

**BETWEEN RESENTING AND UNDERSTANDING THEIR MOTHERS' TOUGH
CHOICES: YOUNG ADULTS PROCESSING CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
EXPOSURE**

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Amber Noel Dispanet

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ABSTRACT

Mothering through intimate partner violence (IPV) is difficult, complex, and impactful on both the mothers and children in the home. Millions of youth experience childhood exposure to domestic violence (CEDV) while growing up, including witnessing, overhearing, or becoming victimized during the violence. Much of what we know about the mother-child relationship in the context of CEDV comes from maternal reports, with limited insight into this critical dyadic relationship from a youth perspective. Without empirical knowledge on both maternal and child perspectives, mother-child or child-centered interventions may not be as efficacious for the participating youth. Guided by Family Systems Theory and spillover and compensatory hypotheses, I conducted a theoretical thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 25 college-attending young adults who had histories of father-mother-perpetrated CEDV on their mother-child relationship experiences while growing up through early young adulthood. The findings from this study suggest that young adults with CEDV perceive their mothers and their mother-child relationships in complex and sometimes contradictory ways that I organized into five, interconnected yet distinct themes capturing the young adults' perceptions of mother-child communication, safety planning, seeing their mothers through a positive light, seeing their mothers through a negative light, and the evolution of how they viewed their mother and their relationship over time. This study's participants had lingering resentment, frustration, and guilt alongside protective loyalty, empathy, and love towards their mothers, highlighting the complexity of IPV's impact not just on the victimized parent and child outcomes but also on mother-child relationships over time. Future empirical research should continue to amplify youth voices to better understand the impact of CEDV on their familial and other interpersonal relationships, particularly during pivotal developmental transition periods, such as young

adulthood. Future interventions and programs for mother-child dyads and youth with CEDV histories should be informed by mothers, children, and young adults' perspectives to foster better communication and strategies that promote healing and bonding among victimized dyads.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and General Information

Intimate partner violence (IPV) entails physical, psychological, and sexual violence and other forms of abuse (Ateah et al., 2019). Though men can and do experience IPV victimization, they are more likely to perpetrate violence in romantic relationships, especially when the violence is more severe and rooted in coercive control (Chiesa et al., 2018). Around 1.5 million women have experienced IPV, with a significant number of children (around 7%) witnessing IPV in the home (Randell et al., 2011; Sousa et al., 2021). Notably, there is an increased likelihood that mothers who are caring for younger children will experience IPV and abuse (Ateah et al., 2019).

Mothers victimized by IPV experience a double-edged sword when it comes to navigating decisions regarding staying, leaving, and their children's well-being. Mothering through IPV is complicated due to societal norms that often dictate how mothers are expected to care for their children and engage with their environment, while also surviving and navigating the IPV and its impact on their children (Moulding et al., 2015; Sousa et al., 2021). Society, particularly in the United States, places a strong emphasis on two-parent-headed households and the importance of fathers. These expectations may contribute to the pressure felt to stay in a violent relationship in hopes of keeping the family together to avoid disruption to the family unit. However, victimized mothers also fear that their children could be harmed if they stay or further harmed if they leave and their maritally violent husband had unsupervised visitation or shared custody (Brooks & McFarlane, 2017; Moulding et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2021). Children are ultimately a key catalyst in mothers' decisions to seek help and leave the abusive relationship. Nevertheless, many mothers view their situations as "*damned if they do*,

damned if they don't," as no matter their decision, disruption and potential harm could occur (Moulding et al., 2015; p. 256).

This study was guided by family systems theory, emphasizing the interdependence of subsystems (e.g., marital, parent-child) and two hypotheses commonly applied in the marital conflict and IPV mother-child dyad literature: the spillover and compensatory hypotheses. The *spillover hypothesis* suggests that what happens in one subsystem (e.g., marital) will spill over into another (e.g., parental), resulting in a deficit-based approach when examining mothering and the mother-child dyad (Kouros et al., 2014). Conversely, the *compensatory hypothesis* is a more strengths-based approach that emphasizes how mothers compensate in their role as parents due to conflict and IPV by investing more time, energy, and compassion. The studies to date have centered on the mother's perspective with less emphasis on the youth's perspective on mother-child relationships in the context of IPV. Without input from the child or youth's perspective, interventions tailored for mother-child dyads or IPV-exposed youth may be misaligned with the youth's needs, understandings, and goals, making them less impactful or effective. To address this gap, I qualitatively examined mother-child relationships and perceptions of mothering in the context of IPV from the understudied perspective of young adults exposed to father-mother IPV.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Background Literature

An interest in familial processes and structures ignited research throughout the 1900s and into the 1950s, leading to the emergence of systematic theoretical frameworks that shifted from solely studying individuals and whole communities to examining familial units (Baptist & Hamon, 2022). A prominent theory that emerged from this period is the Family Systems Theory (FST) (Cox & Paley, 1997; von Bertalanffy, 1968; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). FST seeks to understand how families work together, individually and holistically, while examining dynamics and interactions between subsystems and the familial unit.

Several vital assumptions and concepts guide FST. By employing a more holistic approach when examining families, scholars can better understand the complexity and adaptations that families make together (Cox & Paley, 1997). Families comprise smaller *subsystems*, and all subsystems and the family are embedded within larger *environments* and systems (i.e., *suprasystems*), such as neighborhoods and educational systems (Baptist & Hamon, 2022; Cox & Paley, 1997; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Considering that families exist in a larger environment, subsystems (marital, parental, and sibling) are created through interactions within and across the subsystems (Baptist & Hamon, 2022). Interactions within these internal and external systems affect individual family members and familial unit functioning and interaction. Individual family members learn and adapt based on observations and enactments of familial rules, *feedback*, and behaviors of other family members in an interactive, often unconscious manner. Through these interactions, family members become aware of how their actions and behaviors affect other family members, a concept derived from *interdependence*. Families are interdependent, such that one individual or subsystem's experiences, behaviors, and functioning (e.g., parents' work schedule) impact the other family members' experiences,

behaviors, and functioning (e.g., children's bedtime routine). Put differently, interdependence is the action of cause and effect, where one thing happening to one family member affects all family members. This concept illustrates how stress can impact the family system and its internal dynamics.

Within FST, two critical concepts highly impact a family's functioning and cohesion: hierarchies and boundaries. A hierarchy is best described as a structure with varying levels of power and authority in the familial unit and subsystems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). These levels are best known as *echelons*, which refer to levels that distinguish family subsystems from one another. In familial hierarchies, the parental subsystem (i.e., parental figures or parents) is the highest echelon, while the offspring subsystem (i.e., children) is the lowest echelon within the family system. According to FST, the parental subsystem should hold authority and power to set rules and expectations that the children subsystem will be expected to follow and abide by. However, families have many different hierarchical structures depending on who is in the family, their roles, the age or developmental stage of each family member, and additional cultural factors. For example, in some families, the caregiving subsystem comprises a parent and a grandparent, and they are higher in the hierarchy when compared to the children. However, in other families, a parent and an older teenager work together as a caregiving unit while raising an infant. From an FST perspective, a family's success over time requires hierarchies that give power and authority to the adults or the eldest caregivers. However, these dynamics can and should change across the lifespan.

The link between familial systems, subsystems, and the suprasystems further helps to define the boundaries parental subsystems set for the family (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). External familial boundaries delineate who is part of the family and who is not and who can

learn about familial matters occurring within the family. Internal familial boundaries pertain to the interactions and engagements, including information flow (e.g., secrets) between subsystems (Baptist & Hamon, 2022). One can think of boundaries as the spoken and unspoken rules and expectations that family members follow when interacting within and outside the family. Boundaries permit permeability within families, allowing flexibility in boundaries set to fit each family's specific standards. Familial boundaries fall on a continuum from entirely open boundaries (high permeability) to completely closed boundaries (low permeability). FST posits that flexible boundaries are ideal for family functioning, not too permeable or rigid yet also not entirely porous (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). However, the degree to which boundaries are permeable and flexible is family specific.

FST is a guiding theory for understanding why violence exists within families, but my proposed application is different from this focus. I chose FST as a guiding theoretical framework for this proposed study because of its emphasis on family subsystems, interdependence, and how families operate according to hierarchies and boundaries, all of which are valuable concepts when examining mother-child relationships in the context of childhood exposure to domestic violence (CEDV). By analyzing the familial unit holistically, and in this study, the mother-child subsystem, this study can contribute to enhancements of existing interventions as we create new interventions that emphasize the child's perspective of this complicated dyad.

When applied to the family violence literature and the relationship between victimized mothers and their children, two FST-derived hypotheses are regularly examined or grounded in this literature: *the spillover hypothesis* and the *compensatory hypothesis*. In this thesis, I explored how both the spillover and compensatory hypotheses played out in the interactions with and perceptions of victimized mothers from the perspective of their young adult children. In the

following sections, I detail how these hypotheses have been applied explicitly and implicitly in the CEDV literature in the context of the mother-child dyad.

Spillover and Compensatory Hypotheses in the Context of CEDV

Spillover and compensatory hypotheses help scholars understand the effects of parental interactions on the parent-child subsystems or the child individually. Each hypothesis emphasizes the effects of IPV and familial violence on the children in the home. The *spillover hypothesis* tends to emphasize the negative impacts of IPV on children and the mother-child dyad. In contrast, the *compensatory hypothesis* emphasizes a strengths-based approach to mothering through IPV. These hypotheses have been studied in the context of sociological theories (Meyer et al., 2024), marital conflict and violence (Kopystyanska et al., 2022; Sherill et al., 2017), family stress and emotions (Nelson et al., 2009), and triadic and dyadic systems in the familial context (Stroud et al., 2011). More recently, these hypotheses have been examined explicitly and implicitly in the context of the mother-child dyad and IPV (e.g., Bruhl et al., 2023; Gao & Cummings, 2019; Letourneau et al., 2013; Pu & Rodriguez, 2021). In this review, I synthesize what is known about these hypotheses specific to the mother-child dyad in IPV contexts but also from research studies examining marital conflict, a distinct yet relevant and adjacent body of literature.

Spillover Hypothesis

The *spillover hypothesis* refers to the expectation that the interactions between one subsystem (e.g., marital subsystem) will spill over emotionally and behaviorally into another subsystem (e.g., parent-child subsystem) (Kouros et al., 2014). This spillover is due to the interdependence of the marital and parental subsystems, such that when conflict or tension arises in one subsystem, the spillover hypothesis predicts it will *spill over* into the other subsystems.

Specifically, this occurs because the conflict and violence present in the home either (1) cause marital or co-parental figures to be hostile with one another, leading to less patience and irritability in their parental-child relationship, or (2) the conflict and violence causes difficulties navigating emotions, leading to less engagement in high-quality parenting. For example, a victimized parent may react harshly to a child making a developmentally normative request (e.g., an afternoon snack). However, the parents' cortisol levels are elevated from the IPV, leading them to react harshly and punitively towards the child (Gao & Cummings, 2019; Renner, 2021; Sherill et al., 2007). Alternatively, victimized parents in the home may have a difficult time engaging in positive play with their child after an argument with their spouse, ultimately affecting the parent-child relationship.

Many scholars have examined the impact of the spillover hypothesis on marital relationships and parent-child relationships in the context of conflict, finding substantial support for the spillover of marital conflict into parent-child conflict and parental irritability (Gao & Cummings, 2019; Kopystynska et al., 2022; Sherill et al., 2017). Mothers are often responsible for caretaking and child responsibilities even amidst surviving IPV in the home (Showalter et al., 2022). Research suggests that if a mother is emotionally unavailable due to IPV or conflict, or due to the impacts of the IPV on their mental health, the IPV or conflict may spill over into her role as a mother (Kopystynska et al., 2022; Pu & Rodriguez, 2021). The spillover is likely driven by trauma or stress responses from the IPV, increasing mothers' risk of having less patience, lower tolerance, and greater mental health conflict. Victimized mothers experiencing depression report that their depressive symptoms related to the IPV negatively impact their mother-child relationship (Letourneau et al., 2013; Renner, 2021; Sousa et al., 2021). When the IPV is more severe, positive parenting strategies are underutilized, negatively impacting parents' and

children's physical and mental health (Kopystynska et al., 2022; Renner, 2021). In more severe and coercive IPV contexts, children are used as a tool of abuse by the abuser to manipulate and control the mother, demonstrating a direct way in which IPV spills over into mother-child relationships (Showalter et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2021).

Compensatory Hypothesis

The compensatory hypothesis refers to how a parent or subsystem compensates for difficulties in one subsystem (e.g., marital subsystem) by devoting more time, energy, and compassion towards another subsystem (e.g., parent-child subsystem) to make up for difficulties arising in the other subsystem. Simply put, a parent experiencing marital conflict may compensate for the tension a child is experiencing by taking them on more adventures and devoting more one-on-one time to them than they would have otherwise. This hypothesis offers a more positive or strengths-based approach to understanding how parents support their children despite IPV.

The compensatory hypothesis is less commonly detailed in the CEDV and marital conflict literature when compared to the spillover hypothesis and its adverse effects on parenting and family relationships (Kopystynska et al., 2022). However, this hypothesis offers a positive approach to parenting and applies to many facets of families beyond maternal bonding in the presence of IPV. In a systematic review, Kopystynska et al. (2022) found that compensation is more common for mothers than for fathers due to how women are socialized to emphasize caregiving, self-sacrifice, nurturance, and building intimacy, which is then applied in an IPV context to try to make up for the violence that previously occurred. Mothers were known to distinguish between their roles as a mother and spouse, while fathers often utilized harsh discipline practices because of the violence (i.e., not compensating; Kopystynska et al., 2022).

Ultimately, the levels of IPV victimization predict the levels of compensation mothers may engage in (i.e., the higher levels of victimization indicated higher levels of compensation in mother-child dyads), relying on parental warmth and sensitive parenting (Kopystynska et al., 2021; Nelson et al., 2009).

Researchers have found substantial support for compensation due to marital conflict, which positively affects the parent-child relationship (Kopystynska et al., 2021; Sousa et al., 2021). In a study of 51 mother-infant dyads, Letourneau et al. (2013) found that the hostile home environment created by the IPV perpetrator left mothers feeling careful and conscious about their parenting behaviors, ultimately leaving them to "feel robbed of that part of their child's life (Letourneau et al., 2013; p. 579)." Mothers often feel responsible for marital conflict. As a result of lacking support in marital relationships, mothers seek a relationship that relies on sources of support and love they can control, allowing for reciprocal feelings that promote love and support in the mother-child dyad amid violence (Kopystynska et al., 2022; Gao & Cummings, 2019). Compensation in the mother-child dyad can be viewed as a means to compensate for and offset the CEDV that had previously occurred, as IPV often disrupts mother-child relationships (Letourneau et al., 2013; Sousa et al., 2021). The intentionality of caregiving in mother-child relationships supports the compensatory hypothesis, as mothers have previously and continue to play a significant role in child rearing (Gao & Cummings, 2019).

Interestingly, gender differences are evident when engaging in compensation as a form of love, support, and nurturing, as parents, particularly mothers, exhibit varying levels of compensation in the parent-child relationship depending on the level of marital conflict (Letourneau et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2009). Research has indicated that mothers may begin compensating based on their child's understanding of their parents and their relationship

(Kopystynska et al., 2022). Therefore, younger children may receive less compensation than older children who are experiencing CEDV and are aware of the IPV occurring within the home. This engagement in compensation by mothers has led to a stronger, healthier relationship between the mother-child dyad (Letourneau et al., 2013).

However, the presence of marital conflict can produce adverse effects, causing depressive symptoms in mothers (Kopystynska et al., 2021; Kouros et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2009) and the socialization of emotions in children, leading to difficulties in emotion regulation (Nelson et al., 2009), then resulting in compensation to occur. Much like the spillover hypothesis, research applying the compensatory hypothesis finds support for the impact of IPV victimization on maternal depression and depressive symptoms (Nelson et al., 2009). However, in contrast, they find that mothers with heightened depressive symptoms compensated by showing greater support and love towards their children. Mothers who exhibited depressive symptoms were more likely to have a decreased marital quality relationship but an increased positive response in parent-child interactions and their relationship entirely (Nelson et al., 2009; Kouros et al., 2014). More specifically, maternal depression predicted positive marital relationship quality and father-child relationship, while father depression predicted negative marital quality and mother-child relationships (Kopystynska et al., 2021). In a daily diary study with 203 heterosexual couples and their children, Kouros et al. (2014) reported that a mother's depressive symptoms are primarily linked to marital quality, which in turn parent-child relationship impacts, leading mothers to compensate for their relationship with the child rather than spillover. This led to an increase in the quality of mother-child relationships.

The Current Study

The current study applied FST with a focus on spillover and compensatory hypotheses to qualitatively examine youth perceptions of their father-to-mother-perpetrated IPV and the mother-child dyad. This study contributed to the CEDV and violence literature by qualitatively examining how CEDV impacted young adult children's perception of their mothers and their mother-child relationships, as their voices and perspectives have been missing from the IPV literature to date. Implications for clinical and practical use are present, especially as youth share their stories – we can better inform prevention and intervention strategies and resources. The current study is guided by an overarching research question: How do young adults with histories of CEDV perceive their mothers, the mother-child relationship, and mothering?

