Participant 8 discussed a fight that occurred even after her relationship had ended, where her partner still insisted that she needed to listen to him:

He was pushing me, he was pushing me, he was pushing me really hard. I almost fell a couple times. He scratched me and I still have the mark right here. It was very scary because I never expected that from him so that part was very scary.

**Being coerced or feeling obliged to have sexual relations.** One of the most common experiences shared by participants was engaging in coerced or forced sex with their partners. Only one participant identified her experience as sexual assault, however. Other participants described their sexual relationship as reassurance that they were cared for by their partners. For example, Participant 1 said, “I mean I would just do it [have sex] and hope it would be over
soon. Ya know what I mean? I just didn’t want to start another fight.” Participant 10 disclosed, “Only sometimes when like I didn’t want to do it. And I’d be like “stop,” but yeah.”

**Monitoring activities and social media.** Social media and technology were repeatedly used by partners to monitor where participants’ location or their communications with others. In addition to using technology to help track participants, their partners would also limit the time they were apart. Participant 2 disclosed, “And if we weren’t together, he would make me FaceTime him all day. And he would just sit in the background and listen to what I was doing.” As another example, Participant 8 explained how her social media accounts were monitored by her partner: “He would check my social media a lot. Like log-in. He’ll have like my SnapChat, my Facebook. So he’ll um, there was a time where he blocked all the boys on my SnapChat.”

Additionally, Participant 15 discussed ways in which her partner would stay with her to monitor her interactions with people whom he did not know.

He felt like oh like what guy, like who are you? And I was like, “They’re just in a class that I’m assigned a group with,” and so those were the times where he was like, “I’m coming with you,” and I was like, “fine,” but then there were other times where I was like, “This is an all girl group. There is no reason to worry or like think anything of it,” I was like, “I will see you in an hour so don’t get so angry,” and he’d actually like when I said, “Oh I’ll be done around 5,” he’d be there at 5 o’clock, where I said I would be and waiting for me when I’m like, “well I still need a half an hour,” and he’d just get angry saying, “Oh I thought you’d be done,” and I’m like I don’t know exactly when it’ll get done with a group. So it was kind of like whenever I was doing group things um especially with people he didn’t know, that became more like, I think he was more insecure about that. Um, became more controlling and like questioning me and kind of just like or following
me where I was.

**Attempts to avoid fights.** “Walking on eggshells,” or not expressing how they felt was a common experience of participants, who tried to avoid arguments with their partners. Being exhausted by the extent of fighting in the relationship was another reason described by participants attempted to avoid fights with their partners. Participant 9 stated, “[The control] would make me nervous to tell him things, because I didn’t know how it would have been received, and one thing I hate more than anything is having to walk on eggshells.”

**Being insulted or put down.** Derogatory names, not acknowledging how participants felt, and public humiliation were common tactics used by partners. Participants also reported that social media was often used as a platform for their partners to demean them. Participant 1 stated:

> And he went onto my SnapChat account and he posted something on my story so it made it look like I was the one posting it. And he wrote some really mean things about me on there. And I didn’t know about it. And just because I didn’t answer the phone.

Another example was provided by Participant 12, who discussed how her partner would criticize her physical appearance. She stated, “He would talk about my appearance a lot. Like um call me names and tell me to lose weight and everything.”

**Cyclical behaviors.** The experience of coercive control and other abusive behaviors were described by participants as occurring cyclically throughout their relationships. Participants described multiple break ups or fights followed by attempts to re-engage. For example, Participant 9 reported, “And we’d usually argue about something at night also and it was just like a cycle of arguing.” Participant 7 stated, “He really apologized for it the next day and it was really just this continuous cycle.”
Double standards and opposing authority about acceptable behaviors. The relationships described by participants contained multiple instances of double standards, that is, participants were expected to behave a certain way or abide by rules that their partners did not follow. In addition to the double standards, partners were described as enforcing rules or commanding obedience. Participant 1 stated:

So he kind of, his whole view of me was about this rumor so he looked at me differently after he heard that. And then it just that he treated me differently. Like I was a child. I had to have supervision all the time.

Participant 9 discussed the double standards imposed by her partner with respect to spending time with friends. She stated:

Like I would always go there, and he would rarely come here, and he’d be like, “I don’t want to hang out with your friends.” So that would be a fight and then, but then we’d go to his house and he’d want to hang out with his friends, but I’d be like, “If you’re not going to come hang out with me and hang out with my friends, I’m not sitting here watching your friends playing video games.”

Being threatened or intimidated. Threats and intimidation were tactics used throughout the relationship as a way for partners to maintain control. Several participants described instances where their partners would threaten to end the relationship or imply that something might happen if they were not compliant. Some participants described instances where they would be physically blocked them leaving or worried about their personal safety. For example, Participant 4 stated, “If I wanted to go out with my friends or go to a bar or a party and then, ‘You might regret that.’”

Participant 5 stated the following:
He threatened me. He threatened me um he would say that oh, after the sexual assault, ‘if you’re friends with guys I’m breaking up with you.’ And I felt really bad about it so I would try to cut off contact with my male friends.

**Experiencing conflicting emotions.** Many participants described conflicting feelings toward their partners. They discussed how difficult it was to care for someone who had hurt them emotionally, and in some cases physically. For example, Participant 14 discussed how after being sexually assaulted by her partner she struggled to make sense of her mixed feelings:

I was just so scared. Like I had bruises all over me. And I just didn’t know what to do because I liked him and I like I didn’t know how to, like my body told a story versus like how I felt about him and like having bite marks, and like yeah. I don’t know it was just really confusing because you love someone so much and like you don’t understand why they would do that.

**Development of the Abuse**

**Experiencing changes in their partner’s behavior over time.** Many of the participants described their partners behaving differently at the start of the relationship. For example, some participants’ partners were described as warm, caring, or attentive at the start of the relationship, whereas a shift occurred later on. A few participants also discussed incidents in which their partners presented in a way that felt disingenuous or incongruent as the relationship developed. Participant 6 disclosed:

Um so I think he was very manipulative and um I would, I mean I would say, he was probably somewhat of a compulsive liar. He would lie about really random things where there was no reason to lie and lie about bigger things too. So, I think that like what he did was he listened to what like I found attractive in a guy and values I would like and
pretended to be the perfect guy for me. So, um he um he said that he was very family oriented and focused on school and…wanted a serious relationship…I said I would only date someone if I thought there might be the possibility that we would be compatible to ya know get married eventually so he said he felt the same way and that he wanted to have a family one day and have kids in the future and live somewhere warm. And…just made it sound like all of our values lined up…we were both Christian and he said he wanted to go to church with me and made himself out to be more involved with that than he really was…I was very attracted to him and thought he was like the perfect guy for me.

**Feeling guilty or manipulated.** Partners reportedly used different methods to influence participants to feel guilty or to manipulate them. Some participants described incidents that ranged from being ignored to being threatened by their partner in order to inflict emotional pain.

Participant 1 described an incident in which her used guilt to keep her in the relationship:

For like the fourth time I tried to break up with him, but I broke up with him and I was driving him home because it was late at night, we were in my apartment and I said I’m just going to take you home. It’s the nice thing to do. You’re not going to take the bus and I was driving him. And he was freaking out. He was screaming, punching the window. He didn’t ya know hurt me or anything, but ya know he was punching my car or whatever and freaking out. And then he said he was going to kill himself and tried to jump out of my car. And then he actually, at one point did jump out. So it was like traumatic. I didn’t know what to do…so I was silent the whole time. Like looking back, I didn’t say a word. I tried taking him to the police, but then he said he was going to end his life if I called the police. And so like it was this whole ordeal. I think that was pretty bad.
Participant 10 described an event in which her partner tried to make her feel guilty after she attended a party:

I had to go to this party…he got like really mad at me…I wanted to text him during the party…to let him know that I was okay…he just wouldn’t reply to me, and then because of that I started to cry. Because like he didn’t really pay attention to me, and I didn't know why he was like acting this way. And like for me I’m really emotional especially since he wasn’t paying attention to me and like I didn’t do anything wrong so like yeah, he just didn’t reply to me.

