

The stories of self-determination and motivation of community college students who have had
experiences of intimate partner sexual violence

by

Rod Golden

B.A., Wright State University, 1993

M.S., University of Akron, 1995

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Education Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This research, guided by Maslow's hierarchy of needs and self-determination theory, studied community college students who had experienced intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) to understand their perspectives on how motivation and self-determination influenced their academic performance during their college experiences. IPSV has been recognized as a serious public health issue. Community college students experiencing IPSV are more likely to be sleep deprived, experience increased absenteeism, have lower grades, and contemplate dropping out of school. This can lead to increased rates of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation.

The researcher used generic qualitative research to conduct interviews with community college students who had experienced IPSV to discuss the importance of self-determination and motivation in their college experiences and on their career and life goals. *IPSV* is a pattern of coercive and assaultive behavior that may include sexual abuse, physical injury, stalking, economic deprivation, isolation from family and friends, psychological abuse, sexual assault or rape, intimidation, and reproductive coercion. Although these experiences may have lifelong consequences, the participants in this study chose to pursue a college education. The purpose of this research was to examine community college students' experiences of IPSV, how they seek services, and their academic success despite the trauma. Further, this study provides necessary recommendations that inform colleges on the support needed for this unique population of students.

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Approved by:
Co-Major Professor
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Co-Major Professor
Dr. Beverlee McClure-Shaw

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Dedication

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the United States, 2-year higher education institutions were initially formulated as junior colleges, where students would complete the first 2 years of their college careers before transferring to a 4-year college or university. Initially, the model did not focus on workforce development in community colleges. The primary concentration was ensuring transfer. The junior college concept originated at the University of Chicago in 1896. According to Ullrich (2023), William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, believed a community college should be similar to those in Germany. His philosophy was to model this concept throughout the United States. The idea met with some success and evolved over the years from offering liberal arts courses to providing technical education courses. The junior college provided courses that would transfer to 4-year colleges. Additionally, colleges provided terminal training opportunities for intellectual learners in vocational fields (Ullrich, 2023). In the late 1920s and during the Great Depression, the junior college model underwent another transformation. Vocational courses emerged due to large segments of the macrosociety being unemployed (Ullrich, 2023).

Another transformation occurred during the Truman Administration in the late 1940s. In the wake of World War II, new legislation created the GI Bill, and President Truman established a commission of public community colleges across the country. According to Ullrich (2023), postsecondary education would now serve all citizens regardless of race, class, gender, or economic status. Changing the name from junior to community college was an ingredient in this process, as the colleges were to reflect the demographics of the communities in which they were located (Ullrich, 2023).

There are several reasons why some students at community colleges do not complete the degree requirements. The literature has addressed one particular complication: the association between intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) and student performance in the classroom. Previous studies have indicated 20%–30% of college students experience physical violence in intimate partner relationships (IPR). Further, upwards of 50% of community college students in IPR have experienced psychological violence (Grover et al., 2008; Kaukinen, 2014; Shorey et al., 2011). Individuals and groups who have been systemically marginalized (e.g., non-White students, students from depressed environments, students who are the first in their families to go to college) are more likely to have inconsistent or insufficient access to basic needs (Camelo & Elliot, 2019). The experiences of community college students and IPSV are linked with broader social and economic inequities in the social structure. Non-White students, student parents, students in urban areas, students living off campus, former foster youth, high users of financial aid, low-income students, and first-generation students are highly likely to experience basic needs insecurity and other forms of need (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018; Chaparro et al., 2009; Maroto et al., 2015; Martinez et al., 2019; Payne-Sturges et al., 2017).