Chapter 3: Materials and Methods

Methods

The current study derives from a larger qualitative project examining young adults and their experiences with CEDV (Young Adults Live and Learn (Project; Haselschwerdt et al., 2019). At a public state university in the southeastern United States, twenty-five participants were interviewed about their personal experiences with CEDV. The initial Y'ALL project team included a faculty member, two graduate students, and two undergraduates. Recruitment took place from September 2014 to March 2015, utilizing various methods, including campus fliers and newspapers, emails sent to faculty, in-class announcements, word-of-mouth, and social media (e.g., Facebook and X, formerly Twitter). To be eligible to participate in the study, participants must:

1. Have been between the ages of 19-25 years old,
2. Had a father or father-like-figure physically hurt their mother more than once (e.g., pushed/shoved with force, slapped, punched, kicked, or beat up) and
3. Have parents who are still married or had separated and divorced shortly after the participants' 13th birthday.

During recruitment, the majority of participants were 19 years old. However, the participation age threshold was changed to 18 after beginning interviews. In the state where this study was conducted, 19 was historically the age of majority, but this shifted to 18 during the beginning of the study. After beginning recruitment, eligibility criteria were expanded to include participants whose parents separated after their eighth birthday. This change was altered because the participants' earliest recollection of their CEDV experiences was vivid around this age.

Sample

After recruitment, interested participants contacted the research team via email or telephone ($n = 41$) and underwent an eligibility screening process. The results of the eligibility screening indicated that 27 young adults were eligible and 12 were ineligible due to factors including parents who had separated or divorced earlier in life, not having been exposed to IPV, or not meeting the age criteria. After notifying participants of eligibility, two participants did not respond, resulting in a final sample of 25 participants.

The participants were primarily women ($n = 23$) and, on average, 20 years old ($M = 20.48$ years, $SD = 1.46$ years). This sample was predominantly composed of White individuals ($n = 13$) and African American/Black individuals ($n = 7$). Other participants identified as biracial or bi-ethnic (e.g., Black and White, Latiné and White; $n = 3$), Latino/Hispanic ($n = 1$), or Asian/Asian American ($n = 1$). Within the sample, participants reported about maritally violent biological fathers ($n = 17$). However, eight participants recalled their stepfathers, who acted as their father figure, being a crucial part of their childhood and upbringing. When interviews occurred, 11 mothers were married to the participants' fathers, 12 were divorced, and two were separated. Participants grew up in rural ($n = 9$), urban ($n = 7$), and suburban ($n = 9$) areas. Half of the participants recalled receiving at least one type of public assistance (e.g., free or reduced-cost lunch) during their childhood or adolescence.

To provide context into the participants CEDV experiences, all young adults were exposed to at least some father-to-mother physical violence. Still, there were variations in the frequency and severity of the physical violence they were exposed to as well as the context in which the violence occurred, including non-physical abuse tactics. All participants experienced CEDV. Most were exposed directly ($n = 22$), seeing or overhearing discrete acts of physical

violence that their father perpetrated against their fathers. Similarly, most participants ($n = 21$) were also exposed indirectly, meaning that they saw the initial effects of the violence, such as injuries to their mother, or they experienced the aftermath, such as their father getting arrested or moving out of the house with their mom. For most ($n = 16$), the physical violence they were exposed to was severe, including acts such as punching, kicking, “beating up,” slamming against walls, dragging down halls, using weapons, and choking, and frequent ($n = 9$), referring to violence that occurred daily, weekly, or monthly. Participants also discussed the extent to which their CEDV experiences were rooted in father-perpetrated coercive control. Coercive control “Involves the repetitive use of tactics to regulate and dominate an intimate partner’s daily life and restrict their liberties” (Hardesty et al., 2015, p. 2). Half of the participants were categorized as having been exposed to no or low levels of coercive control, and fifteen participants were categorized as having been exposed to moderate or high levels of coercive control. These categorizations were made based on participants’ recollections of their mothers experiencing financial abuse, psychological abuse, surveillance, and isolation, and fathers’ weaponization of children as tools of abuse.

Procedure

The faculty researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board and a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. Before the interviews took place, participants completed written informed consent forms, and approval for audio recording was obtained through their verbal consent. A semi-structured interview protocol was created, mainly focusing on overall family dynamics, violence and abuse, and other interpersonal relationship experiences (e.g., peers and formal support) (see Appendix A). Following grounded theory methods, broad questions were utilized, allowing interviewers to probe and elaborate on

experiences (Charmaz, 2014). Mothers and mother-child relationships emerged organically throughout the interviews, so all the interviews were read and analyzed for this study. However, a few of the CEDV and mother-specific questions elicited the most relevant text for analysis:

- Moms who experience abuse often think or hope their children don't know about, see, or hear the physical abuse but research shows children and adolescents are often very aware of the abuse. Can you tell me about your experiences (and the experiences of your siblings if relevant) of witnessing or overhearing abuse towards your mom?
- Some women who experience abuse respond by using violence to defend themselves or protect their children, whereas others use violence against their partner because they are angry with them or want to take control of the situation. How does your mom's behavior align with what I just read? (Or, can you tell me about a time when your mother used acts of physical violence or other abusive acts towards her partner? *(If so, did she initiate or did he, what was her motivation for her use of violence; common? infrequent)*)
- As I mentioned in an earlier question, some mom's feel like should keep the violence and abuse a secret from their children to protect them from knowing, but other moms talk with their children and adolescents about their partner's behavior. How would you describe your communication with your mother about the abuse she experienced?

Interviews were conducted in a private room on campus and lasted 48 to 142 minutes ($M = 86$ minutes, $SD = 26$ minutes). There were two additional interviews due to follow-up and unintentionally missing questions in their first interview – these interviews were between 12 and 24 minutes. Participants were compensated with \$25 and given a resource list, including on-campus, local, and national resources. Audio recordings underwent transcription, partial coding utilizing MAXQDA (a qualitative software), and analyzation through a constant comparative

analytical approach (Charmaz, 2014). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms, and other identifying factors (e.g., specific town names) were further de-identified by a research team member. This did not affect the meanings of quotes, as it was conducted as a measure of protection in anonymity and confidentiality. All interview transcripts will be uploaded into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative analysis software supported by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville OIT office.

Data Analysis

This research project aimed to gain a deeper understanding of young adults' perceptions of their mother and their mother-child relationship in the context of father-perpetrated CEDV. I followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step theoretical thematic analysis method to identify patterns within the data while recognizing themes that emerged both across and within the data. Theoretical thematic analysis is driven by theoretical interests, often fostering research questions that situate specific theoretical frameworks within a particular context (e.g., family systems theory and spillover and compensatory hypotheses; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Theoretical thematic analysis is well suited for analyzing qualitative data, as it is flexible and allows for moving back and forth between the phases, which is how I analyzed this data. However, for readability, I describe my data analysis process linearly. I also pulled in constructivist grounded theory strategies including initial and focused coding and memoing (Charmaz, 2024).

In phase one, I began familiarizing myself with the data by reading the transcript and simultaneously listening to the audio recordings for the first four participants before shifting to reading only. While reading the transcripts, I began initial coding, noting mothering or mother-child specific stories and incidents. These later became my initial codes to start the codebook. After familiarizing myself with each interview, I also wrote in-depth summary memos detailing

background information for each participant, specific violence experiences recalled, mother-child relationships, and how it changed over time. These memos also included my interpretations and perceptions of the participants' experiences described in the interview. By engaging in summary memo writing, I was able to later reference specific situations and experiences from participants without having to re-read the entire transcript. My thesis chair reviewed and added details or clarifying questions to these early memos; we then discussed the memos and any adjustments during weekly meetings. I continued the in-depth summary memoing but narrowed my focus solely on mothering and mother-child relationships as time went on. So, even though this is a Phase 1 task, it carried on throughout coding, theme creation, revision, and writing, up to participant 19 of 25. My thesis advisor had previously created detailed summary memos for all interviews, so I had access to memos 20-25.

In Phase 2, I began generating initial code. In collaboration with my thesis advisor, we created initial codes based on the first four interviews, resulting in 74 codes that I added to a codebook. The final version is attached as Appendix B. We reviewed these codes and decided that it would be best to merge some of them to form a single code. For example, there were two codes related to moving away (*'moving away ruptured mother-child relationship'* and *'moving away benefited mother-child relationship'*). Together, we decided to make the code *'moving away,'* capturing the different trajectories this code may entail in the definition. At this stage, we also removed any codes that did not contribute to our understanding of this specific thesis project, resulting in the modification or deletion of 43 codes, and thus a codebook with 39 codes remained. At this stage, I familiarized myself with ATLAS.ti. In this qualitative data analysis software, I created a codebook and began coding the interviews based on it within the software to facilitate easier sorting, analysis, and theme generation. However, this codebook continued to

be revised as we analyzed subsequent interviews. For example, after P12, we added six new codes based on our discussion and new findings that had not been accounted for before, including '*mom as disciplinarian*,' '*safety planning*,' '*not wanting to end up like mom*,' '*favoring dad over mom*,' '*mom blaming child*,' and '*partnering with mom*.' I did not go back and recode the previous transcripts to account for these changes, except in one incident. I added one final code, '*child-guilt*,' towards the end of data analysis, which was not coded in any of the previous transcripts either.

Following the first two phases of theoretical thematic analysis, I shifted to searching for themes within the codebook and my summary memos (phase three). During a weekly meeting, my thesis chair and I created a Word document that compiled patterns and themes in the data, allowing us to identify relationships between codes and begin to depict how the codes connected. We created seven initial themes: (1) *Negative Things Mom Did to Child and Partner*, (2) *Things Mom Didn't Do*, (3) *Negative Feelings/Perceptions Towards Mom*, (4) *Positive Perceptions of Mom and Mother-Child Relationship*, (5) *Safety Planning – Mom's Actions*, (6) *Safety Planning – Mom and Child Together Actions*, and (7) *Influencing Factors*. Each code was assigned to a theme except for one. For example, *leaving or threatening to leave* and *removing children from the home* were separate codes that we then moved under the umbrella theme of Safety Planning Actions for Mom.

Throughout this process, we reviewed (phase four) and named and defined (phase five) the themes, although phases four and five were iterative, such that we named, defined, and I wrote and described them, then also returned to reviewing. This process continued through writing the final Findings section of this thesis. To begin the writing process, I started with the subthemes that were collapsed under the larger umbrella theme, "*Positive Perceptions of Mom*

and Mother-Child Relationship.” This kind of writing is referred to as theoretical or topical memoing (Charmaz, 2024). For each subtheme, I relied on ATLAS.ti and my summary memos, synthesizing the data I coded for each participant and keeping track of potentially useful quotes to illustrate each subtheme. I kept track of which participant described each perception or experience in a series of tables that ultimately culminated in a final table (see Figure 1). Through this writing process, my thesis chair and I met to discuss the content within each subtheme, as well as to determine whether certain subthemes fit better under other umbrella themes. For example, *talking about abuse* was initially categorized under the theme, *"Positive Perceptions of Mom and Mother-Child Relationship."* However, we thought it would be a better fit under *Safety Planning* before ultimately moving out as a theme of its own, as it cuts across nearly all of the subthemes and seemingly strongly impacted the young adults’ perceptions.

This iterative process, moving between coding, summary memos, tables, and topical and theoretical memos, continued until I completed a full draft of the findings depicting the resulting 5 themes and 22 subthemes: (1) *Communication About Violence and Abuse*, (2) *Safety Planning Alone and With Mothers* (‘partnering with mom,’ ‘protecting and shielding their mom,’ ‘seeking help,’ and ‘threatening to leave and leaving the home’), (3) *Seeing Their Mothers Through a Positive Light* (‘providing all they could,’ ‘breadwinning moms,’ ‘doing their best for mom,’ ‘spending time with mom,’ ‘empathizing with mom,’ and ‘recognizing the signs of DV and/or abuse in children’s relationships’), (4) *Seeing Their Mothers Through a Negative Light* (‘spiraling,’ ‘caretaking role reversal,’ ‘not fighting back and protecting the children,’ ‘favoring dad,’ ‘mom blaming child,’ ‘lacking warmth and compassion,’ ‘disciplinarian and/or abuse mom,’ and ‘driving a wedge’), and (5) *Changing Perceptions of Mother-Child Relationship Over Time* (‘moving away,’ ‘not responsible for their mom,’ ‘wishing mom would leave dad,’ and

'child-guilt'). Tables 2-5, depicting the themes by participants, are provided in the Appendices of this theses. The Findings section below presents the finalized analysis, utilizing the above-mentioned themes and subthemes, and participant quotes to foster a deeper understanding of their experiences and mother-child relationships.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires trustworthiness to maintain rigor and credibility. It is vital to maintain trustworthiness throughout a qualitative project to demonstrate how the findings are supported by evidence and can be trusted as accurate reflections of participants' beliefs and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I maintained trustworthiness in various ways. I engaged in memo writing, both while analyzing the data and diagramming the data. This allowed me to document the participants' experiences and perceptions, as well as my perceptions and biases that may have needed to be disclosed and discussed with my thesis advisor. I also kept a methodological memo, documenting shifts and changes throughout the data analysis process that ultimately serves as an audit trail regarding the decisions we made and why we made them.

Tabling also helped me visualize the strategies that participants and their mothers employed when writing coding memos, ensuring I was writing about collective experiences rather than allowing one exciting example to skew my perception of how salient or relevant specific experiences were based on the collected data. The memos and tables were further triangulated through coding and ATLAS.ti, allowing me to analyze the data using multiple tools and ensure that my interpretations were consistent with the data. This was further strengthened through weekly meetings with my thesis chair, who was particularly involved in early memoing and coding, and then actively involved in collapsing subthemes under umbrella themes and editing writing as the memos shifted into the final product. Finally, I utilized direct quotes from

participants to ensure that themes and strategies followed the participants' experiences and perceptions as closely as possible.

Chapter 4: Findings

The young adults with CEDV in this study perceived their mother and their relationship with their mother in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. In this opening section, I summarize the findings, and in subsequent sections, I provide descriptions and quotes as examples of the themes identified in this thesis.

Communication between mothers and their children varied across participants and over time, yielding differing perspectives. While some recalled occasional or frequent discussions regarding IPV, others recalled very little or less communication than they preferred. For those with less mother-child communication, participants sometimes found out about the IPV unintentionally, through conversations with other family members, or when overhearing verbal arguments between parents about the IPV. Mother-child dyads in greater conversation were often working together to navigate their complex circumstances.

While growing up, many participants partnered with their mothers for safety planning purposes, protecting their mothers and siblings, and intervening at times. Mothers were described as actively taking safety planning steps, including removing the kids from violence, moving the kids out of the home, leaving or threatening to leave the relationship, and seeking help for themselves and their family. The young adults often reflected on their mothers in both positive and negative lights, but some leaned more positively or more negatively in their perceptions. When they saw their mothers in a positive light, they were inspired to do their best for them, appreciating how their mothers helped them see red flags for dating violence, enjoying spending time with them, and acknowledging how their mothers, while being victimized, were still the family breadwinner and often operating as single or solo parent, doing the best they could. These

positive perceptions led to discussions of empathy for the difficult situation their mothers were in due to their father's violence and abuse.

Participants also viewed their mothers in a negative light, as they had to assume a caretaking role, providing both instrumental and emotional support to their mothers and siblings. They also expressed frustration that their mothers did not fight back or protect them as they wanted. In some instances, young adults favored their dad over their mother because they blamed their mother for the CEDV, recalled the mothers as the primary disciplinarian or lacking warmth, and in a few situations, the mothers were abusive towards them. In other instances, young adults recalled how their mothers drove a wedge between them and their fathers, which they perceived as a negative measure, rather than as a potentially protective one taken by the mothers.

Although many young adults had positive relationships with their mothers at the time of the interview, some discussed how moving away created a mostly positive space, allowing them to feel less burdened and responsible for their mothers but also giving space to create healthier boundaries as they navigated a new relationship with their mothers in young adulthood. Some young adults expressed frustration that their parents had not divorced, even if they were separated, as well as lingering resentment and confusion as to why their mothers remained in the relationship. For some, lingering guilt, including that they were away and could not protect their mothers, self-blame, worry, and the desire not to end up like their mother, alongside empathy for them, were all expressed, with participants juggling these emotions simultaneously. **Figure 1** illustrates the four key themes and their corresponding subthemes, which I will detail in the remainder of this chapter. Mother-child communication about the IPV is not in this table, as the young adults' experiences and perceptions of communication were embedded throughout these four themes.