Taking advantage of participants’ weaknesses and naiveté. Participants described how their insecurities, or areas of weakness were exploited as a way for their partner to keep control. For example, Participant 12 stated, “[Before the relationship] I didn’t care about myself. Um I just cared about please other people, especially him.” A few participants also described difficulty determining what was acceptable relationship behavior. For example, Participant 13 stated, “I’d only been in two relationships before that so I was like oh I don’t know how everyone communicates.”

Proximity due to living on campus. The isolated environment of a college campus was described as making it difficult for participants to have space away from their partners. Participants discussed how living at college made it easy for their partners to track their whereabouts and that their proximity increased the intensity of the relationship. Additionally, participants indicated that a new sense of independence from parents also increased the intensity of the relationship.
Participant 14 stated, “We [participant and her partner] didn’t have our parents. Um yeah, we could just be more independent with like, do what we want to do, any time of the day, night, ya know.”

Participant 10 described the difficulty she faced having a partner who knew her class schedule. She explained:

We would sleep in the same dorm and stuff. We would wake up, go to class, but um I also got kinda annoyed because sometimes he didn’t go to class just because he wanted to stay with me. And I’d be like, “Oh why aren’t you going to class?” And um other than that, when we’d go to class, when we had separate class schedules, he would actually wait for me to get out and then when I do get out, we’d usually go eat and stuff. And it’s like kind of repetitive. We’d go to the library, sometimes to the mall. And I also feel like the relationship also got kind of boring, especially because I’m always with him.

**Feeling isolated and dependent.** Participants explained that as the relationship progressed, they struggled to gain support from others. Due to the isolative nature of their controlling relationships, participants often felt isolated from friends and campus activities. They also described how their partners would often comment that they would be unable to find support or another partner if they ended the relationship. For example, Participant 6 stated:

He would tell me that he was all I had, that there was nobody else there for me. He would tell me if I broke up with him that I would have nothing, that he would be okay because he had lots of friends and that he can, he was fine being without me and would go out and do things on his own, but that whenever I wasn’t with him, I was just sitting around waiting for him to come back, which wasn’t true, but he led me to believe that.
Consequences for going against their partner’s wishes. Punishment by the partner was a common experience among participants. They gave examples, such as not responding to a text right away or going out with their friends resulted in fighting with their partner, being put down or being ignored by their partners. Participant 14 reported:

It got really bad one night, when like this is when um like towards our last week of being together. Um he like saw like a guy in my class texted me about homework and stuff an he was my friend, so we were talking, and he saw that, and I was sleeping at his house and like I woke up to him like throwing the phone on my face, and it like shattered. And then he just like took advantage of me and like physically and sexually.

Participant 1 discussed how difficult it was for her to go out with others. She stated, “And if I did go out without him it was this huge ordeal and we would just get into this huge fight…”

Factors Contributing to Ending the Relationship

Supportive friends and family members. When participants were able to share with friends and family what was going on in their relationship, they received support, which helped them to end the relationship. Participant 15 discussed how the support of friends before and after the relationship ended was pivotal in coming to terms with the controlling relationship. She stated:

I grew much closer with my friends cause…they just saw how hard it was for me and how much this relationship took a toll on me that they kind of just went out of their way to spend time with me and luckily, I was living with them, so I just spent a lot of time with them. So I was never really alone still. Um like I’d just always be with my friends even um like classes that I did have with him. Kind of like I wasn’t sure how to go about that because I was always with him um, but I really like, my friends, actually one time, one of
the first, like officially broke up, she went to class with me, that she wasn’t in.

As another example, Participant 11 described that her friend’s support and belief that the relationship was unhealthy helped her end her relationship. She stated: “I remember I called one of my friends up and was like, ‘this is ridiculous,’ and she was like, ‘You can’t. You cannot stay with him if he’s going to be like that.’”

**Seeking counseling.** Participants’ experiences in therapy reportedly helped them realize that they were in a controlling relationship. Some participants described how a supportive counseling relationship allowed them to feel less alone. For example, Participant 8 stated, “Therapy [is how I have coped]. I went to therapy. I go to therapy a lot. So she was very helpful.” Participant 13 expressed a similar sentiment, stating, “I only started going to counseling and stuff during the relationship and like I kept that up afterwards and I felt like I for sure have a better view of myself like I deserve better than.”

**Experiencing a breaking point event.** Participants described how in some cases there was a singular event that precipitated the break up. For some participants, this event involved having law enforcement to ensure their personal safety. For other participants, being accused of being unfaithful as a pivotal event.

Um it ended with that big like incident and me going to his house after and talking to him and telling him and then um, um then it just ended like that. Me saying that I can’t be with him and that I had to like get the police involved in stuff. (Participant 14)

**Factors Making it Difficult to End the Relationship**

**Normalizing abusive behaviors.** Many participants described times in the relationship where they would minimize the extent of their partners controlling behaviors or justify what was
happening. Participants also described believing that some of the jealousy and control exhibited by their partners stemmed from love and concern.

As an example, Participant 14 reported how she tried to make sense of her partner’s control about her clothes, stating, “…like ya know maybe like he doesn’t want me to wear certain things because like I’m just h..like I’m just his.” Another participant’s experience with her parents helped her realize what was happening in her relationship:

And I was like really confused like why won’t you just let me live my life, but I didn’t really interpret it as a bad thing, it was just like whatever. Like he’s just being protective. Cause my parents are protective of me, so it’s just like, it didn’t really matter to me. And my friends were like, “Dude, he’s like controlling you.” And I was like, “No, he’s not. He’s just protecting me,” ya know? (Participant 5)

**Hiding abusive behaviors from friends and family.** Hiding or lying about the controlling behaviors of their partners was common for several participants. Many participants discussed that at times they would tell their friends and family that the relationship was fine, whereas at other times they would hide the relationship altogether. The family members of their partners were also reportedly unaware of what was occurring in the relationship.

My friends definitely knew I would be upset, but I wouldn’t tell them to the extent, “Oh he’s calling me and asking me where I am right now because he wants to just keep tabs on me,” or why are you checking your phone so much. And I never told them that he was being so controlling that I felt like I needed to be on my phone all the time to talk to him. (Participant 4)

As another example, Participant 15 reported: I didn’t tell like any of my family. Um I didn't want to them to know. When they asked about him. I’d just say like “everything’s
fine.” Like I wouldn’t give, I’d be very vague and not much details just because I didn’t want them to know because I’d know they’d express their concerns.

**Feeling alone with their partner.** Being isolated from social support also hindered participants from believing that they could end their relationship. Some participants reported being concerned about reaching out to friends for help if they had distanced themselves from these friends. Fostering dependency was a tactic that partners reportedly used to maintain control to prevent the relationship from ending. For example, Participant 2 reported struggling with the loss of friends during the relationship, which influenced her belief that she could in fact end the relationship.

I would feel alone a lot because I didn’t really have a lot of friends anymore, cause before we started dating I had a ton of friends. I just felt like I couldn’t ever leave him cause he was really all I had. And if I didn't have that anymore I felt like I would have no one. So that was, I felt like I relied on him for everything.