Experiencing IPSV hinders community college students' educational attainment and successful employment. M. Chen (2017) noted survivors who experienced IPSV during adolescence obtained, on average, 0.5 fewer years of education than those who did not. An analysis of adolescents Aged 11–17, based on the data collected between 1976 and 1987 from the National Youth Survey (NYS), indicated youths who experienced IPSV had a higher likelihood of experiencing a decline in effort on schoolwork and poorer academic performance. Based on data from the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, M. Chen (2017) noted IPSV impacts the education of adolescents through high probabilities of absenteeism for students who experienced dating and sexual violence because of safety concerns. Survey results from the Campus Sexual

Assault web-based survey showed higher education was disrupted or discontinued due to survivors dropping classes and moving their residence to avoid perpetrators of IPSV (M. Chen, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Many studies have shown a link between IPSV and students' noncompletion of their higher education experiences, but this connection has not been synthesized. Exploring the relationship between the experience of IPSV and student success is crucial for expanding existing research and filling knowledge gaps. The effects of IPSV can be extensive, influencing socioeconomic status, GPA, and students living in rental housing. Additional research has indicated IPSV can lead to negative academic outcomes. Brewer et al. (2018) found students with poor academic performance experienced emotional abuse, stalking, physical abuse, and sexual abuse from an intimate partner. Community college students experiencing IPSV can experience mental health issues and suicidal thoughts, which hinder academic motivation. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of synthesis regarding how experiencing IPSV impacts community college students and which college-provided support services help them succeed despite the trauma.

Background of the Problem

There are many reasons community college students are at increased risk of mental and physical health problems. The college environment is stressful for most students and requires adjustment to new surroundings. Attending college is associated with considerable stress due to academic pressure. Additionally, some students experience other sources of stress (e.g., emotional intimacy, individual responsibility, separation from family, work-related stress) for the first time (Fadhel & Adawi, 2020; Ross et al., 1999). Most community college students

experience multiple stressors, increasing their risk of mental and physical health problems. Due to the stress college students experience, there is a need to comprehend the specific risk factors that affect the mental health of this unique population (Pedrelli et al., 2015). Pedrelli et al. (2015) found anxiety, suicidal ideation, and depression as the top three mental health problems that require the most attention among college students. Because anxiety, suicidal ideation, and depression cooccur, students may suffer from more than one of these mental health problems (Lamis et al., 2016), but many students refuse to seek treatment (Chesin & Jeglic, 2016).

Research has revealed a range of social factors that contribute to poor academic performance and the decline in mental health of college students. These include issues concerning race, gender, financial hardship, sexual orientation, and first-generation status. A significant risk factor that requires further and more comprehensive research is IPSV and victimization (Ouellett-Morin et al., 2015).

Mortier et al. (2017) found incidents of violence strongly predict suicidal ideation among college students. A recent study by the American Association of Universities, which surveyed a representative sample of 33 colleges and universities, showed 10% of students experienced IPSV victimization while enrolled, with prevalence rates ranging from 6%–14% across different institutions (Cantor et al., 2020). Other research involving community college students and 4-year universities has indicated higher IPSV rates, ranging from 32%–64% (Barrick et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2020; Kaukinen et al., 2015). College students aged 18–24, typical undergraduates, have the highest rates of IPSV (W. L. Johnson et al., 2015; S. G. Smith et al., 2018). Similar to other populations studied, community college students experience IPSV before college, at ages 18–24, and in subsequent years (W. L. Johnson et al., 2015; S. G. Smith et al., 2018).

Students enter the community college campus from a variety of communities, cultures, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Community college students experience various

forms of violence, including sexual, psychological, and physical violence (Honda et al., 2018). Regardless of the type of violence, victims of violence are at a higher risk of poor psychological outcomes, impacting their academic performance in the classroom. Research has indicated sexual, psychological, and physical abuse tend to cooccur (M. Chen, 2017). For instance, individuals who are exposed to psychological abuse, especially women, have a high probability of experiencing physical and sexual violence (Agardh et al., 2012). Various forms of abuse have common and unique behavioral, psychological, and social risk factors (Miga et al., 2010). NonWhite status, low socioeconomic status, female gender, substance use, depression, anxiety, and relationship problems increase the risk of violence and victimization (Foran & O’Leary, 2008; Volpe et al., 2013; Yount et al., 2017).