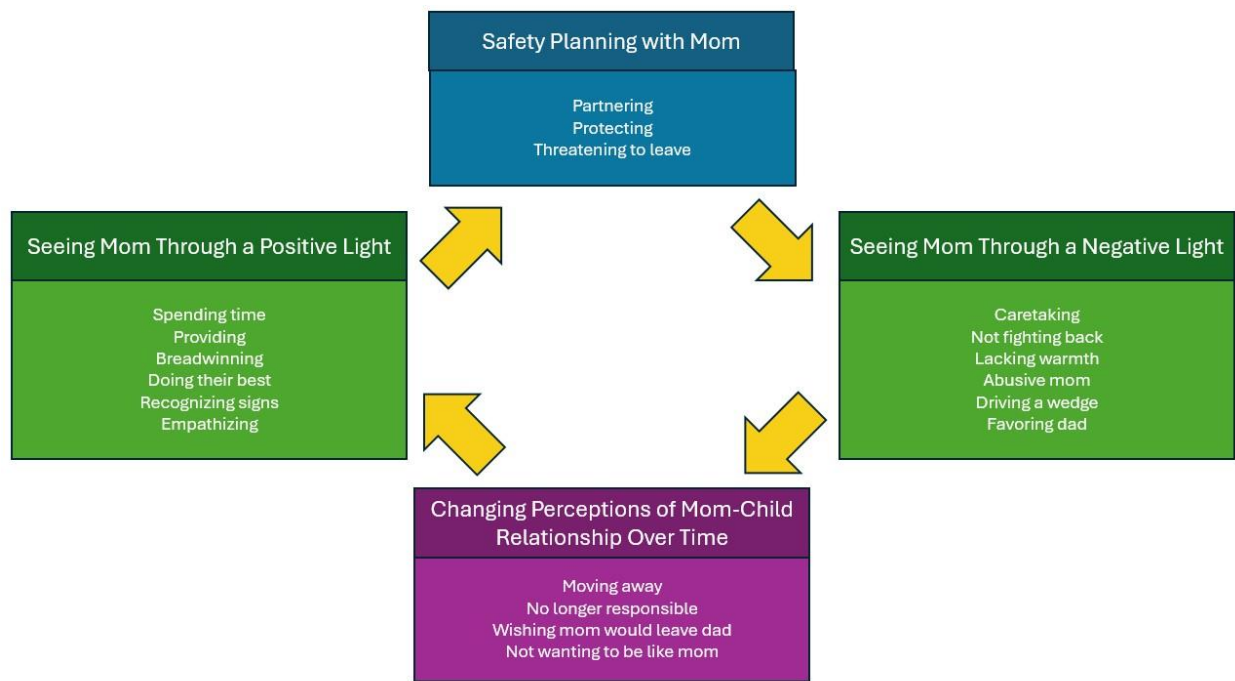


Figure 1: *Mother-Child Relationship Themes*

Communication about Violence and Abuse

Mother-child CEDV communication varied in depth, frequency, timing, intentions, and participant perceptions of their communication. For example, mothers varied in how, when, and why they shared information, depending on specific situations, the young adults' age at the time, their location, and their mental and emotional well-being. The mothers' comfort level often drove communication and disclosure decisions. Although communication is relevant to all sections of this thesis, I focus specifically on how young adults recalled their communication with their mothers, or lack thereof, over time, and how it impacted their relationship with them.

Mothers shared varying degrees of information depending on the young adults' age and developmental readiness. Some participants expressed that their mother frequently withheld specific information related to IPV until they were older. Sometimes, mothers used moving out or going to college as a threshold of when they began disclosing to their young adult children. Interestingly, young adults seemed to use this same time frame as a threshold of when to begin asking questions and bring up the DV. Many young adults often avoided conversations containing content and explanations of abuse, both before and after the abuse had occurred. Some mentioned they'd talk to their moms if she brought it up but didn't desire to have a conversation with her regarding her experiences. Occasionally, participants would learn about the contents of the abuse, often the reasons, through hearing verbal arguments between her parents, but her mother never shared this information with her. Some participants recalled having conversations about their abuse and their mothers' safety with their siblings but not talking to their mothers about it. For some participants, mothers spoke about violence indirectly, but not as a conversation topic; it was more related to their safety. Sarah explained:

She would always apologize the next day for him yelling at her and stuff like that. But we never really talked about how it wasn't okay or how he needed help or something like

that. Like, that [type of discussion] didn't really start until I was in my later years in high school. And then, we actually started to communicate about DV.

Thus, communication and disclosures to the young adults changed over time and varied, such that some moms preferred regular and consistent communication, while others preferred sharing little to no information about the abuse. Participants recalled learning about the types of abuse their mother was experiencing, specific situations, and behaviors their father adopted when he was abusing their mother. Some mothers shared details about their father's environment when he grew up and what they thought led to his decision to harm her. Some young adults recalled how their mothers shared their plans to leave the marriage as well as the burden they carried throughout the abusive marriage. After the fact, some young adults recalled their mothers using their disclosures as an opportunity to share how healthy relationships function rather than dwelling on the negative actions and behaviors perpetrated by the participants' fathers.

In addition to when they disclosed, mothers were also intentional about whom they chose to disclose to. Based on the participants' understanding, some mothers disclosed information to their young adult child but not to other siblings or disclosed to their siblings but not to them at various points in their lives. For example, despite being reticent to talk to her about the DV, Ellie's mom discussed it with her but not with her younger sister:

Well, she started being a lot more open with me, not so much my younger sister. . . She started talking to me about it, and she would be like "I know I shouldn't talk to you about this" or whatever, but... I don't know. I was old enough to where I knew what was going on, and she felt like it was better to let me know than for me to just... I don't know, sit there and know what was going on [but never discuss it].

Some young adults recalled incidents and situations in which they would learn about the abuse and contents of verbal abuse through their exposure to it and not through additional conversations with their mother. When the young adults were aware of the details of IPV, some never felt compelled to discuss it with their mothers, whereas others directly spoke to their

mothers about what they had seen, leading to more open dialogue and shared safety planning. For example, once Taylor's mother pointed out her father's coercive controlling behaviors to Taylor, she became more aware of the abuse:

It was just kind of like, her time, her attention... he just had to be in control. And like, I didn't really notice it at first, but once my mom started to point it out, once she didn't have a car, I kind of picked up on it. I was like, "Oh, that's what's happening."

At the time of the interview, some participants had not talked to their mothers much about the DV, but for differing reasons. Some mother-child dyads never talked about the DV beforehand at all, whereas others did but didn't over time, and the young adults did not want to bring it up. Rebecca provided an example of the first communication theme:

We haven't really ever talked to her about [DV in the past] . . . Well, when I first heard about this [study], I talked to her about it . . . She thought it is a really good idea for me to talk about it. She helped me answer the questions because you like emailed me questions that I had to answer and I was like, "This is me, right?" And she was like, "Yeah, that was us." Then I would ask her when they got separated and when they divorced. She didn't really want to like go into depth about it. She just answered what I asked. The questions and stuff. She thought it was a good idea for me to sit down and talk about it because I had never really sat down and talked about it. Ever.

In contrast, though Jasmine and her mom discussed the DV while she was growing up, she had unanswered questions but chose not to ask them because she didn't want her mom to feel bad for their life circumstances:

Yeah, I mean we talk about it somewhat, but it's not like... I don't know. It is hard to explain to someone that they kind of ruined their kids in a way, you know, with what they had going on cause now my mom is completely different from who she was then and so it's like I would be guilt tripping her if I brought it up even though talking about it would make me feel better. So, I try not to go too far into detail about how I really feel about what happened because it makes her feel bad, and then I feel bad.

Young adults expressed a range of emotions and perceptions about their mothers' disclosure decisions and mother-child communication about the DV. While some young adults voiced anger and frustration with their mother for disclosing abuse to them, especially when they

were younger, others preferred to avoid these conversations altogether, even when opportunities arose. Some young adults questioned their mother's intentions in sharing about the DV, wondering why they told them some things but not others, and observing their mothers' withholding emotions or details that the young adults saw firsthand. London explained:

We would talk, but I feel like she would hold a lot of stuff in, and she always tried to like keep her emotions hidden. I felt like she never wanted me to see her cry really or see her down about [the DV] because she didn't want [her emotions] to rub off on me. But there were times that she would cry to me and stuff. She would she would talk to me about most of the stuff, but I still feel like there is still stuff I don't know to this day and I probably won't now.

Safety Planning Alone and With Mothers

Safety planning was carried out by some mothers individually to ensure their safety and that of their children, while others preferred to partner with their children. In some instances, safety planning strategies were carried out solely by the young adult. The goal of safety planning was to create a safer environment for mothers and their children. Sometimes these were explicitly laid out collaborative decisions, whereas in other instances, decisions were made on the fly as violence erupted or escalated. In this section, I describe key safety planning strategies, including partnering with the mother, protecting or shielding the mother, seeking help, and threatening to leave or actually leaving.

Partnering with mom. Young adults and their mothers partnered or collaborated to strive for or maintain safety throughout CEDV. Eight participants described how they partnered with their mothers in response to CEDV to support individual family members or the family throughout their lives. Mothers and their children were secretive with those outside the family but not with one another. These dyads maintained an open line of communication, enabling them to collaborate and improve their lives together. Keeping secrets from the father became second nature; some secrets were related to CEDV safety planning purposes, and others were for

protecting the young adult or associated with the marital relationship. Mothers often picked one child to disclose the abuse to, most often the older sibling or daughter.

Safety planning, both preceding and during physical and non-physical abuse towards mothers, was often carried out together. Participants notified their mothers if they saw any suspicious activity from their fathers, and they worked together to resolve the issue. Mothers were purposeful in their attempts at safety planning, hiding recorders to record abusive interactions and hiding money for a future escape to ensure they would have money when they decided to leave. Children in the home helped their mothers make leaving plans, helped pack up their belongings, and offered to be witnesses if violence escalated.

When violence escalated, some dyads involved law enforcement together or alone after agreeing it was the best decision. Taylor described how she partnered with her mother to call the police:

She looked at me and was like, “Call the cops.” And I was like, “Are you sure? Because when you do that, they are actually going to come.” It becomes real when that happens. And I went outside to call the cops . . . I started packing a bag to stay at my best friend’s house because I was not going to stay there that night, and then my mom came upstairs, and she was like “The cops are going to come, this is what you need to do. Just be calm. It might get intense, but just be calm. Tell them what happened, be honest” and whatever. So, I packed up, and then cops came in, and they sat me in one room, my stepdad in a room across from it, so like I could see him, and took my mom to like, the kitchen, and we had to tell them what happened and all that stuff.

Beyond partnering around violent incidents, the young adults described how they partnered with their mother to take care of each other without their father’s help or knowledge, or in response to non-physical abuse tactics such as financial abuse. Young adults recalled taking them for medical and mental health care and informing their mother that their father was cheating, which resulted in confronting the father together. Participants were quick to offer their mom a helping hand, either lending their vehicle or money to help their mother when their father

was withholding necessities from the mother. In one mother-child dyad, Mary Beth and her mother opened a bank account, cosigned by both, in case their father ever closed the bank accounts to withhold money from their mother, which eventually did happen. Due to their partnership, Mary Beth had money for college that her father could not access or take away.

Similarly, mothers sent money to children without their fathers' knowledge. Joshua explained:

Well, my mom would try to keep the peace, but obviously in trying to do that, she would keep secrets, like I said, about what she was doing with the money, like, sending me money in college, like I don't think he was even aware that she was supporting me in college.

Protecting and shielding their mom. Protecting and shielding their mother related to but different from partnering, as these were actions taken by the young adult independent from their mother. Fourteen participants verbally or physically intervened to shield or defend their mothers from their fathers. Young adults described their decisions as more instinctual versus required or expected. Participants were strategic in their protection of their mothers by yelling, physically separating mothers from their fathers, defending their mothers, and refusing a relationship with their fathers. In some instances, these tactics were successful as they resulted the violence stopping or de-escalating. Elizabeth explained:

He knows that like, frankly he can get away with doing a lot more to mom because she won't fight back; she won't call the police a lot of times. She won't do a lot of things that would give him repercussions, but he knows that I have no problem doing that myself. So, I mean I feel like I don't have a reason not to intervene.

Participants who felt more comfortable intervening in abusive situations often jumped in and screamed at their fathers. Some cried to get his attention. Many participants moved their mother out of harm's way, especially when their father was targeting her. In some cases, participants and their siblings attempted to distract and direct the abuse toward them to protect their mother and allow her a chance to breathe. They also independently sought help (e.g., law

enforcement) if the father threatened their mother. Allison was exposed to bidirectional violence such that her mother and father were violent towards each other, and her mother was sometimes violent towards her. She explained how she still shielded her mother if her father was violent towards her:

If it's one of those things where if I pull out a gun and get off my mother and you don't, I'm going to shoot you. Like, I suggest you move. I would intervene if need be, but it would also be one of those things that while I am intervening, I'm on the phone with the police, you know, type of deal.

Some participants preferred intervening more verbally or more discreetly, trying to avoid an uproar and make the situation worse. Young adults attempted to talk to their fathers and resolve the argument, but it often ended negatively because their fathers would get angrier and more frustrated. Others preferred to create space between their mothers and fathers, trying to protect their mom and distract her from the situation. For example, Taylor intervened intensively and creatively to protect her mother, but without directly confronting her father:

I'd be like, "Mom, why don't you come cool off, sit in my room and talk to me, hear about my day.?" I'd like intervene like that, but never try to get in between them. I'd also be like, "Why don't we go do something and get out of the house?" Stuff like that. She would call me, I'd be at a friend's house and she would be like, "Come pick me up" or something like that, like "Let's go to a hotel," and I'd drive her there.

While many young adults were quick to defend and protect their mothers, some moms preferred them to remain uninvolved. Three participants recalled their mothers asking them to stop intervening, as it led to more physical and verbal abuse towards their mother, or the mother feared it would cause them greater harm.

Threatening to leave and leaving the home. Threatening to leave or leaving the home was a safety planning strategy employed by the mothers of sixteen young adults. Threats to leave or leaving either occurred more spontaneously during escalating conflict or violence, or after methodical planning in response to ongoing DV, and despite abusive partners trying to

manipulate or convince their mothers to stay. In some cases, fathers used financial abuse to prevent mothers from leaving. Some participants questioned their mothers' ability to leave the home or relationship due to the toll of psychological abuse, economic disparities within the couple, and sheer willpower. Some participants recalled their mothers threatening or initiating divorces but never carrying them out. One participant, London, questioned whether her mother was capable of filing for divorce; her father ultimately filed. In other instances, mothers remained married despite wanting to leave. Victoria recalled:

At one point, my mom had, like, gone to – I don't know how you do it, but you get divorce papers, though, I guess, a lawyer, I don't know. I did see it on our kitchen table one day, like, application for divorce papers or something like that and that's when I was freaking out that, like, it could be real, and that was my junior year. But I never saw anything about it again, and they are still married.

For many other young adults, their mothers left the home immediately or shortly after making threats to do so. Young adults and mothers partnered with one another to hold each other accountable. Moms would promise they would leave after their father abused them the next time. When their mothers were ready to leave the relationship, the young adults partnered with them, helping boost their confidence and strength, encouraging them to leave, and supporting their decisions. Sometimes, young adults were a crucial factor in their mothers' decisions to leave and adhere to their safety plan. For example, Taylor explained:

Some nights we would go and just check into a hotel, me and her, just to leave him and not deal with it, and she said, "Next time we have to check in a hotel, he's out." So, the next time we went to a hotel, I was like "You know what this means, right?" and she was like "Yeah." And the next day, his bags were by the door.

Sometimes, mothers would leave after arguments and return, refusing to speak to their husbands. Others initiated divorces or left beforehand, leaving their children at home and returning once they were financially stable enough to care for their children. Mothers who left home did so to protect their children. During this time, mother-child communication was often

limited and sometimes nonexistent, as mothers took steps to ensure the safety of both their children and themselves. These mothers were strategic in their communications with their children, disposing of phones and using an unknown number feature to contact them. Many young adults remembered helping their mothers pack a bag, even when they were younger, to ensure they were safe. Mothers often left their children with a trusted adult, such as grandparents or close friends, returning for them once they were stable and able to care for their children. Ultimately, their decisions to leave depended on their feelings and situations. Participants recalled their mothers leaving after big arguments and abuse episodes, while others up and left when dad wasn't present in the home, taking children with them. Ellie explained:

They had a really big fight and he was just extremely mean and my mom came in my room and she was like, "I'm leaving." I was like, "No you won't" because I've been through this or whatever, . . . and she was like, "no, I am." There's a house close to my grandparents, it used to be my great-grandparents', and she moved in there and is still living there.

In the process of leaving, some mothers sought help from law enforcement and many young adults were glad that they took this step. Involving law enforcement often occurred when violence escalated. Mary described her experience when her mother called the police and left:

He was too late, my mom already called the police, they were at the house, like she's packing her stuff up, like finally, finally for the first time ever, she decided to leave even if it was temporary. She packed her stuff up and had the cops just there while she was—in case he came home while she was packing, because God knows what he would do if he saw her trying to leave.

The safety of their children was a high priority for most of the young adults' mothers. Thirteen young adults recalled their mothers removing them from the house: taking them to visit a friend, go to a hotel, or otherwise to ensure their children's safety outside the home. Being removed from the house as a safety measure occurred throughout the participants' childhood and adolescence. The catalyst for the decision to remove the children varied from a response to DV

escalation or the buildup of multiple incidents, ultimately leading to a breaking point. Children missed holidays and birthdays to escape the abuse and their father. Residing at a hotel for safety became a new norm for some participants. Jasmine recalled:

I remember a lot of growing up. We stayed in hotel rooms because my mom would get me and my sister, and we would leave for the night. Then we had to go to school the next morning from a hotel.