**Feeling pressured to stay in the relationship.** Partners reportedly used controlling behaviors to put pressure on participants. Participants discussed that it was difficult to end the relationship because they cared for their partner’s well-being or due to the effort they had already put into the relationship. Participant 10, for example, explained that since her partner did not accept her desire to break up, she felt that she had no choice but to remain with him:

Like he would try to talk it out or if I didn’t want to talk to him, he would still wait for me outside, like he would do things that would make me worry and yeah that was why I started, why I went back to him. Because he made me worry or yeah…

**Feeling committed to their partner.** Participants’ level of commitment to their partners hindered their decision to leave the relationships. The commitment to partners was at times
cyclical, similar to the ways that participants experienced breaks up and fights throughout the relationship. Participant 10, for example, explained that she demonstrated commitment by helping her partner academically:

I felt like I was really committed. I always like cared about it. I always got him food when he was hungry and stuff. I would always do things for him like sometimes when he doesn’t do his homework I’d be like “oh do your homework” or sometimes I would go on his laptop and do it for him, because for me I really care about grades, especially in a relationship. I like a guy who cares about his grades, his work, and all that.

**Finding ways to escape.** Participants described coping behaviors, such as drinking, using drugs, self-harm behaviors, and casual sex as ways to deal with their coercive relationships. For many participants, these ways of coping allowed them to escape the relationship temporarily, but also contributed to their staying in the relationship.

For example, Participant 9 explained that she distracted herself as much as possible to avoid thinking about what was occurring in the relationship:

Like if I’m upset about something, I don’t want to deal with it at all and I just don’t so I’ll just make myself busy with other things until either I think about it while I’m doing other things so I’m not completely focused on it or eventually the main issue of it passes where I can deal with it and it’s not too much for me.”

As another example, Participant 15 discussed the numerous ways she would try to cope with being in her relationship:

…it just kinda added on to more bad behavior on my part and me kinda like doing more self-harming or like when we did go out, I’d get really like blacked out drunk and he obviously wasn’t happy about it and my friends were just kinda like, didn’t understand. I
was like I couldn't give you a reason why like a good reason why I did that, but it was just, just everything around was so stressful and like there was no way to really like relieve that stress in a positive way.

**Lasting Impact of the Relationship**

**Negative impact on physical health.** Participants discussed the toll that their experience in a coercively controlling relationship had on their physical health. In some cases, they had gastrointestinal problems, had trouble sleeping, lost weight due to not eating, or had hair loss.

Participant 4 reported: “There were times where I couldn’t sleep at all. I wouldn’t be hungry. Like I would be eating and then totally lose my appetite.” For Participant 17, sleep was sacrificed during the relationship due to her partner’s demand that she spend most of her free time with him:

I was stressed out already and he wanted to see me every second every day, so I ended up staying up until 2, 3 am doing homework, because I was spending every minute of my free time with him. In high school it wasn’t bad, but when it got to college I was getting like 2 hours of sleep a night.

**Negative impact on mental health.** Participants described how their partners’ controlling behaviors affected their mental health, resulting in low self-esteem, depression, an inability to concentrate, and anxiety. Participant 13’s experience led her to question what was wrong with her: “[The relationship] definitely gave me a ton of anxiety…yeah for a while I was definitely thinking there was something wrong with me instead of him.”

**Negative impact on academics.** Several participants indicated that the experience of a controlling relationship resulted in lower grades, poor class attendance, and difficult completing academic assignments. They reported that their partners would sabotage them attending classed
or prevent them from studying. Participant 4 how her academic achievement was affected, whereas her partner’s academic progress seemed fine:

   It was definitely really hard for me to get work done. I would always be stressed out. Always and couldn’t focus at all. That was my issue. It didn’t seem to, at least I don’t think so, to affect his schoolwork as much. I never really saw that. I mean he wasn’t very on top of it all the time, but he never seemed to be not able to finish his assignments. Whereas for me, it would be a lot harder. Where my anxiety would start to take over. Like if he’s trying to argue with me, texting me while I was trying to do schoolwork. I just couldn’t sit down. I would have to leave the library sometimes to like go home.

Understanding the Coercive Experience

   Self-blame. Many participants blamed themselves for having a controlling partner. Some participants experienced guilt or believed that they had caused the coercive behavior. Participant 2 stated, “And I feel kinda guilty for hurting him even though he’s hurt me a million times.” Similarly, Participant 16 had stated, “I kind of started to feel like everything, all this stuff was wrong with me.”

   Regret over not ending the relationship sooner. Several participants also shared the internal struggle they faced since ending their relationship, believing that they could have ended it at an earlier point in time. For example, Participant 7 stated:

   It took me a long time to accept the fact that I didn’t do it sooner and that was the worst part. It wasn’t so much missing him or wanting the relationship back after we broke up, but just me always wanting to be like I hate myself like wanting to tell, like I hate myself like this, I can't believe I didn't do this sooner cause I was so much happier after.
**Viewing the relationship as a learning experience.** One way that some participants were able to make sense their experience involved viewing it as a lesson to be learned. Some participants believed that as a result of the relationship, they became more aware of red flags in dating relationships and knew more about healthy communication. Other participants described personal growth, explaining that they went outside their comfort zones to find social support in order to prevent being in a similar controlling relationship. For example, Participant 9 stated:

> I definitely learned red flags to look out for and I learned if they’re there, and especially if they’re there early on you cannot ignore them. Like they’re there for a reason and ignoring them you’re just going to get yourself deeper into it.

**Changed self-image.** Participants noticed that with time away from the relationship, they came to view themselves differently. For some participants, the end of the relationship resulted in increased self-esteem and self-confidence, whereas other participants explained that the relationship took a toll on their view of themselves, hoping to regain their earlier sense of self. Participant 1 stated, “But now I feel stronger. I feel better.” On the other hand, Participant 2 discussed the negative impact of the relationship on her perception of herself:

> [Before the relationship] I was outgoing and like I had a lot of friends. I was kind of popular and um I feel like I was more confident and happier… [but after the relationship] I’m definitely quieter… I got more shy, I guess. And I freak out about what people think about me.

**Belief that abusive relationships are common.** A few participants reported that their experience in the relationship helped them realize that controlling relationships are commonplace. Some participants recognized that some of their friends’ relationships might also be abusive, while others noticed having believed that what they saw in films could not happen to
them or would not happen in “real life.” For example, Participant 11 discussed noticing that several people she knew were in similar relationships:

My one friend who I shall not name, she’s in a relationship that’s kind of like that too where he like makes her feel bad and then like turns it around on her. And I think that’s like a huge thing that’s happening in a lot of relationships and I see it with a lot of girls. Even my friend’s little sister was in a relationship where a guy was doing that. And I think it’s like a lot of girls feel put down by these manipulative guys because they turn it around on them and make them feel like it’s like I wish I had just seen that it wasn’t all my fault.

**Changed view of romantic relationships.** Similar to viewing their previous relationship as a learning experience, many participants explained how their views on romantic relationships had shifted. Participants discussed struggling with trusting new romantic partners, feeling guarded, or being unsure how to handle a partner who was not jealous or controlling. Participants also discussed being more aware of what to look for in a partner in order to protect themselves. For example, Participant 17 stated, [“after the relationship] I’d like to think I’m smarter and more aware of people. Like better at reading people and better at reading guys, specifically.”

As another example, Participant 3 discussed the struggle she had connecting with a new partner:

I tried to start something with a new guy and that I just couldn’t find myself to be emotional with him, I guess. It’s hard. I can’t really trust anymore. I try, but it’s hard.