For community college students, experiencing IPSV affects physical health, mental health, academic success, and access to equal and quality education (Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Mengo & Black, 2016; Sabina & Straus, 2008; Voth Schrag et al., 2020). IPSV survivors experience a heightened risk for depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), along with poorer health outcomes (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2001). For community college students, adverse academic outcomes influenced by IPSV may prove harmful, affecting longer-term economic health and well-being long past the end of college or a relationship (Adams et al., 2013; Pandey & Zhan, 2007). Hence, community college leaders must understand the need for support services that act as safety nets for students experiencing these challenges.

Perceptions of community campus climate and safety may offer both protection and risk for students when addressing violent experiences (Kelly & Torres, 2006). Federal Title IX protections, for example, include IPSV, stalking, sexual assault, and harassment. However, most Title IX compliance efforts have focused on sexual assault and harassment and subsequent

impacts. An increase in research on sexual assault has begun over the years, especially in the period after the Department of Education's 2011 "Dear Colleague Letter" and the President Obama-era White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (2014). Although researchers have begun to examine potential consequences of IPSV in the lives of college students (Banyard et al., 2017; Kaukinen, 2014), and T. R. Coker et al. (2016) found campuswide initiatives (e.g., the Green Dot) helped reduce rates of IPSV, the pathways between campus climate indicators, academic outcomes, and experiences of depression, and IPSV remain underexplored.

Future research should explore the impact of IPSV experiences on students from different racial/ethnic groups and sexual orientations, students with disabilities, and first-generation community college students who succeed academically despite the trauma of experiencing IPSV. Additional research is required to understand the policies and programs most effective at promoting mental health on campus. It is still unknown how subpopulations differ in intersections between socioeconomic status, violence victimization, and poor mental health (T. R. Coker et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is a need to test the efficacy of programs and interventions that may support the mental health of college students on a large scale. The exploration of how community college students' experiences are affected and how college programs and support safety nets may work to break and dismantle the cycle of violence and abuse must be explored and clarified.

Prevention of violence may be one of many strategies for the mental health promotion of college students (T. R. Coker et al., 2016). Future research could provide more reliable tools to collect the most relevant data to inform tailored treatment. Research should assess the role of college variation in the resources available on campus for mental health support for students experiencing trauma. Future studies must focus on a longitudinal design with multiple

observations to address temporal ambiguity issues. Other researchers can explore nuances like types of violent victimization and types of suicidal behavior. More knowledge is needed related to collegiate IPSV and the pathways between experiencing psychological and physical IPSV and academic disengagement.

Finally, the consequences and the link between the experiences of community college students, academic performance in the classroom, and motivation require additional research. Workshops that build students' skills based on IPSV prevention approaches are a good addition. This can add to the current emphasis on building a campus climate against IPSV. These workshops would address individual and micro system-level (i.e., relationship-level) protective/risk factors for IPSV.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the college experience of community college students who have experienced IPSV to understand their motivation and self-determination to succeed in college and the support services that strengthen their likelihood of success. Also, this study provided insight into the influence of the college experience on students' career and life goals.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. How do community college students who have experienced IPSV describe their motivation and self-determination to succeed in college?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of community college students who have experienced IPSV of college support services that strengthen their likelihood to succeed?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Experiencing IPSV is a serious, complex phenomenon among community college students. Using theory to understand the needs of community college students who have experienced IPSV and how personal factors contributed to their experiences and their success is vital to developing effective campus community college support strategies. To get a detailed perspective of how community college students describe their needs, a theoretical framework was needed.

The theoretical framework used for this research was Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Maslow's philosophy of motivation comprises the individual's internal and external processes. He believed human motivation must be viewed as the whole sum of the individual. He concluded that the self is complex (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's (1943) philosophy is based on five basic needs: psychological, safety, social, esteem, and love. All basic needs are related and dependent on one another. However, they are ranked in a hierarchical arrangement based on their power and influence on the goals and motivations of the individual self (Maslow, 1943). One fact is clear: a student who does not feel safe is unlikely to succeed in their educational experience and may be unable to achieve higher levels of esteem and self-actualization.