Some moms left the home, either to escape to a shelter or safety, leaving their children behind to protect herself and her children. Some mothers received support from friends and family when seeking help and leaving. In some instances, mothers deemed it safest for them to leave the home by themselves, leaving their children with the father at home. These mothers contacted the children when it was safe to do so, like while the father wasn't home to keep her location hidden and herself safe. These mothers would discard their phones and get burner phones to keep everyone safe. For example, Rebecca's mother frequently left the home without her children yet remained in contact with them:

There were points where . . . had to leave the house and go stay with her friends. She would leave and not even tell us kids where she was going because she couldn't risk us telling dad because he would ask us, "where's mom, where's mom?" And we didn't know. She wouldn't tell us. So that's like, how severe it was. . . When we were little, like when I was in elementary school, she packed her bags and left multiple times and like she did it so many times that eventually it stopped affecting me because it was like she's coming back. She'll be back.

Seeing Their Mothers Through a Positive Light

According to participants, many mothers remained focused on their children as their top priority, in addition to their safety. Despite childhood traumas and frustrations, participants' stories also revealed their gratitude, love, and support for their mother's dedication to them during such a difficult time in their home. They expressed numerous ways their mothers had

taken care of them and ensured their safety. In this section, I detail the positive perceptions that young adults have held for their mothers throughout their childhood and into the present.

Spending time with mom. Mothers continuously showed up for the participants, regardless of how DV occurred in the homes. Although nearly all participants recalled positive memories of doing activities or spending time with their mothers, *spending time with their mothers* was a particularly salient experience for six participants. For these participants, their mothers were a consistent source of reliance and comfort. They spent time together watching movies, playing board games, talking, eating meals together, and laughing together. These mothers were also present for academic and extracurricular activities. Blair explained:

I cling more toward my mother because she does things with us, and he's kind of just off on his own thing . . . We were at the game, the three of us, me, my mom, my sister, who is in the band. We were watching her and he's nowhere to be found until we get home.

Most of this mother-child bonding occurred when fathers were not present or at home, which may suggest that fathers interfered in mother-child relationships when they were present or at home. For example, Taylor detailed how her father interfered with her time with her mother while she was growing up:

I'd go shopping for a prom dress with my mom, and he would call 10 times. "Where are you? When are you coming back?" and she's like "I'm out shopping with (Taylor), she's my daughter, I'm going to take her to do stuff."

Especially when the fathers were absent, neglectful, or abusive, participants described their mothers as their sole or primary caregiver, almost as though they were single parents.

Providing all they could. Despite the DV their mothers endured, nine participants recognized how their mothers were providing all they could during their childhood through the present. These mothers worked multiple jobs, sought resources like food stamps to ensure the children's basic needs were met, provided a loving home, helped them with their homework,

attended extracurricular activities, tried to achieve safety for themselves and their children, followed their promises, helped their children reach their goals, and positively contributed to children's health and development. These examples stood in contrast to how the participants described their fathers, who were more absent or neglectful in their parenting duties, resulting in their mothers being perceived as single or solo parents. Blair's dad regularly questioned her mother's whereabouts, leading her to say:

I knew my mom; what she did all day long was take care of me and my sister, all day long. But he would think that she was doing other things. And I'm like, "She's with us all day long, and you're never here. So why are you arguing with her when she's working, cooking, and taking care of us, and you're just in and out?"

Breadwinning moms. Many mothers contributed significantly to their families' income, often being labeled as "the breadwinner" by their young adults. Five participants explained that their mothers made the most significant financial contributions to the family. Despite this title and economic contributions, fathers often withheld the mothers' income and wouldn't let them have it, even though it was the mothers' money. These mothers also often ran the household, including social, personal, and financial matters. In comparison to her father, Caitlin described her mother's roles in the household with admiration.

My mom has a role in her own life. My mom actually holds the higher role in our household. My stepdad is like a market level, which is like two levels below where my mom sits, and then she's the one who usually makes all the decisions on where we eat and stuff like that.

Despite their economic earnings, many of the mothers were unable to access their income or make substantial family decisions regarding money, leading them to feel trapped and an economic burden should they decide to leave. The young adults acknowledged this predicament and felt gratitude and frustration for what their mothers endured.

Doing their best for mom. Because of their mothers' sacrifices, nine young adults told stories that aligned with the theme of *doing their best for their mom*, highlighting the devotion they had for their mom and their siblings, but also for themselves in wanting their mothers to be proud of them. Participants detailed how they helped their mother out and picked up slack by distracting their siblings when abuse occurred (e.g., watching TV, listening to music on MP3, singing to sibling, going to get ice cream), trying to be like their mom (e.g., attending the same school, acting like them), making sure their siblings were not harmed, taking on a mothering role towards their siblings (e.g., doing homework together, comforting their siblings, tidying the home, educating them on warning signs of abuse, managing their health, rescuing them from the abuse if they were not home), and mothering their mom (e.g., giving them grace and allowing them to fix their previous mistakes w/ them with their younger siblings). For participants, their siblings' emotions, well-being, and safety were important priorities but they also saw helping their siblings to help their mom:

But then once I went off to college, . . . the oldest brother became more close to me, he would text me more, talk to me more, he would like send me stuff to school , be like oh, did you watch the game?! . . . Now it's even more of a bond because he's coming here, and we're going to be living together next year *to make it easier on mom*. (Rebecca)

Recognizing the signs of DV and/or abuse in children's relationships. Mothers were attentive and on alert for similar signs of DV in their child's relationship. Three participants recalled their mother recognizing signs of DV and/or abuse in their relationship and confronting them about it to express their disapproval, talking to them about what they were observing, and educating them on warning signs. Barbara's mother noticed how her ex-boyfriend was treating Barbara, using this as an opportunity to help break the cycles of violence:

He was always making me feel like I wasn't good enough. He was always trying to corner me and get me to do something he wanted to do. It reminded me a lot of my dad's relationship with my mom. It worried my mom when I came home upset so often after he

left . . . I noticed it towards the end that he was doing that. My mom talked to me about that.

Alexis' mom's disapproval of her current boyfriend led her to end the relationship:

Of course, my mom didn't approve of him, and I wanted her to like me, so I broke up with him. But he was a bad guy. I shouldn't have talked to him, and that's why my mom didn't approve of him. I just really wanted my mom to be happy, so once she told me not to be with him, I was upset, but I wasn't with him anymore. But I'm glad I listened to her.

Empathizing with mom. Because the DV was seen, heard, and felt by the young adults, often regardless of what the mothers did or did not do, ten participants emphasized with their mothers. They described how factors even outside the marriage, like growing up in a small town and being raised in a similarly abusive childhood household, but also societal roles for wives and mothers, such as the importance of marriage commitment, contributed to their mothers' circumstances. Other participants saw similarities between themselves and their mothers in terms of personality and how they responded to violent outbursts, which led them to empathize with them. In some instances, the young adults stayed very connected to their mothers even after moving away because they, too, experienced an abusive relationship:

I'm kind of, I am my mother's child. I've done the same thing, and I think that's why. I'm so protective of her because I understand the situation she's in. And I know, I feel like this: I can still get out of it, I'm still young, I'm not married, so that's why. I don't want her to feel like she's alone in that. (Sarah)

Seeing Their Mothers Through a Negative Light

Though young adults described many of their mothers as doing the best they could, they emphasized with them, and they shared positive memories and stories of their mother-child relationship, participants also described many reasons they also saw their mothers in a negative light, which caused short- and long-term damage to many of these relationships. Mothers were seen in a negative light for a variety of reasons, including having to serve as their mothers'

caretaker, perceiving their mothers as not fighting back or defending themselves and the children, lacking warmth and compassion, the perception that mothers drove a wedge between them and their fathers, and in some instances, the mother was also an abusive parent to the young adult and their siblings or served as the family disciplinarian. These factors contributed to some young adults favoring their father over their mother despite the DV they inflicted on their mothers.

Caretaking Role Reversal. One reason why some participants saw their mothers through a negative light was that they often had to step into the role of a parent, allowing their mothers to feel supported and loved, despite the stress and anxiety it inflicted on participants, especially when they were younger. Although many participants protected and shielded their mothers or siblings without regret, six participants described these caretaking role reversals in a more negative light, especially when they felt that they were mothering their mother as their part-time or full-time caretakers due to their mothers' chronic illness, disability, or financial insecurity. Blair felt particularly resentful that her mother was financially dependent on her due to her father's abuse and poor financial decisions:

And now, since I'm out on my own, I have to help my mom. . . He wants to keep extra money for liquor, alcohol, for that type stuff. So he'll spend money on that before he'll give her an extra \$40 to help her with the bills. And that upsets her. And she felt like she had to go out and get another job, which I didn't really want her to do. Because with her being a teacher, and then having a job in the evening, and we're from a small town so there's not many places, you have to go out of town to even work and that would be too much for her at her age.

Beyond these other more instrumental roles, participants also took on emotional support roles when their mothers were spiraling due to their fathers' actions, divorce, or post-separation abuse they were experiencing. Prior to these examples of spiraling, these young adults described

their relationships as strong and nurturing, but the spiraling negatively impacted this relationship over time. Lauren's mother spiraled after the divorce from her father:

At first it was really positive and we had a really good relationship, but then it just—she just started acting crazy about stuff . . . She would come bang on my door at 4 in the morning crying... Numerous times, she would just come bang on my door in the middle of the night and come cry about it. And I know she needed support, but it was just stressful for me, because I don't really know how to support her through that.

I remember one night she did it, and it was before I was supposed to take the ACT, and she knew that, and it was like she just always expected me to put her first and treat her how a parent would treat a child and take care of her and make sure she's not upset.

In contrast, though Amelia and her mother have a rocky relationship, Amelia became concerned that her father would gain custody of her and her siblings, so she became an emotional support to her mother during the custody hearings, leaving Amelia angry and resentful towards her mother:

You are 39, you have a stable job and I mean you can you know care for us. And so like, for months she would be so scared because she would get letters like I guess.. I don't know it was like a cop came one day and he just like gave her papers and she was like slam it on the ground or the table and she was like he is trying to recontest (?) your sisters. Like she's so worried. She's so scared that you know he's gonna get all of them and like to my mom, she doesn't mind like paying child support or whatever if that's what you know it needs to be done, but to her like in her head, she was think about the safety of my sisters. Like are they going to be safe with him? Is he going to take care of them? But you know like he, I think the judge just threw it out. He was just like no we are not going to redo this again. We have already decided. She has full custody.

These mothers would seek support and comfort from their children throughout and after the abuse, interfering in the participants' daily lives with negative impacts.

Not fighting back. Mothers and children often faced difficulties in protecting one another and ensuring their safety from the DV. Four participants viewed their mothers in a negative light because, from their perspective, these mothers did not fight back to protect themselves, the participant, or their siblings from their fathers. In some instances, participants or their siblings were hurt when they intervened in the DV due to their father's response, which

included being thrown across the room, getting hit, or being grabbed by their neck. Blair described a recent incident where she had to intervene to protect her sister while her mother asked her not to intervene, leading to guilt and anger:

The most recent thing was not towards my mom, but it was towards my sister. It was two years ago, when I was a senior, and he got angry and put his hands on my sister's neck, and I got very, very angry. Because she couldn't move. She couldn't breathe and I was very upset about it. And my mom was just like, "Don't worry about it. Just, like, don't come over here." And I got angry very angry, and I called the police. And at that point, I kind of broke down once they got there and took him because I was like, this is...I felt like it was my fault at that point.

In some instances, participants expressed frustration for what they perceived as their mothers' failure to fight back to defend themselves or others in the house. Examples of this included mothers running away from the abuse or barricading themselves from the violence. Many moms ran away from the violence and barricaded themselves to prevent further harm and abuse. As a result. Some participants questioned whether their mothers were thinking about their children's safety when they ran away. Keli explained:

So he continued hitting her or whatever, but for the most part I didn't see her try to defend herself. She would like to run and shut the door and try to barricade the door. She wouldn't like try to push him or anything. This is going to sound weird, but I don't like when those things would happen. I don't think my brother, or I, or my cousin were like my mom's number one priority at the time. It was kind of like [she would just] get away from him, and so she wouldn't really shield us or hide us from anything. She knew we knew what was going on.

Lacking warmth and compassion. Amidst the DV, some mothers were highly attuned to their children's needs. Still, for eight participants, mothers were perceived as lacking in their demonstrations of love, compassion, care, support, and warmth. Some felt that their mothers were detached from them, and others recalled how their mothers were more loving and warmer towards their siblings than towards them or vice versa. This reality contrasted with their desires and expectations, such that they expressed a desire for mothers who were supportive,

comfortable, and willing to have heart-to-heart conversations with them, not just about the DV but also about the young adult's life outside the family. In contrast, they felt dismissed or disregarded and left without proper tools for coping with circumstances such as peer relationships. Mia experienced bullying during adolescence. She went to her mother for support, but was dissatisfied and worried about what would happen if she adopted her mother's suggestion:

I remember my mom told me to fight, which wasn't really an option for me because I'm not like that. I didn't really think that was a response. My mom told me to fight, but if I actually did, she would be upset. She's always been that way [willing to fight]. She's very feisty, or very quick to have a rebuttal. So, I think if she thought I had a good reason, she wouldn't get mad. But I felt like I would get in trouble if I retaliated. So, I didn't tell my parents, and I didn't tell teachers or anything like that, so I just dealt with it on my own.

Similarly, Keli recalled her mother not showing warmth or compassion following the death of her friend, shifting into explicitly psychological abusive behavior towards Keli:

I remember, I think when I was in 10th grade when my friend passed away. I think it was like months later, but I was thinking about it – I was in my room, and I was like crying, and rather than come in and “Oh, what's going on. It's okay.” This is going to sound horrible. She opens my bedroom door and goes, “If you're just going to be crying all the time...if you're just going to be in there giving me a headache crying all of the time, why don't you just kill yourself and get over with it. Stop bothering me.”

Some participants questioned whether their mothers resented them, as though their presence as children were the reason for their mother's need or decision to stay in the abusive marriage. Many of these participants preferred to live with their grandparents or other family members. The lack of love and warmth in mother-child relationships ultimately determined how functional and close participants were with their mothers. Keli explained:

I think for a period of time she blamed getting – I think she blamed her relationship with my dad and staying in a violent relationship on me. And not my brother, more so because I was younger and she was telling herself that she was being a good mother and being a good wife by keeping her family together, whereas she could have gotten out of that marriage three years earlier because my brother is three years older than me. But she had

to stay longer. I think she just blamed it on me. That kind of leaves us in a place where I would love for our relationship to be growing, but she gets mad. Like she says, I was able to forgive my father for the things that he did to her and our family, but I haven't been able to forgive her.

Disciplinarian and/or abusive mom. Given that most mothers took on a single or solo parenting role, it is unsurprising that many also assumed the primary disciplinarian role in the family. However, how mothers approached this role varied, and eight participants saw their mothers' approach to parenting as discipline-driven, overly harsh, and in some instances, psychologically and physically harmful, even while preferring their mothers in this role to their fathers in most instances. When not abusive, the young adults perceived their mothers' disciplinary approaches as rooted in a desire to maintain safety and protection in the context of the DV even if they disliked it or home country cultural norms and values that differed with the host (i.e., U.S.) cultural norms and values. For example, some mothers limited the young adults' peer interactions and social activities, like sleepovers and going to nonfamilial peer homes.

Though the young adults may have disliked their mothers' approach to discipline and child rearing at times, this differed from the young adults who described ways in which their mothers were abusive towards them. In these instances, mothers would express anger and frustration towards the children if the house wasn't in order and put together exactly as they wanted it, often resulting in mother-child conflict. In some instances, these conflicts led to physical violence towards their children. Alexis recalled examples of care taking role reversal that were intertwined with physical child abuse:

She was abusive towards me. I feel like she made me do a lot of things I shouldn't have to worry about as a child. Like, I came home and took care of the house. I don't want to say she abused me, but she disciplined me a lot for anything. I was basically just had to be perfect, and [even if I was perfect], it just wasn't good enough . . . Sometimes she would say mean things to me, and sometimes she would hit me. Eventually, it got to the point where the house was never not clean, because I was so . . . I would wake up, clean up, go to school, and as soon as I got back from work or whatever I had to do that day, I

cleaned up again. I then did whatever else she wanted me to do or my homework or whatever, and I cleaned up again before I went to bed. Like, I had to just—I just tried to make sure that it was always clean because I just didn't want to deal with whatever was going to happen to me if it wasn't.

At times, the mothers expected perfection and children to occupy an adult-like role to try and prevent the maritally violent fathers from becoming more violent. Still, in other instances, the young adults were unsure of why their mothers treated them this way or they saw her abuse as separate from, or compounding, the father-mother-perpetrated DV.

Driving a wedge. Parents, both mothers and fathers, intentionally drove a wedge between the child and the other parent. Seven participants recalled how their parents caused strain in the parent-child relationship either deliberately or unintentionally. Parents of participants would put their children at the center of the marital relationship problems by expressing hatred or anger towards the other parent. In many of these instances, mothers seemed to be trying to protect themselves and their children from the father, thereby driving a wedge between the father and child. However, the young adults' perceptions of this varied, with some expressing curiosity about why they could not communicate as much with their fathers, others showing understanding, and still others feeling resentful or angry about the wedge between them and their fathers. Lauren had complex feelings about these relationships, over time coming to see this as not just a protection tactic but more of fulfilling her mother's desires:

Honestly, now, I think she wanted me not to like him. She wanted to drive a wedge between me and him even more. He always said that he and I didn't have a relationship because she did that. I never really believed that, but now I kind of do. Like, she wanted me to be hers. Because even though my brothers didn't like him, they still looked up to him, and I think she didn't want me to feel that way. I think my brothers just always looked up to him and idolized him, even though they were scared of him and saw what he did. I think she just wanted me to be hers, because he had them.