And I just refuse to let anyone step on me again so I’m very careful.

**Feeling relieved when the relationship ended.** Many participants described feeling happy after their relationship ended. They described a sense of relief that they would no longer be subjected to abusive and controlling behaviors. Some participants indicated that it took them
several months to feel fully relieved, while others reported a feeling of relief soon after the end of the relationship. Participant 16 stated, “[After the breakup I was like] I feel happier just having that off my chest.” Other participants reported similar experiences, for example: “I think pretty glad that [the relationship ended]” (Participant 12), and “I’m so happy it ended” (Participant 13).

Discussion

Although there has been extensive research conducted on understanding the needs to survivors of IPV in the community (Fass et al., 2008; Coker et al., 2008; Ehrensaft et al., 1999; Johnson, 2006; Stark, 2006), there has been a paucity of studies examining the experience of coercive control survivors in college, despite the finding that 78% to 90% of women reporting IPV in college described coercive control in their relationships (Barnes, 2001; Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; Coker et al., 2008; Eshelman & Levendosky, 2012; O’Hearn & Davis, 1997). Much of the research examining IPV on college campuses has focused on rates of abuse and its effects on survivors (Anderson & Danis, 2007; Buhi et al., 2009; Myhill 2015; Shorey et al., 2011; Straus, 2008; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014) rather than the phenomenological experiences of IPV survivors.

The current qualitative study extended this literature by examining the experiences of college women who had survived coercively controlling heterosexual romantic relationships. In order to focus on psychological rather than physical abuse, participants were volunteers who indicated not having experienced repeated physical abuse and not having sought medical attention due to an incident of physical abuse.

Specifically, the study was designed to understand the lived experience of coercive control in college dating relationships. The following questions were addressed in the study: How is coercive control experienced in college dating relationships? How does coercive control develop in these relationships? What factors facilitate and hinder a woman’s decision to end a
coercive dating relationship? How do women understand having survived a coercive relationship after it has ended?

**Thematic Results**

The qualitative results provide a rich picture of ways in which coercive control was experienced by a sample of 17 college women in a northeastern university. The level of severity of the coercive control experienced by these participants is noteworthy. On the screening questionnaire, participants endorsed an average of 5.47 (SD = 1.70) controlling behaviors, and during the interviews themselves, participants described pervasive coercive control, with ongoing influences on their social support, academic performance, safety, and physical and emotional well-being.

Consistent with previous literature on coercive control (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Stark, 2006), participants explained that their partners attempted to reduce their social support network by sabotaging other relationships and/or by limiting their contact with peers and family members. Many participants explained that having their social media activity monitored contributed to limiting their relationships with peers. Several participants also discussed the double standards that they experienced. For example, their partners allowed themselves to engage in activities with friends, whereas participants were not allowed the same privilege.

Consistent with previous literature (Beck & Raghavan, 2010; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Lehmann et al., 2012; Myhill, 2015; Robertson & Murachver, 2011; Stark, 2006), participants described being threatened or intimidated by their partners, at times physically. Although repeated, severe physical abuse was not present in the dating relationships described by participants, these women nonetheless described multiple episodes of coerced or forced sexual activity. Indeed, the level of sexual violence described by participant was staggering. Each
participant described at least episode of sexual coercion, and many of these women described these sexual encounters as unwanted and emotionally taxing. Notably, few participants labeled these coercive sexual experiences as assault or abuse. It was not clear if participants did not view their experiences as sexual assault or were unable to label their experience as such. Rather, participants described the sexual coercion they experienced as an aspect of their relationships that simply needed to be tolerated.

Sex was also described as a control tactic by many participants. Some women indicated that they would give in and have sex as a way to avoid fights. A few participants described their partner’s use of sex to keep them content in the relationship, or to manipulate them into believing that enjoyment during sexual experiences was the only required aspect of a dating relationship. Several participants described how their partners used sex as a form of punishment; for some participants this resulted in being raped, while others described their partners withholding sex.

A noteworthy finding, unique to the college environment, is the effect of coercive control on participants’ academic life. Participants described incidents in where their partners prevented them from completing academic assignments, kept them from going to class, or interfered with their assignments with peers. This targeting of academics provided partners even more control in the relationship. That is, participants described being isolated in specific ways, such as being unable to participate fully in group projects. Not surprisingly, this kind of coercion had a major effect of participants’ academic performance.

It is also of note that every participant described engaging in self-censoring. That is, these women described various ways that they used to avoid fights with their partners, indicative of the severe levels of coercive control that they experienced. For example, some participants described “walking on eggshells,” or thinking about what could or could not be said to their partners, and
agreeing to remain socially isolated, all of which had the overarching goal of avoiding arguments.

The evolution of coercively controlling college relationships was also notable. Partners were consistently described as presenting themselves differently at the start of the relationship and how the participants’ weaknesses had been exploited during the relationship. Manipulation contributed to the development of coercive behaviors, since participants described being dependent on their partners for social support due to their social isolation.

Living on a college campus contributed to the development of abusive behaviors in several ways. As described in previous research (Rickgarn, 1989), participants described how the closed environment of a college campus allowed for ready surveillance by their partners. In particular, the campus environment allowed participants to spend virtually all of their free time with their partners, who were easily able to know their whereabouts at all times.

Although participants described feeling isolated from their social support network, they also explained that their friends and family members helped them end their coercive relationship. For many participants, a singular event helped them decide that the relationship needed to end. Some participants indicated that receiving counseling, even if they had not initially sought professional help for this purpose, helped them end the relationship. Counseling seemed to have helped some participants who had sought help at the request of their partner, who had described them as “dramatic” or “crazy.”

Other factors seemed to deter participants from ending their coercive relationships. Some participants explained that they would normalize their partners abusive or controlling behavior, seeing these behaviors as loving or being caring. As was found in previous studies (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Ehrensaft et al., 1999; Stark, 2006), current participants described ignoring the
Participants also described their level of commitment to the relationship and the kind of pressure they felt to stay with their partners. Some participants, for example, explained that their partners would threaten to commit suicide if the relationship were to end. For some participants, maladaptive coping with the stress of the relationship kept it going. These participants engaged in excessive drinking or drug use or self-harming behaviors.

As Myhill (2015) described, being victimized in a controlling romantic relationship seems to have had a lasting impact on participants. Similar to the experiences described by participants in other studies, the current participants described negative effects of the relationship on their physical health, including acne or stomach ulcers. Experiences described by participants reflected previous research, in that some participants described struggling with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Coker et al., 2000; Shorey, Sherman et al., 2011; Witte et al., 2015).

In addition to the lasting impact of their previously controlling relationships, participants also discussed how they understood their experience after they relationship ended. For example, some participants described viewing the relationship as a learning experience, whereas others struggled not to blame themselves. Not only was decreased self-esteem a common experience of several participants, but also greater self-consciousness and insecurity were experienced by some participants.

On the other hand, some participants viewed themselves as stronger as a result of the relationship. Other participants indicated having a changed view of romantic relationships. For example, some participants indicated having had a better understanding of a “red flag” in a
relationship, or what they should not tolerate from a future romantic partner. A common experience among participants was the struggle to trust new partners. Another common experience was feeling a sense of relief that the relationship had ended and a sense of being content with their life at the present time.

Although the thematic analyses revealed numerous similarities in the experiences of coercive control in the current sample with results from previous studies, there were important differences identified. As mentioned above, the college environment increased the ease of partners keeping surveillance in ways that are different from what may occur in a relationship in the community. Some participants reported their partners waiting outside their classrooms or watching them as they completed group projects. Participants also discussed how being able to spend all of their free time together or living in the same building aided in their relationships progressing faster than it would have if they did not live on campus.