The purpose of a conceptual framework in a research study is to act as a road map for the research that outlines the study's variables, concepts, and relationships. The conceptual framework that guided this study was self-determination theory. The theory was developed by psychologists Ryan and Deci (2000, 2020). Ryan and Deci found individuals tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfillment. The decision to use this conceptual framework helped the

researcher understand what motivates students and how determined community college students are to complete their college education after experiencing IPSV.

Methodology

The research methodology for the study was a generic qualitative design using interviews to explore the college experiences of community college student participants who had experienced IPSV. The analysis allowed the researcher to learn from the individuals' storied lives. Furthermore, it gave meaning to the individuals' experiences that can be shared and understood (Reismann, 1993). The research followed a qualitative study approach designed to understand the college experience that supports success and completion.

The researcher conducted 10 interviews in a community college district over a period of several months. The current study allowed a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of motivation and self-determination of community college students. The effects of IPSV on academic performance and enrollment were also considered.

The research study involved 10 participants. The community college district that served as the site for this study had multiple campuses in the southwestern part of the United States and was classified as a Hispanic-serving institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Alignment Table

The alignment table showcases the overview of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a theoretical framework and self-determination theory as the conceptual framework. The table aligns the theories with the literature findings, methodology, interview questions, and research questions. The alignment table is in Appendix A.

Delimitations and Assumptions

This qualitative study focused on several colleges in a community college district in the southwestern portion of the United States. The regionally limited responses may potentially vary from other parts of the country. This study only included student participants and did not include college administrators or leaders. The research was conducted during the Spring 2026 term. This time was chosen to ensure subjects would be engaged in their studies at the time of the interviews.

The study assumptions were as follows: The researcher expected the participants interviewed to answer questions honestly and precisely and to be accurate in their reflections. The researcher also expected full commitment from campus leaders, administration, and students.

Significance of the Study

This research on students at community college campuses who have experienced IPSV and their subsequent success is vital because it explores self-determination theory as an influence on student success while enhancing understanding of this population of students. This research can inform and assist in the design of student support-related strategies. College administrators can use these approaches to support current and incoming students. In addition to the physical aspects of violence and its effects on student success, research has indicated various social, physical, and psychological consequences for students who endure violence in IPR (i.e., IPSV; Tolman & Rosen, 2001). Tolman and Rosen (2001) found over half of the women studied in their research (51%) reported experiencing some type of physical violence in their IPR in a single year.

IPSV includes behaviors and experiences that are unique from other forms of sexual violence. The focus on prevention and education is vital for a comprehensive approach to student support on college campuses. Research could have important implications for policymakers and campus leaders who seek to understand IPSV among college students. As the information is gathered and shared, college leaders and administrators can use effective strategies to develop campus protection and support programs and services. Prevention policies and programs can be effective in changing attitudes and increasing knowledge toward sexual and dating violence and the skills of bystanders (Wong et al., 2023). Additionally, many community colleges across the country have provided expansive support services (e.g., counseling) and a myriad of other programs that act as safety nets for students at risk. The impact of these services on student success was examined in this study.

The conceptual theory used in this study is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It is the leading theory in motivating individuals and is widely used across spheres. This research study contributed to answering how administrators and campus leaders might address student success and the growing impact of IPSV and other mental health concerns. This research may inform interventions and support programs tailored to community college students experiencing trauma while seeking on-campus services and while succeeding academically.

Definitions of Terms

Academic disengagement has been defined as the degree to which students are connected to what is going on in their classes. Examples of academic disengagement include an increase in student absenteeism, a decline in participation in class assignments, and a lack of enthusiasm in the classroom (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023).

Academic Success is defined as continued enrollment in various subjects in college, which can help performance in many ways (Stebbleton et al., 2020).

Anxiety is defined as an emotion characterized by somatic symptoms and apprehension of tension in which individuals anticipate impending danger, catastrophe, or misfortune (American Psychological Association, 2026).