In many of these instances, fathers also intentionally tried to destroy mother-child relationships and get the participant on their side. Some fathers would bribe the participants to do

fun things with them without inviting their mothers or would engage in activities that caused harm or discomfort to either the participant or their mothers. Elizabeth recalled how her father would gaslight and call her mother names in front of her to weaken their mother-child relationship:

Basically, [he would say that] she's crazy, she's psycho, she's loony...not only because she's been hospitalized but because she's on hormone replacement. She is on antidepressants, whether or not she's taking them, wither or not she's saying is completely reasonable...no, it's always: she's lying, she's crazy, she's the alcoholic, she's the drug abuser, she's this, she's that. And it's like nothing that she feels is remotely valid or logical [given the abusive circumstances].

Favoring dad. From childhood through the interview, participants' parental preferences shifted between parents, but for some, their preferences were consistent throughout. For example, some always favored their mothers due to the actions their mothers took to care for and provide for them. However, eight participants expressed a preference for their dad over their mom. For some, they remained close or close to their father from childhood through early adulthood, whereas for others, they were closer to their father during childhood. Their preferences shifted, however, as they learned more about their abusive behaviors towards their mothers.

For those who favored their dad over their mom at the time of the interview, they recalled feeling more comfortable calling their father if they were in trouble or needed help. Some also recalled the active role their fathers played during their childhood, but these same mothers were perceived as angry or jealous of the father-child relationship, leading fathers to pull away from the participant. Stephanie explained:

Yeah we were very very close . . . We would do a whole lot of different things together, like he was the one that kept me during the day before I started to go to daycare and school. . . My dad decided that he would try to pull—I don't know if pull away is the right term because it makes it kind of sound like he didn't love me, but he tried to give me a little space because he could see how I didn't really like my mom. My mom told my

dad that she thought I didn't like her because I always preferred to be with my dad more than her, and he decided that he would pull away just to give me more time to spend with my mom and get to know her better.

Other participants described how their preference for their father waned over time, beginning at a younger age. Mary Beth explained how her relationship with her father changed after he began to abuse her mother.

I mean, I think me and my dad were really close until I was about 6 and then I just started noticing things that were like... you probably shouldn't be talking that way to these people that have to live with you every day.

For participants who felt like their mothers were unsupportive of who they were, they found refuge in their father's love and warmth. Some desired this relationship with their mother, but their father was the only one who could provide it for them. For example, Briana explained how her mother's religious beliefs conflicted with her sexual orientation. In contrast, her father embraced her sexual orientation, shifting her preference towards him:

And my mom is like so religious, . . . and, I have a girlfriend, so she doesn't really agree with like my lifestyle, so it is kind of hard to kind of talk to her. . . [But with my dad] He just wants me to be happy, so at the end of the day, he accepts me for who I am and also who I am with because they [her father and girlfriend] are kind of close."

Changing Perceptions of Mother-Child Relationship Over Time

Young adults described how their relationship with their mothers and their perceptions of their mothers changed over time, as discussed in some previous sections. However, this change was most notable to them as they transitioned to college and were no longer living at home. For some, these changes were seen as positive, enhancing their relationship with and perceptions of their mothers. For others, these changes were seen as positive due to increased boundaries and differentiation from their mothers, as well as greater clarity in their relationship with their mother. And for others, navigating their mother-child relationship remained challenging, and their frustration and resentment grew over time.

Moving away. Mother-child relationships underwent significant changes when the participants moved away from home. Eight participants recalled how *moving away* had improved or impaired their relationship with their mother. Sometimes, simply moving away from home and their mother allowed participants to have a better parental relationship with their mother overall because the physical distance created natural boundaries. Maintaining a relationship with their mother from afar was best for some of these participants but not always their mothers.

Stefan explained:

...As I get older, I kind of want to distance myself from parents, stuff like that, and I just got to where the point now where it's just like, "I love you mom, I like talking to you, but I need to do it like dad does, maybe talk once a week," you know, stuff like that. I realize that's not how my mother works; she needs that bonding, so...I want to say that I have started to distance myself a little bit, just grow up a little bit more, but we are still close compared to my [relationship with] dad.

In contrast, others struggled to navigate their home life from their school life because they were still "in the know" about DV or conflict occurring at home. In some instances, mothers began disclosing and discussing DV that occurred while the young adults were growing up, but also ongoing DV while they were away. This new or increased disclosure led to contradictory emotions, such as guilt, anxiety, and relief. For example, although Briana wanted to know what was going on at home, regular calls and updates interfered with her daily life, making it harder for her to focus on her schoolwork and college life. This left her feeling like, "I don't really know how to handle [the DV] being that I am so far away." Young adults whose mothers were still in the abusive relationship felt guilty for leaving their mothers in the situation and acknowledging how their decisions to move away negatively impacted their mothers. Lauren explained how her role was different from afar in a potentially better way, yet she knew the circumstances were bad without her there:

[The DV] is definitely a lot worse since I moved out last summer and came here because when I was there I had to deal with all of her stuff. I had to take care of her... I felt like I had to.

No longer responsible for mom. While growing up, some participants assumed a caretaking role for their mothers. However, the shift to college led to a shift out of this role for three participants, who no longer felt responsible for caring for their mothers. In a few of these instances, this shift was due to growing frustration and disinterest in helping their mothers when their mothers did not follow their advice. Mary Beth explained:

After years of being ignored when I'm trying to help her, I've kind of just quit giving her advice and telling her what would be best. So, she can do what she wants. . . So, I really, I have become quite apathetic to their whole situation. She can do what she wants, and if she wants to stay with him while getting worse with his behavior, then she can do so. I'm what, 200 miles away? I don't have to deal with it, and I'm not going to.

Wishing mom would leave dad. Twelve participants wished that their mothers would leave their abusive marriages. Although some were sympathetic to their mothers' situation, others, as indicated in the quote above, were growing increasingly frustrated, confused, and resented their mothers' decision to stay, whether they sought help or tried to repair the relationship. Feeling guilty wasn't uncommon, as some participants felt that they were the reason their mother stayed, yet they also explained how they regularly told their mothers they wished they would leave the marriage. Mary Beth recalled:

I felt bad about not helping my mom, but I mean, if you're going to stay married to someone who's been doing that for 10 years now, you'd think that if it bothered you enough, you'd leave. But she didn't, she never would. I have told her since I was 14 years old, "Please, please, please, please—I don't know any other kids that would ever say this, but please get divorced from him. Please leave, take me with you!" And she would just never do it. I think her excuse was always, "Well, when you've been married to someone for this long, I'm just not going to give up till it's done, till it's over." And I'm like "It was over 10 years ago."

In some of these instances, parents were separated or not romantically together. Still, they remained legally married for various reasons despite having new romantic partners. Participants

didn't like the ambiguity of their parents' relationship and preferred concrete decisions in this matter. Reflecting over time, Ellie explained how she wished her parents would divorce, even though this was at odds with community norms where she grew up:

A lot of children would be upset about a divorce because obviously you never really want your parents to get a divorce, but from the family that I'm from, I just felt like [divorce would have been] the best thing growing up. . . I always hoped my parents would split up. And I just felt like it would be easier.

Not wanting to end up like mom. When reflecting on their CEDV experiences, eleven participants expressed a desire but also a worry—they did not want to end up like their mother or in a similarly abusive relationship. Though some participants experienced unhealthy or abusive relationships in high school, none were in these kinds of relationships in college. Much of this can be attributed to their mothers, as well as to their own experiences and observations, which lead them to desire something else. However, along this journey, some had to learn the hard way how not to adopt physical and verbally abusive behaviors from their parents or how not to stay too long in toxic relationships. A crucial part of this discovery was learning how their home environment and CEDV shaped who they were and who they were becoming.

Participants were concerned about following in their mother's footsteps, which often led them to be selective and cautious in their search for a romantic partner. They had higher expectations and remained vigilant for red flags or signs of DV. Some even felt like they were better at picking and finding partners than their mothers. They also didn't want to exhibit behaviors like those of their fathers toward their mothers. Alexis shared a nuance take on what she thinks she would do if she saw signs of abuse in a relationship and her worry that she might follow in her mother's footsteps:

I say that I would be done with him [if he was abusive], but sometimes I feel like my mom probably said the same thing, then when he [was abusive], she stayed. Like sometimes I do worry that I will follow in her footsteps as far as that. I feel like I won't,

but I do wonder if I would or not. Like I say that I won't stand for it, but I do wonder sometimes like, will I really not stand for it or will I do that just because it's in me, or something like that? I don't know. I do I worry about that. And I really try to keep telling myself not to let anything like that happen so maybe I will be stronger if it does, and I can say "Okay, we're done because I'm not going to let you do this to me." . . . I'm sure my mom wasn't like, "When my man hits me, I'm just going to do better [so he doesn't do it again]." You know? No one ever thinks that's how they're going to handle that situation, but once they are in it, it changes. And I just hope that for me, that I still feel [I would leave] if it happened, because I do worry that I won't.

Mothers became influential and educational in motivating participants' desire for healthy, safe relationships, which fostered a positive mother-child relationship. Many mothers took on an educational role, helping them navigate romantic relationships, including sharing when they saw red flags in their young adults' relationships. These mothers were also adamant about their children finding partners who were different from their fathers. Blair's mother would tell her, "There are other people in the world who have normal relationships, and you can have this too." And though she initially worried that she wouldn't find healthier partners because her mom did, she can now see the possibility, reminding herself of her mother's words, "Don't find a boyfriend like your dad."

In conclusion, it is essential to recognize the complexity of feelings that most participants expressed towards their mothers. Nineteen participants expressed conflicting feelings when recalling their parent-child relationships and perceptions, with relatively equal numbers of positive and negative experiences and perceptions. The remaining six participants either described only positive memories, experiences, and perceptions of their mother ($n = 2$), described only negative memories, experiences, and perceptions of their mother ($n = 3$), including two participants who favored their dad over their mothers, or did not discuss positive nor negative memories, experiences, or perceptions of their mother ($n = 1$). The five participants

who demonstrated a clear positive or negative perception of their mother were straightforward about their feelings and did not express conflicting feelings or perceptions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to thoroughly examine adult children's perspectives of the mother-child relationship and mothering in the context of CEDV. Much of what we know about mother-child relationships in IPV contexts comes solely from maternal reports and perspectives, suggesting that the broader literature and empirically based interventions may be potentially less efficacious for youth, as their perspectives are often not included. The young adults in this study had complex and sometimes contradictory perceptions of their mothers and their mother-child relationship. I unpack this complexity below, situating this thesis study within the broader mother-child literature and family systems theory, along with suggestions for future research and practical implications.

The Mother-Child Relationship is Complex

Findings from this study suggest that mother-child relationships are deeply complex, marked by both protective loyalty and enduring resentment. These conflicting emotions appeared especially salient when mothers did not leave the abusive relationship, were unable or unwilling to protect their children, caused them direct harm, or failed to communicate about the abuse openly. Taken together, these findings offer qualitative support for both the spillover and compensatory hypotheses, which often occur simultaneously within the same family system. For clarity, I first address the spillover hypothesis, followed by the compensatory hypothesis.

Spillover Hypothesis. The spillover hypothesis emphasizes how conflict in one family subsystem (e.g., the marital relationship) affects another (e.g., the parent-child relationship) (Kouros et al., 2014). Tension and emotional dysregulation in the marital subsystem may lead to irritability, withdrawal, or reduced emotional availability in parenting. Scholars have

increasingly applied this hypothesis to understand the impact of childhood exposure to domestic violence (CEDV) on mother-child relationships (e.g., Bruhl et al., 2023; Gao & Cummings, 2019; Letourneau et al., 2013; Pu & Rodriguez, 2021). Pu and Rodriguez (2021) noted that mothers, more so than fathers, often occupy emotionally vulnerable parenting roles in the context of DV. However, in this study, some participants also described their mothers as emotionally unavailable, lacking warmth or compassion, particularly toward them. Some participants reported unequal treatment among siblings, with warmth extended to others but not to them. When seeking guidance or support from their mothers, participants were often met with emotional unavailability or even harmful advice. Many mothers were described as the primary disciplinarians in the home, often reacting harshly to minor infractions, such as unwashed dishes or messy rooms, which created a hostile environment that strained the mother-child bond; in a few situations, mothers were also abusive towards the young adults. In some dyads, young adults felt blamed by their mothers for the abuse or the overall family situation. These experiences often fostered guilt, sadness, and eventual emotional distancing. IPV thus shaped not only the mothers' capacity to parent but also the children's emotional well-being (Kopystynska et al., 2022; Renner, 2021). Mothers' emotional withdrawal and distress often disrupted their caregiving responsibilities (Kopystynska et al., 2022; Showalter et al., 2022). Some participants described "caretaker role reversal," feeling they were parenting their mother as they were pulled into managing their mother's emotional needs and household responsibilities. This parentification created resentment and stress, as participants felt burdened by responsibilities that interfered with their development.

These dynamics reflect the challenging position many mothers find themselves in while navigating IPV. Much like Moulding et al. (2015) describe, mothers were "damned if they did

and damned if they didn't" (p. 256). Efforts to protect their children may be perceived as inadequate, while disengagement could lead to long-term resentment and broken relationships. Participants' narratives revealed this tension, acknowledging both their mothers' suffering and their own unmet needs.

Although traditionally viewed as a deficit model, the spillover hypothesis also helps illuminate moments of connection and mutual support. In this study, when mothers were transparent with their children about the abuse, the dyad often collaborated on safety planning. This included joint decisions about calling law enforcement, sharing resources (e.g., cars, money, bank accounts), and planning to leave together. These moments of shared decision-making suggest that, under some conditions, spillover may lead to resilience and strengthened bonds. Participants also described defending their mothers from verbal or physical abuse—sometimes instinctively—by yelling, intervening, or cutting off contact with abusive fathers. In many cases, their protective efforts helped de-escalate conflict. These findings highlight the dual nature of spillover: it can either erode or strengthen mother-child bonds, depending on the context and the nature of communication.

Compensatory Hypothesis. In contrast, the compensatory hypothesis highlights how conflict in one subsystem can lead to increased investment in another. In the context of IPV, some mothers appeared to compensate for the harmful marital environment by deepening emotional connections with their children (Kopystynska et al., 2022). This strengths-based approach is less explored in literature but is gaining attention (e.g., Gao & Cummings, 2019).

Participants reported that their mothers made intentional efforts to spend time with them by taking shopping trips, sharing meals, or having movie nights amidst the IPV. Despite their distress, many mothers consistently attended school events and extracurricular activities.

Participants recalled their mothers' involvement in homework, goal setting, and vigilant monitoring of their romantic relationships. Some mothers actively intervened when they sensed potential harm, demonstrating continued commitment to protecting their children from abuse. Participants often remembered these gestures and memories as meaningful acts of love and connection. Cultural and gendered expectations of women may help explain why mothers are more likely to engage in caregiving-oriented compensation (Kopystynska et al., 2022). Many participants described their mothers as making significant sacrifices, such as holding multiple jobs, using public assistance, and prioritizing their children's well-being, despite facing economic hardship and emotional strain. This consistent presence and care fostered gratitude and emotional closeness among participants, even in families with high conflict.

Parentification as a Missing Piece of the CEDV Mother-Child Relationship Context

A salient takeaway from this study is that many participants, even in childhood, became *de facto* protectors, emotional supporters, and safety strategists for their mothers. These roles included assisting with escape plans, confronting abusive fathers, shielding younger siblings, and providing financial or emotional support. While these actions highlight children's resilience and maturity, they also underscore the profound developmental burdens associated with CEDV.

Although the spillover and compensatory hypotheses are critical frameworks within family and developmental sciences, these literatures often rely on maternal reports, which can inadvertently silence the perspectives of youth. In contrast, the family and interpersonal violence fields more frequently elevate youth voices, shedding light on their intensive, active involvement in the mother-child dyad. Youth are not passive recipients of marital conflict or maternal compensatory efforts; instead, they engage in bidirectional, circular dynamics of support, protection, and survival.

The absence of youth voices creates a skewed understanding of how children experience CEDV, as witnesses and as critical members of their family's coping system. As they navigated the IPV, many participants took on parental roles (i.e., parentification), stepping in to care for their mothers and siblings when maternal caregiving was compromised. Consistent with recent research (e.g., Achar et al., 2025; Haselschwerdt & Tunkle, 2024), participants described a range of caregiving responsibilities, shielding others from violence, helping cope and heal, and calling the police. It appeared that this caretaking was particularly common among the eldest children, who also often intervened directly.

Participants who experienced parentification expressed mixed emotions about the roles they assumed. Some recalled feeling frustrated, angry, or resentful about their responsibilities, echoing previous findings that children often experience negative emotions when burdened with parenting duties (Achar et al., 2025; Swanston et al., 2013). Still, many felt it was their obligation to protect and console their mothers, given their mothers' vulnerable physical and emotional states. Despite their complicated feelings, participants often kept their mothers' well-being at the center of their priorities, including not sharing their lingering resentment or desire to talk about the CEDV, demonstrating both devotion and long-term harm, or juggling resentment with loyalty and grief.