One way being in college was beneficial for participants in the current study was the social connection that remained despite their partners efforts to keep them isolated. Participants identified how their friends and family aided in them in ending their relationships and provided support during their relationships. However, survivors in community samples (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Ehrensaft et al., 1999; Goodman & Epstein, 2008; Stark, 2007) often describe complete social isolation and struggle to find support to end abusive relationships. Additionally, participants in the current sample did not describe economic abuse as being a way partners kept control, which is common among survivors and victims in the community (Goodman & Epstein, 2008; Lehman et al., 2012).
Implications for Practice and Prevention Efforts

The present thematic results have implications for clinical practice and prevention efforts on college campuses. Clinically, the results highlight the importance of counseling to help women in abusive relationships find ways to cope, to end the relationship if they want, and find ways to help them stay safe. Many participants discussed how therapy was helpful for them, even when they had not sought therapy due to their relationship, a finding that highlights the importance of therapists taking a client-centered approach when identifying the goal of therapy, especially when working with victims and survivors of IPV. Therapists should be educated on coercive control and the various ways coercive control tactics can be used to inform their work with victims and survivors of IPV. It is also important for the Title IX office, as well as other campus administrators, to learn about the important role that counseling can play in helping victims end their coercive relationships in order to refer them to the campus counseling center when a complaint is filed.

Goodman and Epstein (2008) highlighted the importance of taking a survivor-centered approach when working with victims and survivors in the community. The same approach needs to be taken with victims and survivors on college campuses. Although participants had volunteered for the study because they saw themselves as having been in a controlling relationship, some participants did not view their partners as controlling while the relationship was ongoing. For this reason, therapists should refrain from explicitly asking a woman if she is in an “abusive relationship.” Rather a broader focus on control might allow clients to feel comfortable identifying their partners’ behavior as controlling.

Results of the current study also underscore the importance of therapists inquiring about their clients’ experience of sex with their controlling partners, since many participants described
experiencing sexual assault or abuse without identifying it as such. For example, rather than asking about rape or sexual abuse, therapists could inquire about whether their clients were coerced into having sex with a romantic partner in order to remain safe.

In line with a survivor-centered approach, therapists should also use language that matches the language used by their clients. Participants in the current study did not describe their experience in the relationship as traumatic or use the word *trauma* when describing what they had endured. It is important for therapists to keep this point in mind when asking clients about previous experiences of trauma, as some survivors might not view a controlling relationship as traumatic.

The present participants were aware of friends or acquaintances who were also in controlling dating relationships, which normalized their own experiences. It is possible that coercively controlling relationships are so commonplace on college campuses that a description of the experience as *traumatic* seems excessive to survivors. It may also be the case that young women are not aware of coercively controlling behaviors before entering their relationships, resulting in them believing that coercive control and sexual coercion are normal.

Campus prevention efforts typically focus on educating students about the characteristics of healthy versus unhealthy relationships and the kinds of “red flags” of abuse to be aware of when entering into a new dating relationship. However, these efforts may not help a victim end her relationship at the first sign of abusive behaviors. A more explicit focus on coercive control may be helpful, particularly centered on the tactics of coercive control on a college campus, such as surveillance, monitoring social media activity, or regulating out of the classroom activities. It would be particularly helpful for prevention efforts to target male college students early in their college career. Explicit education and outreach efforts focusing on equity in dating relationships
and defining coercion, particularly sexual coercion may decrease the apparent pervasiveness of this kind of behavior.

Less emphasis on physical assault and abuse may also be warranted for campus prevention programming. Based on the present results, not all victims experience repeated physical abuse. Prevention efforts that emphasize physical abuse could result in isolating victims of coercive control, preventing them from reaching out to peers or campus staff for support.

Additionally, more education about coerced sex seems warranted. Participants discussed experiencing events consistent with sexual assault throughout the relationship, but only one individual identified her experience as rape. More education on nonconsensual sex might help women recognize this aspect of abuse in their current or future relationships.

College faculty and staff would also benefit from learning about the signs of coercive control when working with students. For example, faculty members can be on the lookout for others outside a classroom or who argue when a class runs late and offer campus resources such as the Title IX office or the counseling center. Resident assistants in the dorms can also watch for couples who frequently argue or for students who do not reside in the dorm but are frequently waiting outside for a resident to come back to the dorm. Security officers on campus should also be on alert when repeatedly contacted to respond to loud incidents occurring between members of the same couple.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Strengths of the current study include (a) in-depth interviews to gain detailed information about the experience and develop of coercive control in college relationships; (b) an exclusive focus on coercive control, which has not been the topic if similar qualitative research on IPV; and (c) close attention to qualitative research standards.
Additionally, bracketing and audit trails enhanced the confirmability, credibility and transferability of the current study. The themes and sub-themes generated from the data indicated commonalities across participants’ experiences, which supported the study’s dependability.

One limitation was that participants in the current study had ended their controlling relationships three to nine months before the interview. This criterion insured participant safety, but participant’s faulty memories may have affected the veridicality of their responses to the interview questions.

By focusing on controlling relationships that did not include repeated episodes of physical abuse, the current results indicate that the threat of physical violence can be just as intimidating as violence itself. For this reason, it is critical to explore the use of intimidation without repeated physical assault in future research.

**Recommendations and Considerations for Future Research**

Due to the richness of the experiences described by participants, the results suggest several directions for future research. Because the current study is the first to examine the lived experience of coercive control in college dating relationships, it is important for future research to expand the literature on IPV occurring on college campuses. As one example, future researchers could focus exclusively on how sexual intimacy is experienced in coercive relationships, particularly how sex is used by perpetrators in order to maintain control. Raghavan and colleagues (2015) identified the use of sexual coercion in place of physical violence as a common occurrence in a coercively controlling relationships. Further examination on how sexual coercion is used in place of physical violence in college romantic relationships is needed. Researchers could closely examine how the quality or frequency of sexual activity tends to change over the course of an abusive relationship.
In order to gain a better understanding of the experience of IPV in the queer community, researchers could replicate the current study by interviewing survivors from this community. Results could begin to highlight the similarities or differences in control tactics used in LGBT+ relationships.

Additionally, the current participants described various ways they tried to cope with being in a controlling relationship. A future study should more explicitly examine the coping mechanisms used by women in coercively controlling relationships. Results could illuminate how victims behave in order to mentally and emotionally “escape” their abusive relationships, since this method of coping seems to make it difficult for victims to end a controlling relationship. More information on coping that facilitates ending a coercive relationship would inform clinical practice and campus prevention efforts.

Lastly, modifying or developing self-report measures assess aspects of controlling, college relationships is another avenue for future research. The available measures of IPV, such as the Revised Control Tactics Scales (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), do not fully capture the unique experience of coercive control in these relationships in that the context of relationships is missing from the measure, which solely assesses the frequency of abusive behaviors. By creating measures to reflect control and abuse in college dating relationships, researchers will be able to obtain more accurate prevalence rates. These results could then be used to inform campus prevention efforts, administrative policies, and clinical practice.