Campus-Based Advocacy (CBA) is a confidential resource that provides direct support to students who have experienced harm related to sexual violence. It can also include support for the individuals supporting those who have experienced harm (Voth Schrag et al., 2023).

Depression is a mood disorder characterized by loss of interest and feelings of sadness. It can be called *clinical* or *major depressive disorder*. It impacts how a person behaves, feels, and thinks. This can lead to a plethora of emotional and physical problems (e.g., poor academic performance, psychosocial factors; World Health Organization [WHO], 2025).

Hispanic-Serving Institution is a college, university, or system/district where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes at least 25% of the total headcount enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Intersectionality describes how race, class, gender, ethnicity, and other individual characteristics intersect. It refers to the individual's identities, the status of those identities, and the situational context of when, where, and how those identities influence individual experience(s) in multiple dimensions of the social structure of oppression (Crenshaw, 2021).

Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV) is a pattern of behavior that can be abusive in any relationship. It can be used by partners in a relationship to gain or maintain power over another partner. It can be emotional, physical, economic, psychological, and technological (Office on Violence Against Women, 2024).

LGBTQA+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and asexual individuals, with the plus sign representing additional sexual orientations, gender identities, and sex characteristics not explicitly named in the acronym (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Community Center, n.d.).

Motivation proposes that human motivation comes from a desire to fulfill five basic needs (Maslow, 1943).

Negative self-perception is constantly comparing oneself to others, being overly sensitive to criticism, having trouble identifying one's positive qualities, and downplaying one's successes or attributing them to someone else (Nagy & Muehlenkamp, 2024).

Nonbinary is relating to or being a person who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that is neither entirely male nor entirely female (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition caused by being part of or witnessing an extremely stressful or terrifying event. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the event (American Psychological Association, 2026).

Psychological Violence is defined as interpersonal acts intended to humiliate or diminish others without physical force and has been linked to significant psychological suffering. Despite its prevalence and association with mental health disorders, it is not classified as a potentially traumatic event under the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) criteria for PTSD diagnosis (Gonçalves et al., 2026).

Self-Determination Theory is a theory of motivation that suggests people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Stalking is a crime of control and power. It is an action clearly directed at an individual that causes fear for their safety. It can be used to exert power or control during or after a relationship (Office for Victims of Crime, n.d.).

Trauma Theory states a traumatic experience impacts the whole person. The way one thinks, learns and remembers things, feels about themselves, feels about others, and makes sense of the world are all profoundly altered by traumatic experiences (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2005; Tseris, 2013).

Victim-Sensitive Referrals is a designation made by the sending state in accordance with its definition of *crime victim* under the statutes governing the rights of crime victims in the sending state (Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision, 2026).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 of the study introduced the problem, the background of the problem linked to the experiences of community college students and IPSV, the purpose of the study, the research questions guiding the study, and the significance of the study. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the selected methodology, the alignment table, assumptions and delimitations, and the definitions of the terms required to understand the concepts of the study were also included. In addition, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory were explained as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to inform the research.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of the study presented an overview of the study's history and the significance of the issue. Chapter 2 provides a detailed analysis of the literature review of themes and theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to IPSV in the community college environment. Chapter 3 details the qualitative narrative analysis that was used for this study. Chapter 4

describes and analyzes the study's findings, including the data collected. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the entire study and includes conclusions, implications, and recommendations from the study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to provide the context for the study. This includes Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) of IPSV, and empirical literature on experiences, self-determination, and academic success. Some of the literature discussed in this chapter consists of studies conducted on students who experienced IPSV before attending community college. IPSV can occur in families and intimate partner relationships (IPRs). Documents were discovered through intensive research in Kansas State University databases, including the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Global, and Google Books Search. Sources included professional reports, books, dissertations, and peer-reviewed journals. The themes selected for this research support the study using prior research, professional journals, and existing publications regarding the need to address IPSV among college students. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks are described in this chapter. Finally, the chapter illustrates the gap in the literature that emphasizes the need for a study in this area.