Mother-Child Communication was Shaped by Intentionality, Timing, and Guilt

The level, frequency, and nature of maternal disclosures about abuse varied significantly across participants. Some mothers shared more openly, with some sharing too much information, turning the children into peer confidants or informal therapists, whereas others seemingly discussed the IPV to try to teach and model healthy relationships. In contrast, other mothers withheld information but for different suspected reasons, including wanting or hoping their

children were unaware, but also, some withheld due to emotional avoidance or denial. As maternal communication styles differed, so too did participants' perceptions. Some young adults appreciated the communications, while others expressed discomfort, anger, or confusion, especially when the communication was emotionally overwhelming.

Scholars have explored how children navigate emotionally fraught conversations about violence in the home. Cater (2014) and Izaguirre and Cater (2016) found that children often experienced anxiety or tension when discussing family violence but later reported feeling relief and emotional release after such conversations. When open communication was established, mother-child relationships often became more collaborative, with both parties working together toward safety and survival. This pattern was reflected in the current study. While many participants valued their mothers' openness and vulnerability, others expressed frustration when disclosures came too late or felt emotionally burdensome.

Participants generally fell into two groups: those who desired to talk with their mothers about the abuse, and those who preferred to avoid the topic entirely. Few expressed ambivalence. Older children were more likely to be included in conversations about the abuse as mothers recognized their emotional maturity. This means that older children were often more likely to know and understand their parents' relationship because their mothers began to compensate for their CEDV experiences. The young adults were all living outside of their family home, creating opportunities for them to set boundaries around communication that they might not have been able to enact before. These mother-young adult discussions around IPV often strengthened the mother-child bond, as also observed by Letourneau et al. (2013), creating greater emotional closeness even in the context of trauma.

Those who avoided conversations often cited guilt or a desire to avoid re-experiencing painful memories. This finding aligns with Izaguirre and Cater's (2016) research, in which nearly half of their participants reported a preference not to discuss the violence due to its emotional toll. Interestingly, some mothers also avoided initiating conversations. Swanston et al. (2013) found that some mothers felt emotionally unprepared to hear their children's reflections on the violence, fearing guilt, shame, or distress. This may explain why several participants in this study recalled that their mothers deliberately avoided discussing the abuse with them.

Finally, research suggests gendered patterns in parental communication and compensation. Kopystynska et al. (2022) noted that mothers, more than fathers, were likely to compensate after recognizing their children's awareness of IPV or family conflict. Research has previously detailed a gender difference in compensation practices between mothers and fathers, with mothers more likely to compensate after learning of their child's regulation and understanding of their parent's relationship (Kopystynska et al., 2022).

Limitations

Despite this research study making significant empirical contributions to the mother-child, spillover, and compensatory hypotheses literature, it is crucial to consider some limitations when reviewing the findings. All participant accounts were retrospective reports and could be influenced by recall bias. While participants were able to recall specific and detailed information from their childhood, we must recognize that these memories may be clouded or shaped by their current experiences with their mothers and their relationship with them. Future research should investigate mother-child relationships and CEDV exposure, gathering longitudinal, holistic experiences from both the mother and the child. Intertwining mother and young adult accounts simultaneously allows researchers to further understand the similarities and differences between

both accounts while contributing to the mother-child dyad and violence literature. Although generalizability is not the primary goal of qualitative studies, the specifics of this sample may limit its transferability. Many participants were predominantly female, college-attending volunteer young adults, which raises questions about the applicability of these findings to young adult men and/or predominantly male samples, including those non-college-attending young adults. However, two young adult men were interviewed in this study, and their mother-child discussions fit within the broader study findings. Obtaining a disproportionately female-centered sample is consistent with the CEDV literature (e.g., Lapierre et al., 2017; Paul, 2019), although there is less clarity on whether notable gender differences exist in familial relationships within the context of CEDV. However, it may be that there are meaningful gendered differences, suggesting that these findings may not be transferable to samples of young adult men. Future research should strive for greater gender diversity, allowing for within- and across-gender comparisons to better inform mother-child interventions, thereby addressing this limitation. Finally, this research project was part of a larger study conducted and did not specifically seek to address or research mother-child relationships. Although the study included mother-child interview guide questions, and participants discussed their mothers in great depth at various points throughout the study, the overall protocol and study framing were broader than the study's focus, which may have influenced the findings.

Empirical and Practical Implications

This study highlighted how mother-child relationships are shaped by the complex interplay of spillover and compensatory processes in families experiencing IPV. In some cases, IPV in the parental subsystem spilled into the parent-child relationship, leading to emotional distance or parentification. In other cases, often within the same family, mothers compensated by

fostering emotional intimacy and offering protection despite ongoing abuse. Future research should explore how these processes co-occur and evolve over time, particularly through longitudinal designs. It is also important to examine how contextual factors, such as maternal mental health, financial stability, and social support, shape these dynamics.

Research must also work to amplify youth voices, which are still underrepresented in both family science and family violence scholarship, despite youth playing an integral role in navigating and responding to IPV in their homes, even after leaving the family home or living apart from their parents. Since much of the literature continues to rely on maternal reports, youth-centered qualitative and mixed-methods research is especially needed to deepen our understanding of these complex dynamics.

Parentification in the context of CEDV also warrants greater attention. These findings suggest that parentification is more multifaceted than previously documented. Young adults in this study described caregiving behaviors—such as emotional support, safety planning, sibling protection, and logistical coordination—that go beyond traditional definitions of parentification. Future research should investigate these expanded forms of parentification to gain a deeper understanding of the expectations and long-term consequences for youth.

Clinicians and practitioners should recognize that youth who were parentified in CEDV contexts may carry unique burdens such as guilt, resentment, and anger, alongside loyalty and empathy. Some youth expressed a desire to process their experiences but hesitated to discuss them with their mothers out of concern for causing guilt or emotional pain. Therapeutic spaces, such as individual or group therapy, may offer a way for young adults to work through the complex, contradictory feelings and protect the mother-child bond. Supporting both mothers and children, individually and as a dyad, requires a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach that

acknowledges the impact of IPV while also helping mothers and youth identify compensatory or protective strategies that contributed to resilience. This may also help reframe more negative perceptions and foster empathy for the constraints mothers faced. At the same time, victimized mothers must be supported in acknowledging and repairing harm to the mother-child relationship, ensuring that responsibility is not misdirected onto them for the abuse they experienced.

Finally, clinicians should be attuned to the role of communication in shaping mother-child relationship. The young adults in this study described their mothers' disclosures as variable, sometimes affirming and bonding, but at other times too late, too overwhelming, or absent altogether. These findings suggest that communication about IPV is influenced by timing, emotional preparedness, guilt, and the child's developmental stage. Interventions might help families re-engage in these conversations, re-establish boundaries, and facilitate healing if that is the desire of both mother and child.

Interventions

Many empirically driven interventions aim to strengthen the mother-child bond in the context of CEDV, with some targeting mothers exclusively and others addressing the mother-child dyad jointly or separately. A systematic review by Anderson & van Ee (2018) found that separate interventions for mothers and children were most effective in targeting coping skills, while a combination of joint and separate approaches more effectively addressed traumatic stress, child adjustment, self-esteem, social problems, and positive attitudes. These interventions also improved mothers' social support, self-efficacy, depression, and confidence. Including a child component further contributed to improvements in child total behaviors, trauma-related symptoms, and social behaviors (Romano et al., 2019).

I highlight two well-established, validated, trauma-informed, culturally adaptable, efficacious interventions. The Mother's Empowerment Program/Kids' Club is a 10-week intervention designed to empower women, reduce trauma symptoms, enhance coping skills following IPV victimization and CEDV, improve mother-child communication, and facilitate emotion recognition among youth (Graham-Bermann & Miller, 2013). Domestic Abuse Recovering Together (DART) is a 10-week intervention for mothers and children designed to restore mother-child relationships through both joint and separate sessions (Smith et al., 2015). The choice of intervention depends on the specific needs of the mother-child dyad at the time. Both interventions may have been beneficial for this study's sample, as they both target maternal response, communication, and coping skill development. However, the extent to which these interventions and similarly well-regarded interventions were developed and modified based on youth input is unknown. Nevertheless, they both improved individual and dyadic outcomes, suggesting that our findings fit well within this intervention science literature.

Conclusion

Participants' perceptions of mother-child relationships are heavily influenced and impacted by the violence and CEDV that occurred in the home throughout their childhood. We found support for both *spillover* and *compensatory hypotheses*, presenting a layer of complexity to mother-child relationships. Similarly, mother-child communication varied between participants but remained structured by intentionality, timing, and guilt. Future research and practice should investigate how these hypotheses can be applied to enhance mother-child relationships and communication within the mother-child dyad. We also found that some children and young adults are subject to parentification early on, forcing them to adapt to becoming the mother or parent in the home because of the CEDV occurrences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Young Adults Live and Learn (Y'ALL) Project

The purpose of this interview is for me to learn more about the experiences of young adults who were exposed to violence and abuse perpetrated by their father or father-like figure towards their mother. I am going to ask you to tell me about your family life while you were growing up through the present time as well as your past and current romantic relationships. I will also ask you how you managed your experiences within your family and community. I will ask about the violence and abuse you were exposed to in a variety of ways, but I'll encourage you to just share your story through the majority of our time together.

Finally, I want to let you know that I will not be judging you based on your responses. If I don't comment on certain things you tell me, it is because I am listening and want you to continue your story.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

We are going to begin with some demographic and background information pertaining to you, your parent's relationship, some specific questions about each family member, and then also a few about where you grew up, but first, how did you learn about the Y'ALL Project?

I. Demographics/Background Information

1. How old are you?
2. What is your race or ethnicity?
3. What is your highest level of education?

If participant did not indicate who his/her mother's abusive partner was/is during the initial screening, ask the following:

Over email/phone you had said that your father or father-like figure had physically harmed your mother while you were growing up, was this your biological or adopted father, stepfather, or mother's partner not from marriage?

Now I'm going to ask you a little bit more about your mom's marital status and relationship with _____ (refer to him as participant did)?

[Mother's abuser is referred to as her "partner" but will be identified according to participants' labeling during interview process]

What is your mother and her partner's marital status? *[Probe for when they got married, separated or divorced; who initiated separation/divorce; who do they primarily stay with or visit when they are home]*

[If parents separated or divorced, probe for current relationship status, remarriage, step or half siblings]

Now I'm going to ask you to tell me a little bit more about your individual family members.

1. What is your mom's age?
 2. What is your mom's race or ethnicity?
 3. What is your mom's highest level of education?
 4. What does your mom do for a living? *[Probe if these are jobs or occupations that have remained constant or have varied while growing up.]*
-
5. What is your mother's partner's age?
 6. What is his race or ethnicity?
 7. What is his highest level of education?
 8. What does he do for a living? *[Probe if these are jobs or occupations that have remained constant or have varied while growing up.]*
 9. Do you have any siblings? *[If yes, probe for...]*
 - a. How many?
 - b. What is their age?
 - c. Gender?
 - d. What is the birth order of siblings (e.g., oldest, middle)?
 - e. Any still living at home?
 10. Are there any extended family members or individuals (e.g., nanny, grandparent) who lived in your house while you were growing up? If yes, who? When did they live in your home?

Now I'm going to take the information that you gave me to draw out a picture of your family – it's called a genogram – so that I can get a picture of who is in your family and the relationships in your family. This genogram will make it easier for me to keep track of who is in your family and the relationships between your family members while you are telling me about your experiences.

Alright, now I'm going to ask you some questions about your family as a whole and the community you grew up in.

11. How would you classify your family while you were growing up? *[Probe for changes between then and present; would you classify your family as _____ at the current time?]*

Read as options, not like a multiple choice question:

- a. Impoverished/living in poverty
- b. Working class
- c. Middle class
- d. Upper-middle class
- e. Upper class

12. Did your family ever receive any of the following public assistance services? Reduced or free school lunches, cash assistance, food assistance (food stamps), health care or child care assistance, or housing assistance (e.g., Section 8 housing)? [If yes, specify which ones.]

13. In what town, village, or city did you grow up or spend the majority of your childhood?

14. What sort of setting did you grew up in (for example, was it rural, urban, or suburban)?

15. If you were an outsider (e.g., not close friend or family member), how would you describe your family?

How does this compare to your perspective or the reality of your home and family life?

II. Violence, Abuse and Family Life: I am now going to ask you to tell me about your mom and her partner's relationship and how he hurt your mom, but I will also ask you some questions about your relationship with your mother's partner and the possible ways in which he may have hurt you.

1. How would you describe your mom and her partner's relationship while you were growing up? *[Probe for whether this has always been the case, or if there were ebbs and flows or patterns of change throughout their childhood]*

2. Reflecting back on your childhood, can you tell me about the first time you realized that your mother's partner was hurting your mother? *[Probe for specific age or year in school. They did not need to label it abuse at the time, but now when they reflect back]*

3. Can you describe the physical abuse against your mother while you were growing up?

Moms who experience abuse often think or hope their children don't know about, see, or hear the physical abuse but research shows children and adolescents are often very aware of the abuse.

Can you tell me about your experiences (and the experiences of your siblings if relevant) of witnessing or overhearing abuse towards your mom? *[Probe for whether they witnessed, overheard, saw the aftermath (e.g., bruises, property damage), or were told about it by someone else if they were not present; frequency; whether or not the participant or siblings intervened in any way]*

Some children and adolescent say they sometimes tried to intervene to stop the abuse, but others have said that they did not intervene because they were too scared or thought they would make things worse. Can you tell me about your experiences and opinion about intervening?

[Probe for factors that played into their decision not to intervene; if they did intervene, did the ways in which they intervened change over time; what happened when they intervened?]

4. In addition to physical abuse, can you describe some of the other ways that your mom experienced abuse by her partner? *[Probe with examples of emotional, sexual, financial, etc. abuse, if needed. Probe for possible controlling behaviors by asking to elaborate on examples of abuse; frequency]*

a. *[If participant does not mention control issues in the preceding questions, directly ask if such behaviors were present.]* Would you describe him as controlling of your mother or not controlling? If yes, how so? Can you give me some examples? If no, why would you say he was not controlling?

b. Research has indicated that children and adolescents are often exposed to the physical abuse, but we do not know much about exposure to some of non-physical abuses that you described. Can you tell me about your experiences (and the experiences of your siblings if relevant) of witnessing or overhearing these non-physical but abusive behaviors towards your mom?

[Probe for whether they witnessed, overheard, or were told about it by someone else if they were not present; frequency; whether or not the participant or siblings intervened in any way; when they figured out that these behaviors were abusive]

5. From your perspective, why your mom's partner was abusive towards her or what was going on to cause or lead up to the physical and non-physical abuse? *[If necessary, probe regarding specific arguments, unpredictable violence, and violence used to control.]*

6. Some women who experience abuse respond by using violence to defend themselves or protect their children, whereas others use violence against their partner because they are angry with them or want to take control of the situation. How does your mom's behaviors align with what I just read? (Or, can you tell me about a time when your mother used acts of physical violence or other abusive acts towards her partner? *(If so, did she initiate or did he, what was her motivation for her use of violence; common? infrequent)*)

7. How has your mother and her partners' relationship changed over time? *(If divorced or separated and mom initiated divorce and/or separation. Probe for responses that indicate control, such as threats of violence if she left, or threats to the kids. [Probe for whether abuse continued post-separation, types of abuse])*

Alright, now I'm going to ask you a set of questions asks about actions your mom may have experienced in her relationship with her abusive partner. You have already answered many of these questions these past few minutes. These questions have only been used in research with adult women who were hurt by their partner, so we want to see if the questions are useful in better understanding the experiences of young adults exposed to violence and abuse.

PMWI: Using the following scale, tell me how often each statement occurred from childhood through the present *(If mom is separated or divorced from abusive partner, say: tell me how often each statement occurred from childhood through your mom and her partner's separation and divorce. You are also welcome to elaborate on or say more about any of the following items.*

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	<i>[If never]</i> Has this ever been a problem for your mom?
PMWI1. He monitored her time and made her account for her whereabouts.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI2. He used her money or made important financial decisions without talking	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes

to her about it.						
PMWI3. He was jealous or suspicious of her friends.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI4. He accused her of having an affair with another man.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI5. He interfered in her relationships with other family members.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI6. He tried to keep her from doing things to help herself. <i>(Anything that would help her improve herself or situation.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI7. Her partner called her names.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI8. Her partner swore at her.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMWI9. Her partner yelled and screamed at her.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMW10. Her partner treated her like an inferior	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMW11. Her partner told her that her	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes

feelings were irrational or crazy.						
PMW12. Her partner blamed her for his problems.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes
PMW13. Her partner tried to make her feel crazy.	1	2	3	4	5	0 ____ No 1 ____ Yes

We are about halfway through the interview, do you want to take a break or keep going?

III. The Impact of Abuse on Family Dynamics and Functioning.

For the rest of the interview, I'm going to ask you some questions about your family dynamics and functioning, how you managed your experiences, and how your experiences have influenced you, particularly in terms of your view of and involvement in relationships with your romantic partners and peers.