Finally, women who saw the flyer about the study may not have considered that their experience qualified them to participate in the study. Due to the difficulty the present participants have to consider their experience as traumatic, it is possible that many survivors do not identify
their previous relationships as psychologically abusive, particularly as coercively controlling relationships seem to be common on college campuses. It would be beneficial for future researchers to keep this in mind when recruiting participants.
References


Table 1
Participants’ Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Participant Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Partner Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship Length*</th>
<th>Shared Activities</th>
<th>Housing Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
<td>Across the Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Attended Sporting Events</td>
<td>Opposite Sides of Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Ecuadorian</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Different Quads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mixed, White African American</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Same Quad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>West Indian American, Black</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Different Quads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Exercise Together</td>
<td>Down the Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Different Quads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black, African American</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Same Quad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Varied Each Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Couple Floors Apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Building Apart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* in months

Note.
Table 1, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Participant Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Partner Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship Length*</th>
<th>Shared Activities</th>
<th>Housing Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Different Quads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Same Quad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>Building Apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Floor Apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Different Quads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>One Club</td>
<td>Road Apart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Themes, Sub-themes, and Additional Significance Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Experiences during the relationship | Controlling their appearance | P1: I couldn’t really wear makeup…I couldn’t dress a certain way  
P10: He didn’t want me to wear makeup, but for me makeup is something that makes me feel really positive. He also like would tell me to cover up. I would just wear a tank top or something and he’s be like, “um why are you wearing shorts? You like a ho.”  
P12: [he would] tell me to lose weight |
| Limiting, controlling, or sabotaging relationships with others | | P1: So my male co-workers that I had, he really didn’t like them. And so there was always accusations that he would place like, “oh you’re sleeping with him.”  
P3: He would monitor who, like things like who I followed on social media and I thought that was ridiculous, but he would monitor those things. He would tell my mom on me when I did something that he didn’t approve of. And then they would both like tag team against me.  
P7: We [best friend and ex] were all going out together and then he was whispering in my ear like, “[your best friend] is talking about you. She’s talking about you. And like I heard this.” And then I’d be like oh my god, thinking the rest of the night, but not saying anything to her because I didn’t want to bring it up. |
| Experiencing being physically threatened or abused | | P4: Probably when he came to my house uninvited because I told him I wanted to end things. And like wouldn’t leave, was arguing with me. Then he punched past me into the wall.  
P9: And I walked out so fast, he just grabbed my ponytail and pulled me back by it. |
| Being coerced or feeling obliged to have sex | | P2: It [sex] was basically whenever he wanted. And if I wasn’t really into it he would say I was rejecting him and that he would get really mad at me. And be like, “I don't like being rejected. You’re not attracted to me.” And I was just like, “No, I’m just really not feeling it,” and then we would have to do it anyways. |
Table 2, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P6</strong>: So there was like one time I had a UTI and I was almost better from it, but I was scared to have sex. They say not to for weeks, and it has been a couple days, but he definitely didn’t force me, but kinda convinced me to. There were definitely times where I didn’t want to, but felt like I needed to in order to keep our relationship going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P12</strong>: Maybe once or twice he forced me to do something [sexual] I didn’t really want to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P14</strong>: I mean [our sexual relationship] had like it’s moments, but like with that night, that the what happened like I just felt like, I don’t know it wasn’t a like um I didn’t want to. So yeah it just became more violent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Monitoring activities and social media</strong></td>
<td><strong>P1</strong>: He wanted to know the password to my phone. My social media accounts. And he ended up hacking them one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P7</strong>: If I ever posted something [on social media] and anybody ever liked it, I would have to explain every single boy and even girls he didn’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P10</strong>: I couldn’t really do stuff by myself or he didn’t let me do like, go to places by myself. He’d be like, “Oh why am I not invited?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Attempts to avoid fights</strong></td>
<td><strong>P1</strong>: Couldn’t really go out and have a girls’ night to cope because that would instigate another fight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P7</strong>: I was always trying to make him happy and just realized, like, not pick a fight, and like have this script in my head of what I would have to say throughout the day that would keep him at ease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Being insulted or put down</strong></td>
<td><strong>P4</strong>: How he would talk to me, like lower than him. Like the words he would use during arguing with him…[like] dumb bitch…just really rude words like slut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P6</strong>: He tweeted about how I was a slut and said ya know that I’m, like I act really religious all the time because of my parents and I’m ya know just have these outbursts of bad behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P9</strong>: He messaged me saying, “I can’t believe what a whore you are.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cyclical behaviors</strong></td>
<td><strong>P4</strong>: He and I would sit down and talk about our relationship and address the issues and try to fix them, but that would only work for like a week. And it was a cycle that would keep happening. So it was pretty much bad the whole time until the end when I decided to be done with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P16</strong>: Every time something bad happened he would turn into the sweetest person and be like, “Oh my god I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have yelled,” like stuff like that so I obviously forgave him every time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposing authority</td>
<td>about acceptable behaviors/actions and double standards</td>
<td>P6: I had trust issues for good reasons, at the end he had told me he had been cheating on me the whole time. And he would be going out to parties and I would want to go out with him and at first...that was something we normally did together and the last few months of the relationship he would tell me I wasn’t allowed to go out to parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being threatened or</td>
<td>intimidated</td>
<td>P1: He told me that he tried to go in the bathroom and tried to like hang himself. So he tried to, I don’t want to say he tried to, but like he would use suicide to try to make me feel bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P9: A lot of the time he’d be like, “No. No, we’re not done here,” or whatever and then sometimes he would block the door and be like, “You’re not leaving.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing conflicting</td>
<td>emotions</td>
<td>P10: So it came to that point where I kinda got annoyed and I wasn’t sure if I wanted this relationship, but at the same time I kept thinking that like looking back and all the good memories that we had and so, but then at the same time I was also getting very depressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P11: I think I was really blind. I really like felt like everything was fixed after the conversation. I think my mind said like oh you talked it’s fine. But in reality it wasn’t fine because every single conversation we had was always being like, “You’re doing this wrong. I’m in the right and you’re to blame.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the Abuse</td>
<td>Experiencing changes in their partners behavior over time</td>
<td>P4: He was so nice in the beginning. Compliments and wanted to talk to me all the time. Just a different person, almost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P5: He would try to like guilt trip me back into a relationship with him so it was weird for me, for him to do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P11: He would do the manipulation thing… I would come to him with a problem and be like, “I don’t really like that you’re making fun of me for this,” and he’d be like, “Wow, why can’t you take a joke? That’s not, it’s not really a big deal,” things like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking advantage of participants’ weaknesses and naïveté</td>
<td>P5: I lost my virginity for the first time toward him. And I expressed to him that I actually felt something towards him. That I probably might be in love with him and it didn’t take him until a few months after to say that he actually felt connected to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P15: I think I’m very naïve and I let that happened and I kind of accepted [his attempts to limit time spent with friends] for a while.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity due to living on campus</td>
<td>P6: The fact that we lived in the same dorm, um it just, the relationship progressed really fast because we had the opportunity to spend all of our time together.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P9: We usually slept together almost every night, if not every night so we would wake up, sometimes get breakfast, sometimes not depending on who had class when, go to class. We would like talk throughout the whole day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P17: [being on the same campus] was better cause he could actually keep tabs on me so he wasn’t constantly like texting me and calling me. Like he’d want me to call him and wake him up in the morning when he was in college so then when we were actually in the same college I would just go over there so he wouldn’t expect me to call him three times a day. Um but he knew where I was all the time so there was no escaping it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling isolated and dependent</td>
<td>P9: I really thought, I don’t know why, I really thought I would not be able to survive without him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P10: I didn’t really have anyone to rely on. Always being with him I felt like there wouldn’t be anyone there for me like him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences for going against their partner’s wishes</td>