IPSV, Trauma, and Depression

Community college students who have experienced IPSV are prevalent on college campuses throughout the nation. IPSV affects 36% of women in their lifetimes (S. G. Smith et al., 2018). Longitudinal research indicates approximately 88% of women have experienced at least one incident of sexual or physical violence between their adolescent years and completion of their 4th year of college (Pate & Simonic, 2021; P. Smith et al., 2003). Estimates of the prevalence of IPSV among collegians range from 10%–50% (Kaukinen, 2014). More recently, Wood et al. (2018) found 31% of female college students in a selected college and university system had experienced some form of IPSV since enrollment at their institution. Psychological

and physical forms of violence were the most common. Although differences in populations and methodologies have led studies to find a range of prevalence estimates, there is no doubt IPSV is a serious issue, particularly for female community college students.

Community college students in IPR experiencing IPSV are more likely to suffer from traumatic consequences (A. L. Coker et al., 2000; Kaura & Lohman, 2007). Significant and lasting impacts of trauma have been observed in IPSV and depression, along with anxiety, negative self-perception, internalizing problems, and PTSD (Kaura & Lohman, 2007). Amar and Gennaro (2005) found students in IPR who experienced IPSV had higher levels of depression and anxiety than their counterparts. Each of these factors has the potential for adverse impacts on student success. In addition, depression among college survivors of IPSV partially mediates perceptions of future risk for episodes in the future. This indicates depression can be a risk factor for subsequent victimization (Helweg-Larsen et al., 2008). Anxiety, depression, and other mental health outcomes cause serious challenges for student survivors. Follingstad (2009) advocated for the exploration of moderating and mediating variables to help better understand the psychological impact of violence.

Anxiety and Depression: Impact on Students in the Classroom

Anxiety and depression symptoms may leave community college students at risk for lower academic achievement. These symptoms are associated with lower grade point averages (GPAs), sporadic attendance, disengagement, and missed assignments (McCurdy et al., 2022). Anxiety and depression are associated with students not completing their academic pursuits and dropping out of school (McCurdy et al., 2022). Many college students report mental health difficulties interfere with their studies (e.g., sitting alone in class and not engaging with other students, being unwilling to participate in classroom activities, leaving class abruptly if a

difficult subject is discussed, experiencing difficulty completing an assignment that centers around a recent experience; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, n.d.). A decline in student retention can mean losses in tuition, fees, and alumni donations. Additionally, college administrators and leaders are burdened when students with mental health difficulties do poorly on their coursework and drop out of school, and colleges and universities must be prepared to address the psychological impact of suicides on other students, teachers, and staff (McCurdy et al., 2022).

Academic Results of College Dating Violence

Adverse outcomes are associated with community college students experiencing IPSV. Research on this topic has increased over the past 60 years; however, the rates of IPSV have not changed (Linder et al., 2020). Research has indicated perpetrators will assault 20%–25% of women in their community college and university careers (Black et al., 2011). Comparing and contrasting studies done on demographics indicated that perpetrators targeted students from racially and ethnically minoritized groups at higher rates than White students (Black et al., 2011; Cantor et al., 2020). Research has indicated community college students experiencing IPSV who self-identified as members of the LGBTQA+ community and disabled students experienced higher rates of sexual violence than their cisgender, heterosexual, and White counterparts (Cantor et al., 2015).

Research has indicated community college students experiencing IPSV experience reduced GPAs and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school (Kaukinen, 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Voth Schrag & Edmond, 2017, 2018; Wood et al., 2018). Brewer et al. (2018) found student health mediated an observed correlation between GPA and IPSV in undergraduate students aged 18–24. The results of this observation can be defined as *academic disengagement*,

the degree to which students are connected to “what is going on in their classes” (Steinberg et al., 1996, p. 131). It is also considered a “red flag” for potential difficulty in higher education, including a reduction of their GPA, resulting in a high risk of discontinuing school (Fredricks et al., 2004). The consensus among the researchers is that community college students experiencing IPSV suffer behavioral issues, mental health decline, and substance abuse. Additionally, the invisible scars of abuse include coercive control that severely disadvantages women long term (Postmus et al., 2020; Voth Schrag & Edmond, 2017). Academic disengagement has three components: emotional, psychological, and behavioral (Fredricks et al., 2004). The behavioral aspect of academic disengagement consists of being late for class, missing assignments, attending class while intoxicated, and submitting assignments late (Huerta et al., 2006).