First, I am going to start off with some questions about your relationship with your mother's partner. Just as a reminder, I am a mandated reporter of ongoing child abuse, so if you report any ongoing child abuse towards a sibling under 19, I would have to report this to the proper authorities.

1. Many people report that they have a complicated relationship with their mother's partner if he was abusive to their mother meaning that they have both a good and bad relationship with him, whereas others report all positive or all negative memories or encounters with their mother's abusive partner. Can you tell me about your relationship with your mom's partner while you were growing up?

[Probe for whether this has changed over time; probe for physical and non-physical abuse, controlling behaviors; provide examples]

[If probes did allow for information on controlling behaviors] Would you describe him as controlling over you and your siblings? If yes, how so? Can you give me some examples? If no, why would you say he was not controlling?

2. Compared to when you were growing up, what is your relationship like with your mom's partner now or in the past few years? *[Probe for discussion of all aspects of relationship, good, bad, controlling]*

3. (Back up question if not getting enough detail) Some people believe that a husband (or partner) who is abusive can still be a good father to their children or the mother's children while others argue that the two cannot be separated. What are your beliefs on this?

I am now going to shift our attention to your family and home life in general and how you managed your experiences in the context of your immediate family members and those outside your family.

4. If you were to describe what your family or home life was like in three words, what would the three words be and why would you choose them?

5. Can you tell me about a time when you talked with another family member about your his abusive behavior? (*Who initiated the conversation, when, what was the response of the other person, did the conversation remain ongoing; messages about secrecy*)

a. *If no communication*, what do you think the response would have been had you told others about his abusive behavior?

6. (If not covered earlier) As I mentioned in an earlier question, some mom's feel like should keep the violence and abuse a secret from their children to protect them from knowing, but other moms talk with their children and adolescence about their partner's behavior. How would you describe your communication with your mother about the abuse she experienced?

7. Can you tell me about a time when someone outside your family learned about your mother's partner's abusive behavior? (*Who initiated the conversation, when, what was the response of the other person, did the conversation remain ongoing; any other conversations with others*)

b. *If no one ever learned*, how do you think someone outside the family would have responded had they learned about his behavior?

8. Compared to when you were growing up, what is your family and home life like now? (*Probe for mother, mother's partner, siblings; reasons for change; beneficial or detrimental change*)

IV. Interpersonal Relationships. Alright, in this final section, I am going to ask you some questions about your relationships with peers as well as romantic partners.

1. Thinking back to your childhood and adolescence, how would you describe your relationships or how well you got along with your classmates, neighbor kids, and friends that you met while growing up? [*Probe for bully perpetration/victimization, ability to maintain close friendships; changes over time*]

a. Some young adults report that their ability to develop and maintain friendships has been negatively impacted by the abuse they experienced or were exposed to, whereas other young adults report that they have many positive friendships that helped them cope

and manage their abusive home life. How does your peer or friend experiences compare with these perspectives?

2. The romantic relationships, both positive and negative, that we are exposed to in our families of origin are known to impact our views of and involvement in romantic relationships. Can you talk about how your abuse exposure experiences have impacted or not impacted your decision to enter into a romantic relationship at this point in your life, your choice of romantic partner, and your interactions with romantic partners? *[If they have never been in a romantic relationship, ask them how they EXPECT the exposure will impact their choice of and interactions with a future partner]*

3. And finally, as we wrap up, if you were given the opportunity to talk with others who were exposed to violence and abuse in their family of origin, based on your experiences, what tips or advice would you share for coping and managing their experiences in a beneficial manner?

Do you have any questions or concerns for me? If not right now, please know that you can email or call if any questions arises after our meeting.

Thank you very much for your time and willingness to share your experiences with us. Please accept this thank you note, \$25 cash, and referral list.

In the future we may conduct studies similar to the Y'ALL Project, would you like to give me your contact information so we can invite you to participate in future studies? This information will be kept in a confidential file cabinet and electronic file. If we were to contact you in the future, we would be using a project name similar to the Y'ALL Project and would not identify as you a participant in the current project. If you provide your contact information, you can decline our invitation to participate in any future study. This does not commit you in any way to participating. [If the participant agrees, ask the following contact information]

Date of Participation: _____

Contact information: _____

(Email)_____

(Cell/phone) _____

(Additional contact information) _____

(Regardless of providing contact information for future studies) **Would you like me to contact you with an overview of the final results from this study?**

(If yes): How would you like me to contact you? [Regardless of contact method] I will not identify the nature of the study, but rather, I will refer to the study as the Y'ALL Project and ask to make sure you would still like me to provide you with the results via the mean of

communication that you suggested today. For example, I will not just email the results to you without first checking to make sure that is what you would like.

(If yes and did not provide contact information above)

(Email) _____

(Cell/phone) _____

(Additional contact information) _____

Appendix B: Final Codebook

Table 1: Final Codebook

STRUCTURAL CODES (Mother-Child-Related Only)		
Code	When to Use	-----
MOTHER-CHILD: Personal perception or experiences of mom	Any talk about the participant's perception of, relationship with, or experiences with their mom.	-----
MOTHER-SIBLING: Sibling perception or experiences of mom	Any talk about sibling's perception of, relationship with, or experiences with their mom.	-----
PUBLIC: Public perception or experiences of mom	Any talk about how others outside the immediate family (e.g., excluding father) perceive their mom or how public perception compares to life at home. Examples may include having specific beliefs that were implied, but did not align with the life the participant knew. They may include having specific beliefs that were implied, but did not align with the life the participant knew. This could be positive or negative. This can include extended family member's perceptions of the mom or mom/child relationship. For example, P17, the grandparents observed and intervened, chastising their daughter/participant's mom.	-----
PROCESS CODES (Mother-Child-Related Only)		
Code	When to Use	Example

Table 1: Continued

DAD-CHILD/MOM: Dad's treatment of the child influences the mother-child relationship.	Any talk about how the participant's relationship with their dad influenced their relationship with their mom. This could be positive or negative.	"... then with my dad, it was kind of like he was always at arm's length. He didn't want to get too close. I think that kind of made me have a stronger bond with my mom" (P1)
YELLING: Mom yelling or screaming at dad	Any talk of mom yelling or screaming at dad. This could be an indication of verbal abuse but could also be an indication of poor conflict management or self-defense/response to Dad's abusive behavior.	"Usually he would start things off. He has always been very calm, but he's angry. You can tell he's angry, but he is not like screaming like how she is. And he would make a comment to her, they would go back and forth and then she would start screaming."(P1)
THREATENING DIVORCE/LEAVE: Mom threatening to divorce or leave dad	Any talk of mom threatening divorce or threatening to leave the abusive relationship. This could include the participant's perception of mom's threats to divorce or leave the relationship.	"She was always threatening to get a divorce and leave, saying we could live with her parents for a little while before she could get onto her feet and be able to support us, herself (P4, 381-382)."
SPIRALING: Mom physically and/or mentally spiraling	Any discussion of mom physically and/or emotionally spiraling due to violence, divorce, post-separation abusive behaviors or interactions. Examples include banging on participant's door, damaging dad's property, calling participant incessantly. This could also capture spiraling due to health-related issues and how the participant felt about their mom's spiraling.	"At first it was really positive and we had a really good relationship, but then it just—she just started acting, I don't like to use this word, but crazy about stuff. I don't know it was like she was, almost crazy about stuff with my dad and she was just upset about it all the time. She would come bang on my door at 4 in the morning crying."(P1)
FIGHTING OVER MOTHERING: mom and dad arguing about a parenting decision for their child	Any discussion of mom and dad physically or verbally arguing due to the discussion of parenting decisions differing. An example may include disagreeing on where child should go/should not go.	"And I think the reason he and my mom fought some towards the end is because he would go somewhere and then she would let me go do something and then he would find out and they would fight about it (P1, 516 – 518)."

Table 1: Continued

MOVING AWAY: participant physically moved away from parents, thus causing a disconnect	Any talk of the participant talking about how moving away alters or otherwise changes the mother-child relationship, including wanting some separation and independence. An example may be moving away for college or moving out of the home. This can be positive or negative.	“It’s definitely a lot worse, since she’s... well really since I moved out last summer and came here, it got a little worse (P1, 539–540).” “But the openness didn’t really start until after I moved (P2, 856).”
NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR MOM: participant expresses having no caring feelings or sympathy for mother	Any talk of participant describing a lack of sympathy or care towards their mother or implying they are not responsible for how their mother acts/performs. Examples may include ignoring their mother or not feeling an obligation to take care of her.	“But since I’ve gotten away, I guess I don’t feel that same obligation to take care of her, because I don’t see how she acts (P1, 541-542).”
CARE-TAKING ROLE REVERSAL: mom and participant switched roles – participant would take care of mother instead of mother taking care of participant	Any discussion of the mother and child reversing roles. This would mean the participant takes care of and supports the mother and the mother acts as the child in the mother-child dynamic. This may also include when the roles began to shift in the home - may be when the father moved out, the abuse started, or the abuse worsened. Examples include interrupting child’s sleep to be comforted, stating she is the support system, and expecting to be put first over priorities in the child’s life.	“It’s like I said, she would come knock on my door in the middle of the night—like on a school night. I remember one night she did it and it was before I was supposed to take the ACT and she knew that, and it was like she just always expected me to put her first and treat her how a parent would treat a child and take care of her and make sure she’s not upset (P1, 545-548).”
SPENDING TIME WITH MOM: participant describes activities the family would do together as way to bond with mom without father in home	Any talk of activities the family would partake in with one another and their mom, without the father at home. Examples include watching movies and board games with their mother.	“We would watch movies with my mom and just do normal family stuff, and play board games (P1, 593-594).”

Table 1: Continued

TALKING ABOUT ABUSE: children and mom talked and discussed the abuse occurring in the home	Any discussion of the mother disclosing, talking, or discussing contents of the abuse to participant. Any talk of mother and child communicating about the abuse or arguments with father that occurred in the presence of participant or without participant present. This may look like detailing specific incidents, conversations, or actions that occurred. Knowledge and disclosure of abuse may vary depending on mom and situation. Examples may include talking to mom frequently after abuse, talking to mom about a specific incident, and timeframes of when communication about the abuse first started. This may also include recollections from pre-during-post abuse. This could be positive or negative. This could also include extended family talking to the children (not the mom/dad) about the abuse.	“Yeah, I’ve talked to my mom about it a lot, and my brothers more recently, we’ve discussed it. But, mainly my mom. Ever since I was 13 or 14, she’s told me stuff he’s done to her (P1, 608-609).”
DRIVING A WEDGE: mom intentionally creating disconnect in father-child relationship to have her child for herself only	Any discussion of how the father or mother drove a wedge between the child and the other parent for their own benefit.	“Honestly, now, I think she wanted me to not like him. She wanted to drive a wedge between me and him even more, and he always said that he and I didn’t have a relationship because she did that.” (P1, 612-616).”

Table 1: Continued

MOM HEALTH: mom has medical conditions and health diagnoses that are important to mention	Any discussion of the mother having health impacts and/or medical conditions. This may include depression, anxiety, or PTSD. <i>This can also include substance misuse or the impact of traumas outside the IPV that impacted the mother and her health behaviors (e.g., drug use).</i>	“my mom and my brother, they both have depression, and they both have had different issues at some point with their medications, so they’ve had very intense emotional, I don’t know if outburst is the right word, but like behaviors or displays over the years (P2, 773-776).”
MOM SHIELDING/PROTECTING: mother protected and shielded children from abuse	Any mention of mom partaking, engaging in, or displaying intervention behaviors as a way to prevent and stop the abuse that is happening. Any mention of the mother protecting and/or shielding the father and abuse from the children. This may look like sending children to a room, waiting to argue until after children were asleep/gone, sending children to a family members’ house, or physically protecting the children. Examples may include calling the police, stopping the abuse, protecting the children, inflicting harm on father, or using physical violence.	“when we were kids she’d try to like shield like stuff from us so we wouldn’t see it (P2, 182).” " And then mom would just like if something was like happening when we were around “well can you wait until they leave” or like “can you at least wait until I put them to bed” or something (P2, 288-290).”
BREADWINNING MOM: mother brought in the money to the home and made the most money	Any discussion of the mother having the primary income for the home and is making the most money. Examples may include mom working a job or multiple jobs, while dad is barely making an income.	"Saying like, you don’t own any money, you can’t even afford this or like all these things which ironically would be when he would be unemployed and frankly my mom would be bringing in more money from her part time job than he would be unemployed with benefits or his benefits would have run out but he would still like “oh, you don’t have a real job, you’re not employed” all this stuff (P2, 211-215).”

Table 1: Continued

INTERVENING: participant describes and details a story in which they intervened/jumped into the situation to stop the abuse and the differences in approaches from their mother and themselves	Any mention of participant partaking, engaging in, or displaying intervention behaviors after negotiating as a way to prevent and stop the abuse that is happening; how the participant and mom intervened differently; how the participant or parent(s) perceived the intervention. Examples may include calling the police, stopping the abuse, protecting the mother, inflicting harm on father, or using physical violence.	“But if things ever get physical and police haven’t already been called, and I’ll go ahead and do it (P2, 366).”
SINGLE MOTHER: mom often displayed single parent behaviors (taking care of family, children, working, etc.).	Any talk of not receiving any or little support from the father as a parent, leaving the mother to have single mother characteristics. Examples include refusing to support children, refusing to help with chores, or only caring about yourself.	“plans for the family or like errands that mom needs like mom said basically she’s turning into a single parent because he’s too busy getting drunk to be reliable for anything (P2, 329-330).”
PROTECT-SHEILDING: participant protects mother when father becomes abusive	Any mention of the participant protecting or standing up for their mother as a protective factor against the abuse. Often, this may mean the participant is using their fathers’ reluctance to inflict harm as an advantage. Any talk of the participant jumping in or intervening in the abuse to shield mom knowing the father would not inflict harm against them. This is used as a protective factor for mom.	“You can only hit the one and frankly if he were to hit me he knows that like frankly he can get away with doing a lot more to Mom because she won’t fight back she won’t call the police a lot of times. She won’t do a lot of things that would give him repercussions, but he knows that I have no problem doing that myself (P2, 359-362).”

Table 1: Continued

MOTHER STOPS INTERVENTION: mother stops participant from intervening in the abuse	Any discussion of the mother stopping participant from intervening to prevent further arguments and abuse inflicted on both mom and participant. Examples may include stopping child, reasoning with child, and asking child to stop.	“Um, sometimes I’m worried about things escalating because mom says like if he starts yelling and I want to tell back she’s like “oh, don’t do that it will only make things worse blah blah blah,” so sometimes I won’t yell back at him (P2, 363-365).”
FATHER BLAMING MOTHER: father blames mother for ongoing abuse to children	Any mention of the father blaming the mother for the reason the abuse started/occurred, specifically in front of or to the children. This must be tied into the mother-child relationship and how the participant perceives the mom. Examples may include calling mom names or denying his part in the abuse.	“He’d be like, “no you’re crazy” or “you don’t understand” or no, “your mom’s just convinced you that I’m doing all of these terrible things” (P2, 614-616).”
MOM INITIATED FAMILY INTERACTION PRE-ABUSE: mother organized and facilitated family interactions and activities before the abuse	Any talk of mom being the sole parent to initiate family interactions and activities before the abuse occurred. Examples include planning game nights and family outings.	“there were, like a lot of the stuff that we did was still at the prompting of my mom but it was more like she was the plan maker and he enthusiastically went along with it (P2, 629-631).”
PEERIFICATION: any discussion of participant serving as mom’s friend or closest confidant, including the participant’s perception of this role	Any discussion of the participant serving as mother’s friend or closest confidant, including the participant’s perception of this role. Examples may include perceptions of participant and being mother’s sole support system. This can be positive or negative.	“P2: Ever since I’ve gotten older, like to be an adult and stuff, she’s – we’ve gotten to be a lot closer, but it’s not always in a good way. Because like when she, for example when, I called – there’s one point when she was suicidal and she had already self-harmed a little bit, so I called 911 and she was in a crisis center, and had an interview with either a doctor there or a doctor at the hospital I can’t remember which one... But she would, like, they asked her “who’s your support system” and she mentioned my daughter, well, she’s my support system. (P2, 817-822).”

Table 1: Continued

MOM SEEKING HELP: mother looks for resources and ways to leave the abuse/relationship	Any discussion of mom attempting to seek help or resources for navigating and leaving the abuse or relationship. This may include how the participant sees the mother seeking/leaving or how they may perceive the mother-child relationship. Examples may include talking to friends, counseling, or making a plan to leave.	“Because my mom said too, she wants to leave him, and she’s trying to go to counseling so she can get strong enough to, but she’s just not at that place right now.” (P2, 1162-1171).
REMOVING KIDS FROM HOME: mother would remove kids from the home to protect them	Any discussion of mom removing the children from the home in order to protect children from abuse or exposure to more abuse. Examples may include staying at hotels, with friends, or family members.	"I remember a lot of growing up we stayed in hotel rooms and stuff because my mom would get me and my sister and we would leave for the night (P3, 109-110)."
WISHING MOM LEFT DAD: participant describes how they hoped or wished their mother left their father	Any discussion of participant describing how they wanted their mother to leave their father. Examples may include expressing annoyance, frustration, or hope towards her mom leaving the situation.	“MH: Do you remember thinking back what made her start to fight back? P3: No because I always did wonder that. You know how do you just sit here- and I really feel like she just eventually got tired of being abused, but it doesn’t make any sense to me for her to then become the aggressor. I just always felt like she should have just left the situation (P3, 168-178).”