<td>P3: [after a fight] he went home and he started going out with this girl and I said I didn’t feel comfortable because they had a past, but he did it anyway. He blocked me from contacting him for like a day, until he was done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P4: He would like block me if I did go out and he didn’t want to, I don’t know, maybe send a message that I don’t want anything to do with you, maybe. Or just wouldn’t want to see me or tell me, “No, don’t come over. I don’t want to talk to you.” Or break up with me multiple times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P10: I would have to go out to parties and...he would always get mad at me...and he would get mad at me just like because we had the party at night he wouldn’t even talk to me at all. And then like the next morning he would like give me like an attitude and everything even though I did nothing wrong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-Themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Factors contributing to ending the relationship | Supportive friends and family members | P7: It actually took one friend, I never really thought it was controlling and then one friend, I was describing to her a fight we had and she was like, “This is what, this is not okay.” And that just kinda checked because we weren’t that good of friends. Knowing it was an outside source that saw this, I was like okay there’s something wrong.  
P10: Luckily I had like my [sorority] sisters to rely on.  
P14: I didn’t want it to end, but like since my family knew, it’s like and like I felt like I was like not forced to, but I , I want to be like, want to get over this I need to totally detach and this wasn’t right what he did to me and like no one, I had to come through that like mental aspect, but like my family helped me a lot. |
| Seeking counseling                       |                                         | P2: Talked to my counselor. She helped. I wasn’t alone.  
P12: Went to the Psychological Services over there. Yeah, yeah. And I talked to someone. |
| Experiencing a breaking point event      |                                         | P12: There was like an incident [that caused the end of the relationship]…it was really big for me like the cops were called. I don’t want to talk about it, but at that point I took like a break and I thought to myself this has to end so I completely cut contact with him.  
P16: It was kind of like, it kind of was like a turning point and made me realize maybe this isn’t the best relationship for me. |
| Factors making it difficult to end abusive behaviors | Normalizing abusive behaviors | P2: At first…I was just like well there’s nothing I can really do…he loves me that’s why he’s acting like this.  
P3: I guess I always knew it was a bit toxic, but in my mind the good always outweighed the bad…there would be days where he would treat me nice, nicely I guess and he would give me presents and I felt loved or whatever. And then I don’t know I always thought to those instances to always push away the bad stuff. |
<p>| Hiding abusive behaviors from friends and family |                                         | P1: Yeah my family still doesn't know that he’s suspended…they know that we had broken up. And I said, “oh you know it just wasn’t right.” But yeah, they don’t really know. So I have an order of protection against him because he was crazy after we broke up and would stalk me. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P3</strong>: This is the first time I’m openly speaking about it and I never thought that I would. I tell my friends bits and pieces because I don’t want to be judged…and I don’t want to hear, “I told you so.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P6</strong>: My brother is very protective of me so uh ya know I would make it out to seem like [my ex] was a better guy than he was and I would get nervous when he was around my family, that they would kinda see his true colors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P17</strong>: I definitely didn’t tell people like, “oh I can’t hang out with you because like my boyfriend wants to hang out with me every 5 seconds,” and all my co-workers loved him. Like they thought he was great. They were like, “Oh he brings you coffee every single day. That’s so sweet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling alone with their partner</td>
<td><strong>P5</strong>: I just really couldn’t handle leaving him. It was really hard. Kinda feeling like I needed him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P10</strong>: Also I felt like it was really unhealthy for me because like I relied on him and like I would be kind of sad like what I lose all of these memories I have with him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling pressured to stay in the relationship</td>
<td><strong>P3</strong>: He would threaten to kill himself if I left him and I felt like stuck. I didn't know what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P17</strong>: For a while I didn't think I was capable of meeting someone else so I thought he was like the only option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling committed to their partner</td>
<td><strong>P11</strong>: I was like topped. Top. Like I was ready to get engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P14</strong>: Well when he started to get obsessed I was pushing back, but for the most part I was very [committed to the relationship].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding ways to escape</td>
<td><strong>P2</strong>: Would first start smoking and I was drinking. He would get really mad at me for that. And I just, it was a way to like release the stress I guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P5</strong>: [during the relationship] I self-medicated a lot. It was hard for me to take in. I partied a lot. Did a lot of drinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>P12</strong>: I told you that I would ignore it. I think that’s my coping mechanism for everything actually. Just ignore it and push it to the side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lasting impact of the relationship</td>
<td><strong>P1</strong>: So I was super stressed. Like my hair started to fall out, like I had stomach, like I don’t know if I had stomach ulcers, but I had digestive problems because I was so stressed. Acne obviously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative impact on physical health</td>
<td><strong>P7</strong>: I didn’t eat so [I was] looking skinny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td>Additional Significance Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative on impact on mental health</strong></td>
<td>P3: I was just upset all the time. I noticed that I was always crying. And I just don't know. I felt like in a dark place.</td>
<td>P9: I’m not going to go as far and say I was depressed because I wasn’t, but maybe like situational depression. Like if we were fighting I would just be upset all around, like take naps and I just don’t want to deal with this. I just can’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P10: I felt really depressed and like I don’t know like it started to hurt my own self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative impact on academics</td>
<td>P3: Yeah, like when I should sleep over or he would sleep over, to go to class the next day he wouldn’t let me. Or he would turn off my alarm.</td>
<td>P10: Because of him always being around me I didn’t really have time to study. And when I would try to study it would be really distracting and I couldn’t really concentrate with him always being there around me. So my grades actually dropped down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P13: [due to the relationship and control] I got my only C on my whole undergrad transcript that semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the coercive experience</td>
<td>Self-Blame</td>
<td>P12: Like I blame everything on myself for what he did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P15: I just, it’s crazy to me that I actually stayed for as long as I did and that I let it happen and that I let myself get hurt by it. I don't understand like my behavior in that. Like I just don’t understand why I stayed when I did. Um and kind of like a disappointment in yourself for being in a relationship like that when you know you deserve so much better. So, but at least now I know what I deserve and not something like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret over not ending relationship sooner</td>
<td></td>
<td>P16: Part of me wishes that I kind of like told him off sooner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the relationship as a learning experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>P1: I learned a lot of lessons. I learned a lot. I definitely learned red flags. What those are ya know and not to just ignore them and I learned a lot of ya know, coping skills on how to deal with really difficult people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Additional Significance Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P11: I think that he really helped me open my eyes to how important communication is. Because a lot of the time beforehand, my other past relationship I have been very locked down. Like if anybody asked me anything that made me uncomfortable I would just shut right up and not want to talk. So I think he really opened my eyes up to communication and portraying more of how I feel and if something bothers me saying it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed their self-image</td>
<td></td>
<td>P1: I mean after the relationship it was obviously like low self-esteem. Super stressed. But now I feel stronger. I feel better. I kind of lost all of the relationship weight I gained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P7: But some, it, things like that just creep into new sections of my life that I go back to. Even finding with new people, afraid to express myself. Or if I’m upset about something not willing to talk about it, which kinda affects a lot, even with my friends. Like sometimes I’m a little passive aggressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P12: I feel like more insecure about myself [now] because he would talk about my appearance a lot. Like um call me names, and tell me to lose weight and everything. So it kind of lowered my self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that abusive</td>
<td></td>
<td>P14: Like you see it in movies and you think it would never happen to you. Cause like you know them as being like such a good person and like you only see that. You don’t see that they’re this other person that only comes out…rarely. I don't know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships are common</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed view of romantic</td>
<td></td>
<td>P2: Because of my ex-boyfriend, he was very controlling, but I was always looked at like the controlling and the jealousy as someone caring for me. And now since the other boyfriend I had, he was very hands off and wasn’t like that. It kind of, I don’t know it made me feel like oh he must not care about me because he’s not like this guy was. And all my friends were like, “No, he’s just not crazy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>P4: [after] kind of maybe trust issues and trusting other guys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P15: But to get into another relationship now, like no. I don’t think I’d want to just because I’m probably too afraid to go through something like that again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling relieved that the</td>
<td></td>
<td>P9: Even like after [the final break up] I immediately, I realized wow I’m so much happier not being stressed, but at the three month mark, four month mark it was like I kinda really realized we are not going to get back together and I was really nervous about that and it was just like a weight off my shoulders and I’ve been like outrageously happier since. Like in every aspect. Like I’ll wake up in a better mood. Even the small things like I’ll be watching TV with one of my roommates and I’ll be like I’m so happy doing this. Like I’m just content with my life right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship ended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Screening Questionnaire

Please respond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to each of the following questions about your partner’s behavior toward you.