Table 1: Continued

MOM'S VIOLENCE/ABUSE: mother became the aggressor instead of father, almost as if mom was the abuser	Any mention of mother physically hurting or verbally abusing the father. Participant may express confusion for this decision on her mother's behalf. Any talk of the father initiating the abuse and mother beginning to fight back. This may include mom slowly starting to fight back or always fighting back. Examples include for self-defense, stabbing, shooting, or punching/hitting.	"I remember she stabbed my dad one time so it really brought a lot of dysfunction into our family (P3, 108-109)." "P3: No because I always did wonder that. You know how do you just sit here- and I really feel like she just eventually got tired of being abused, but it doesn't make any sense to me for her to then become the aggressor. I just always felt like she should have just left the situation (P3, 176-178)." "I remember being in the 9th grade and that's when she got a gun and granted she wouldn't pull her gun on him, but she would hit him in the head with it (P3, 180-181)." "I do remember growing up and they would get into physical altercations and things like that. I do remember seeing my dad beat my mom and then I remember years after that it turned into my mom kind of fighting back eventually (P3, 105-107)."
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Table 1: Continued

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE: mom's emotional response to participant	Any discussion of mom's emotional response towards the participant or in comparison to her emotional response to participant's siblings. This includes affection, love, warmth, but also coldness and distance. Added to also include participant's emotional response regarding mom, abuse, their family situation.	"I do remember trying to tell my mom when I was maybe in like 4th or 5th grade, you know I came home crying because I wanted to be friends with these girls and they were being mean to me and she was like you don't need any friends you don't need anybody. She was always so like... I didn't feel like she gave me any compassion. You know like I am upset right now. Comfort me. Help me feel better, but instead she'd be like you don't need them. Don't worry about them and then she would just go on about her business and like yeah you're saying that, but you don't understand what it's like to go to school with these same people and no one wants to be your friend you know (P3, 605-612)."
KEEPING FAMILY SECRETS: mom often kept secrets in the house and did not share outside of the home, regarding what occurred inside the home (abuse)	Any mention of mom keeping what happened in home a secret, from peers, family, or friends. This must be specific to the mother-child relationship or the participant's perception of their mother/mothering. Examples may include mom or child hiding information about abuse from anyone who was not in the immediate family.	"I am really talkative and things would slip out before I realized it so I stayed in trouble with my mom because she was like "don't tell anyone about any of our business and things like that (244-246)." "And secretive, I guess. KH: Secretive? P4: We like to keep to ourselves usually. (P4, 16-19)." "I do remember a lot of being told "you don't tell anyone what goes on in our house" and things like that. I remember one time saying something to my grandmother about something that happened and I got into a lot of trouble (P3, 240-242)."

Table 1: Continued

CHILDREN LIVED WITH MOM: participant lived with mom	Any mention of participant living or going to live with mom.	“MH: When you were in high school, did you live primarily with your mom or with both of them when they separated? P3: Yeah it has always just been with my mom. (P3, 332-335).”
MOM-CHILD COMMUNICATION: participant is in contact with mom	Any talk of communicating with mom. Any discussion of mom and child not communicating about the abuse or arguments with father that occurred in presence of participant or without participant present. Communication can vary from never to frequently. This may also include recollections from pre-during-post abuse. This could be positive or negative.	“I try to call my mom, my dad and my grandmother every day (P3, 496-497).” “MH: So now you guys do discuss it or P3: Yeah, I mean we talk about it somewhat, but it’s not like.. I don’t know. It is hard to explain to someone that they kind of ruined their kids in a way you know with what they had going on cause now my mom is completely different from who she was then and so it’s like I would be guilt tripping her if I brought it up even though talking about it would make me feel better. So I try not to go too far into detail about how I really feel about what happened because it makes her feel bad and then I feel bad (P3, 580-586).”
PARTNER’S BEHAVIORS RESEMBLED MOTHER’S ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS: participant details the similarities of abuse with mother and romantic partner	Any talk of participant connecting romantic partner’s behaviors to their mothers’ behaviors as an abusive parent and recognizing the signs of abuse in relationships.	“when he got mad and there was even one time when he slapped me and you know I constantly kind of just brushed it off which now that I look back it is kind of what I saw my mom do (P3, 719-720).”

Table 1: Continued

EMPATHIZING WITH MOM: participant expresses sympathy/empathy towards mom and her situation	Any mention of participant expressing sympathy or empathy towards mom. Examples may include feeling sorry for mom or feeling the emotions, their mother may have felt.	“It was getting to college and realizing that the world is humongous because I grew up in a small town I kind of felt like that there was no one else for my mom you know I just didn’t feel like there were a lot of people there for you to have a choice of who you want (P3, 739-741).”
MOM BROKERS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KIDS AND DAD: mom is responsible for communication between children and dad b/c children do not speak to father directly	Any discussion of mom brokering or contacting father to facilitate contact between dad and children. Some children may refuse to speak to dad while others do not think to contact their father, but mom wants them too. Examples may include using mom as a middleman between father-child relationship.	“if I need money or something, I can ask my dad for it, but it’s usually easier to ask my mom to ask my dad for it because she kind of forces him to do it. So it’s like they kind of have a good relationship, but it’s really dysfunctional at the same time (P3, 325-328).”
PROVIDING ALL THAT SHE COULD: mom gave her all for her children, despite the abuse	Any mention of participant recognizing their mom contributed as much as she could throughout her childhood. Examples may include gratitude towards mom, working multiple jobs for children, and positively contributing to children’s health and development.	“KH: What about your relationship with your mom? So what was that like when you were younger? P4: My mom always looked out for me and tried to give me the best of what she could afford, and tried to keep me fed and clothed and taken care of. She never liked seeing me upset, and she would try to keep me from getting too upset. I was kind of sickly when I was little and she was always worried about my health. I remember one story where she told me that the doctors had called her thinking that I had like, leukemia, and they checked me out. She said that she could hear me screaming from their waiting room when they drew the spinal fluid and it came back negative, so she was happy (P4, 821-829).”

Table 1: *Continued*

DOING MY BEST FOR MOM: the participant looks out for kids as a young adult	Any discussion of participant going out of their way or picking up the slack from their mom to help their mom out. Examples may include distracting siblings, taking care of siblings, and cleaning.	“We are still very close, she looks out for me, tells me that she’s proud of me, that she loves me. And that all I need to do is keep doing is doing my best and that I can do better than her in this world and make a name for myself (P4, 831-833).” “P4: they, they, they were yelling a lot. I tried to tune most of it out, because it was upsetting, obviously. And uh, I tried to protect my sister from knowing what was going on (P4, 269-270).” “And uh, I tried to protect my sister from knowing what was going on. KH: Okay. Would you like a tissue? No? Okay. So how would you do that? P4: Well I’d set up in front of the TV or I’d get my DVD player out, I’d get out whatever little MP3 I owned or I’d uh, sing to her. (P4, 270-273).”
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Table 1: Continued

MOM RECOGNIZED SIGNS-KIDS ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP: mom recognizing the signs of abusive behavior or tactics in their child(ren)’s relationship	Any mention of the mom confronting or discussing child’s romantic relationship with their child. This may include recognizing the signs of abuse and preventing children from further abuse experiences in romantic relationship.	“KH: Would you say that it was... he was emotionally supportive of you? P4: He was always making me feel like I wasn’t good enough. He was always trying to corner me and get me to do something he wanted to do. It reminded me a lot of my dad’s relationship with my mom. It worried my mom when I came home upset so often after he left... KH: You said it reminded your mom quite a bit of her relationship— P4: because he was trying to control me. Make sure I did what I was supposed to do and get me to do what he wanted me to do. KH: Did you ever come to that realization either after or during the relationship or did your mom explain this to you? P4: I noticed it towards the end that he was doing that. My mom talked to me about that, and I was going to talk to him about how he was treating me differently, when he decided he didn’t want to date me anymore (P4, 945-956).”
SAFETY PLANNING: mom takes steps to plan for safety or leaving, showing intentions to leave.	Any safety planning decisions other than removing kids from the home. This can include hiding money, creating an exit strategy, etc.	“And I remember she would like- I don’t know if all women do this, but I know my mom would hide money in the house just in case (P8).”
PARTNERING WITH MOM: mom and child are working together.	Any discussion of child and mom working together on something, specific to communication and privacy management. This may look like hiding information, helping mom, and more.	“She didn’t know for the longest, because me and my mom felt it was best, we knew she would react that way. But yeah, so that’s how she reacted when she found out (P9).”

Table 1: Continued

NOT WANTING TO END UP LIKE MOM: child expresses not wanting to be like their mom in romantic relationships or abuse.	Any mention of not wanting to end up like their mom in a romantic relationship or in the capacity of abuse that their mom experienced. This can also include perpetrating abuse or engaging in conflict similar to their parents.	“There are other people in the world that have normal relationships, and you can have this too. But...I honestly thought that I couldn’t have that because I guess my mom didn’t, but now I see, she always told me don’t find a boyfriend like your dad (P10).”
MOM IS DISCIPLINARIAN: mom disciplines the children, dad does not play active role in discipline.	Any mention of mom being primary parent to discipline children or father not participating in actions to discipline the children.	“My mom would kind of like discipline us more. Well, when we were younger, they both would..I feel like a mom definitely can handle that better than the dad, because the dad doesn’t really know. But my dad would like... enforce curfews and stuff but when it came to stuff between me and my sister... I don’t know. Most of it was just my mom. We would talk to my mom more about it, but again I think that makes sense because we are two teenage girls...My dad would also really make sure me and my sister would go to my mom. He would always be like, if he was going on a trip or something be like “Y’all get a long for her. Y’all be good, Y’all help her clean,” and so, again, he wanted us to be good....Even though, me and my sister are a lot closer to my mom and her parents, just because they live a little bit closer and relate to them more. He really wants us to be involved with his family, he’s big on family as much as it seems like he wouldn’t be (P9).”

Table 1: Continued

MOM BLAMING CHILD: mom blames child for their life choices or abuse.	Any discussion of mom blaming child for their abuse or their life circumstances. This may include staying in a marriage for the child or frequently getting mad at child for the way their life is going.	“She – the times that you would expect your mom to be like “hey it’s okay” and stuff like that. I remember, I think when I was in 10th grade, my friend had passed away.. I was in my room and I was like crying and rather than come in and “oh, what’s going on. It’s okay.” This is going to sound horrible. She opens my bedroom door and goes “If you’re just going to be crying all the time”...like something about like if you’re just going to be in there giving me a headache crying all of the time why don’t you just kill yourself and get over with it. Stop bothering me. She’s always been like – I think..I know I get on people’s nerves and stuff. But, I think, it’s almost like...I think for a period of time she blamed getting – I think she blamed her relationship with my dad and staying in a violent relationship on me. And not my brother more so because I was younger and she was telling herself that she was being a good mother and being a good wife by keeping her family together, where she could have gotten out of that marriage three years earlier because my brother is three years older than me. Whereas she had to stay longer. I think she just blamed it on me (P8, T2).”
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Table 1: Continued

FAVORING DAD OVER MOM: child prefers their father over their mom.	Any mention of child or children favoring their father or step-father over their mother.	“When I was little, like my mom – she gets mad about this, when she’s mad at me she says this. Even when I was a little kid, I had to be with my dad. Like she would leave the house and it was like “bye mom,” but my dad would leave the house and I would be like hysterical crying (P8, T2).”
CHILD-GUILT: child expresses guilt or guilty feelings for their mom’s situation and abuse.	Any mention of the child or children expressing guilt or guilty feelings towards their mother due to their situational circumstances or the abuse that occurred. This may look like children expressing guilt or being the reason their mother stayed for so long. <i>This can also include feeling guilty for mom worrying about them, indirectly related to IPV.</i>	“So it wasn’t like... I mean when I was there, it was just kind of split between the two of us, the rage... but when I left all his focus was on her. So I kind of felt really bad, but... (P21).” “I felt bad about not helping my mom, but I mean, if you’re going to stay married to something that’s been doing that for 10 years now, you would think if it bothered you enough, you would leave. But she didn’t, she never would (P21).”

Appendix C: Table 2 - Safety Planning with Mom or Alone by Participant

Table 2: Safety Planning with Mom or Alone by Participant

	Safety Planning with Mom or Alone by Participant		
Participant	Partnering with mom	Protecting or shielding mom	Threatening to leave or leaving
P1 Lauren			X
P2 Elizabeth		X_{is}	X
P3 Jasmine			r
P4 Barbara		X	X_r
P5 Sarah		i	X_r
P6 Briana		X_i	r
P7 Mia		i	
P8 Keli		X_{is}	
P9 Ellie	X	i	X
P10 Blair		X_{is}	X
P11 Caitlin		X_i	X_r
P12 Annie		X_i	r
P13 London		X_i	r
P14 Victoria			X
P15 Taylor	X	X_i	X_r
P16 Aaliyah	X		X_r
P17 Alexis			
P18 Steph	X		X_r
P19 Joshua	X		r
P20 Stefan		X	
P21 Mary B	X	X_i	X
P22 Rebecca	X	X_i	X_r
P23 Emma		i	X
P24 Allison		X_i	X
P25 Amelia	X	X	X_r
i represents participants who intervened in physical and psychological abuse. s represents participants who expressed their mothers' efforts to stop their interventions. r represents participants who were removed from their homes.			

Appendix D: Table 3 - Seeing Mom in a Positive Light

Table 3: *Seeing Mom in a Positive Light*

	Seeing Mom in a Positive Light					
Participant	Spending time	Providing	Breadwinning	Doing their best	Recognizing signs	Empathizing
P1 Lauren	X					
P2 Elizabeth			X			
P3 Jasmine						X
P4 Barbara		X		X	X	
P5 Sarah						X
P6 Briana				X		X
P7 Mia		X				X
P8 Keli						
P9 Ellie						X
P10 Blair	X	X	X	X		X
P11 Caitlin		X	X	X		X
P12 Annie		X				
P13 London						
P14 Victoria				X		
P15 Taylor	X					
P16 Aaliyah		X	X			
P17 Alexis	X			X	X	X
P18 Steph						
P19 Joshua						X
P20 Stefan	X				X	
P21 Mary B		X				
P22 Rebecca	X	X	X	X		
P23 Emma						
P24 Allison				X		X
P25 Amelia		X		X		

Appendix E: Table 4 – Seeing Mom in a Negative Light

Table 4: *Seeing Mom in a Negative Light*

	Seeing Mom in a Negative Light					
Participant	Caretaking	Not fighting back	Lacking warmth	Abusive mom	Driving a wedge	Favoring dad
P1 Lauren	X				X	
P2 Elizabeth					X	
P3 Jasmine	X		X			
P4 Barbara						
P5 Sarah			X			
P6 Briana		X				X
P7 Mia	X		X			
P8 Keli		X	X	X	X	X
P9 Ellie				X		
P10 Blair	X	X	X			
P11 Caitlin		X				X
P12 Annie				X	X	
P13 London					X	
P14 Victoria					X	X
P15 Taylor						
P16 Aaliyah			X			
P17 Alexis			X	X		
P18 Steph						X
P19 Joshua				X		
P20 Stefan				X		
P21 Mary B	X					X
P22 Rebecca						X
P23 Emma						
P24 Allison	X			X		
P25 Amelia			X	X	X	X

Appendix F: Table 5 - Changing Perceptions of Mom-Child Relationship Over Time

Table 1: *Changing Perceptions of Mom-Child Relationship Over Time*

Participant	Changing Perceptions of Mom-Child Relationship Over Time			
	Moving away	No longer responsible	Wishing mom would leave dad	Not wanting to be like mom
P1 Lauren	X	X		
P2 Elizabeth	X			
P3 Jasmine			X	
P4 Barbara			X	
P5 Sarah				
P6 Briana	X	X		
P7 Mia				
P8 Keli	X			
P9 Ellie			X	
P10 Blair				X
P11 Caitlin			X	
P12 Annie	X		X	
P13 London			X	X
P14 Victoria				
P15 Taylor			X	X
P16 Aaliyah	X			X
P17 Alexis			X	X
P18 Steph				
P19 Joshua			X	
P20 Stefan	X			X
P21 Mary B	X	X	X	X
P22 Rebecca				X
P23 Emma				X
P24 Allison			X	X
P25 Amelia			X	X

Vita

Amber Dispanet (she/her) was born and raised in Timberville, Virginia. In 2023, she graduated with a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Sociology, Majoring in Criminology and Sociology, and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). In the Fall of 2023, she began her graduate studies in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences to get her MS. Her research interests center on the intersection of families and crime. During her time as a graduate student, Amber served as the HDFS Graduate Student Liaison for the 2024-2025 academic year and acted as a teaching assistant for HDFS 210 (Human Development), HDFS 320 (Family Interactions), and HDFS 360 (Family Stress) under the guidance of Drs. Sally Hunter and Alex Tucker. She briefly served as a research assistant for the Implementation Science for Early Learning Lab (ISELL) under the guidance of Dr. Lori Caudle in the Fall of 2024 and then began a research assistant position with Dr. Jun Ai in the Spring of 2025.