He did not want me to have female friends.

He did not want me to have male friends.

He said I needed to obey him.

He became angry when I told him he drank too much or used drugs too often.

He said that I couldn’t take care of myself without him.

He got angry when I disagreed with him.

He controlled when I was able to go places or leave places.

He told me not to go to class.

He bullied me.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and participate in this study. As I explained earlier, I will be asking you some questions about the dating relationship you had where you experienced psychological control. Please choose a fictitious name to use for your previous partner. I will be taking notes while we talk along with recording us to make sure I do not miss anything you say. Remember that your participation is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time.

Please tell me about how your relationship began and how you saw him as a person at the beginning of the relationship. (How did you meet? How did you first feel connected to him? How did you feel about him?)

How do you think being in college played a part in your relationship with him?

In what ways was this relationship a good one for you?

When in the relationship did you realize that he was being controlling?

What was your reaction to recognizing his controlling behaviors? (In what ways was he controlling?)

Tell me about a typical day that you spent with him.

Please describe the worst point in the relationship. (What was it like for you?)

In what ways was the relationship not satisfying, other than the control?

How did the control affect you? (Uncomfortable? Felt like you were to blame? Sad? Weary?)

If there were aspects of your life in which he didn't control you, what were they?

How would you describe your sexual relationship with him? (How was sex decided on?)

How did his controlling behavior affect your sexual relationship with him?

How did the college environment influence your ability to cope with his controlling behaviors?

Were there points where you hid what he did from other people? If so, how? (Friends, family?)
How did the relationship end?

(Whose decision was it to end the relationship? How did you feel about it ending at that point? Now?)

How do you understand the relationship with him, now that you look back on it? (How do you feel toward him now?)

What helped you get through?

(How did you cope with it at the time? How did you cope when it was over?)

Thinking back to how you were as a person before you were in the relationship, how would you have described yourself?

Now that the relationship is over, how would you describe yourself? (How did the relationship affect how you view yourself?)

If there is anything you’d like to add about this experience, please do so.

Finally, I have a few demographic questions to ask you.

What is your current age?

How do you identify racially or ethnically?

What is your current year in college?

What is your current relationship status?

Approximately, how many intimate sexual relationships, that lasted at least 3 months, have you had since the age of 12?

For the following, please answer them in relation to the partner you discussed in the interview.

How did you describe your commitment in the relationship at the time?

What was your year in college at the start of the relationship?

How old were you when the relationship began?

How old was your partner at the time of your relationship?
How did your partner identify himself racially or ethnically?

How long did this relationship last?

How long ago did the relationship end?

How many times a day did you spend time with your partner?

How far apart did you and your partner live from each other, on campus?

What campus activities did you share with him?

Approximately, how often did you and your partner have conflicts (disagreements, arguments, fights)?

Did you see a counselor or any staff member on campus to discuss this relationship?

   If yes, was it during or after the relationship?
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

about Women’s Experiences in a Psychologically Controlling Dating Relationships

I am conducting private, confidential interviews to understand the personal experiences of undergraduate college women (aged 18-25) who were in a psychologically controlling romantic relationship with a male partner that ended 3 to 9 months ago.

$75 Visa Gift Card will be provided to each interviewee to thank you for your time.

My name is Larissa Barbaro. I am a PhD candidate in the Counseling Psychology Program. This research is being conducted for my dissertation under the faculty supervision of Dr. Myrna Friedlander, Professor.
Appendix D

Informed Consent

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in my study. I am a doctoral student at the University at Albany, State University of New York and this research is being conducted for my dissertation. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Myrna Friedlander, Professor, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, at the University at Albany. Please consider participating in this study if you are between 18 and 25 years of age and were previously in a controlling romantic relationship with a male partner.

This project, entitled *Female College Students’ Experiences with Psychological Control* aims to gain a greater understanding of how college women experience control in their romantic relationships and how it impacts their daily lives. You may find it beneficial to tell the story of your experience. Whether or not you experience a direct benefit from participating in the study, I expect that other women and college counselors may benefit from the knowledge gained through your interview and those of several other women who had experiences similar to yours. It is my hope that the findings of this study will also inform future prevention efforts on campus and counseling services for women who are survivors of controlling romantic relationships.

Procedures

Participation in the study includes completing a brief questionnaire, after which you may be asked for your email address so that I can contact you to schedule the interview. The interview will last between 60 and 90 minutes and be held in a private room on campus.

The interview will be audio recorded so that I can transcribe it for the analysis. If you wish, you may review the transcript of your interview for additions or corrections. The transcribed interview will contain no identifying information about you whatsoever. The audio recording will be destroyed at the completion of the study, and the transcript of the interview will be archived in a locked office for seven years.

Please refrain from using any names or identifying information of third parties during within the interview to protect your identity and the identity of others whom you discuss in the interview.

Finally, you may choose to be contacted after the data analysis has been completed to review the preliminary results from all of the interviews with the whole group of women who participate in this study.

To thank you for participating in this study, if you complete the interview, you will receive a Visa gift card worth $75.
Voluntary Participation

Your participation in the study is strictly voluntary. You can decline to answer some of the questions or withdraw your consent at any time. You may experience mild distress during the interview as you speak about your experiences during the relationship. At the conclusion of the interview, I will provide you with a list of counseling resources in the local area for survivors of psychological control, the college counseling center and a community counseling center if you would like the space to further process your experience and any related distress.

Confidentiality

Your participation in the study is also confidential. Your name will not appear on the demographic questionnaire or on any of the interview documents. A code number will be assigned so that I can match your demographic questionnaire with the transcribed interview.

The research results may include quotations from your interview, but these will have with no potentially identifying information whatsoever.

If you decide to review the transcript and the preliminary results, I will contact you through email. Your contact information will be saved on a secure drive.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board, and officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records. All collected data will be available only to me, the research team of 2 other graduate students and my advisor. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office for a period of seven years.

Additional Information

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact me at lbarbaro@albany.edu (xxx=xxx=xxx) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Myrna Friedlander, in the Department of Education and Counseling Psychology at the University at Albany at (518) 442-5049 or mfriedlander@albany.edu.

Research at the University Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office of Regulatory & Research Compliance at 1-866-857-5459 or hsconcerns@albany.edu.

Participation Agreement

By selecting “Continue” below and completing the questionnaire, you are giving consent for participation in the study, indicating that you have read this consent form and understand its content. You are also agreeing to allow audio-recording of the interview.
Appendix E

Counseling Services

Below is a list of counseling services in the area for individuals who have been in psychologically controlling relationships, along with a list of agencies that provide general counseling services

Equinox Domestic Violence Services: 518-432-7865
Unity House: 518-272-2370
YWCA: 518-374-3386
New York State Domestic Violence 24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-942-6906
University at Albany Counseling and Psychological Services Center: 518-442-5800
University at Albany Psychological Services Center: 518-442-4900