Banyard et al. (2017) found IPSV significantly predicted collegiate stress, institutional commitment, lower academic efficacy, and scholastic conscientiousness. Because education is a catalyst for economic stability, lifetime earnings, and employment opportunities, researchers have determined it is necessary for community colleges to address these student experiences in the context of the campus environment and effects on survivors (Adams et al., 2013; Pandey & Zhan, 2007).

Higher education is vital for economic mobility, especially for women. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) compared women who completed college coursework to their counterparts with a high school education or less. Adams et al. (2013) found, compared to women with less than a high school education, the women’s earnings rose 57% with a high school diploma, 81% with a few years of college education, 181% with a college degree, and 318% with an advanced degree. For women survivors of IPSV, accessibility to economic resources increases the opportunities for self-sufficiency. It can challenge the dependency in an

abusive partner relationship, leading to increased long-term safety from victimization in a violent climate (Adams et al., 2013; Voth Schrag & Edmond, 2017).

IPSV and Sexual Orientation

IPSV can be viewed as an epidemic in society for people classified as LGBTQA+ adults (Reuter et al., 2017). Historically, research on IPSV mainly focused on heterosexual relationships, and members of this community were classified as an afterthought (Graham et al., 2016). The extent of the literature on IPSV among LGBTQA+ populations suggests a prevalence in this community that can be comparable or even higher than in heterosexual populations (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016; Reuter et al., 2017). Graham et al. (2016) conducted a study of college-age couples (ages 18–24), and the researchers found 80% of participants reported experiencing IPSV in their relationships. LGBTQA+ couples reported higher rates of IPSV compared with their heterosexual counterparts.

There has been a contradiction in the evidence of differences in rates of IPSV by racial identity. Some racial and ethnic groups experience higher rates of IPSV compared with White populations while other studies show no differences in rates of IPSV by racial identity (Barrick et al., 2013; Field et al., 2015; Próspero & Kim, 2009; Raghavan et al., 2009).

Research has shown lesbian, gay, and bisexual students and those who identify as nonbinary are more likely to face all forms of IPSV compared to their heterosexual peers. Among bisexual students, women experience a lifetime of stalking and IPSV (J. Chen et al., 2020). Similar to transgender students, who are also more likely to encounter all types of IPSV compared to their cisgender college counterparts, community college and university leaders acknowledge the higher rates of IPSV faced by LGBTQA+ students on their campuses. Colleges should be ready to offer survivors health and mental health services through providers who are

culturally competent in supporting LGBTQA+ students who experience IPSV. Additional institutional support and resources tailored to LGBTQA+ students should be provided to ensure they have the support necessary to thrive in their community college or university setting. Additional research is needed to provide mental health and other health services to LGBTQAI students.

IPSV and Race/Ethnicity and Gender

IPSV on race and gender remains the most underreported crime in the United States (Decker et al., 2019). More than 33% of women have experienced IPSV (e.g., stalking, physical sexual violence from an intimate partner), and more than 20% of women have experienced completed or attempted rape or sexual violence by a perpetrator (S. G. Smith et al., 2018). When race/ethnicity is factored into the equation, homicide is the leading cause of death for Black women ages 15–24 (Petrosky et al., 2017). Students who are classified as Native American have the highest rate of IPSV at 46%, relative to women classified as White at 35%. The pattern continues with sexual violence (Black et al., 2011).

A quantitative study was conducted in 2017 regarding the 20% (Muehlenhard et al., 2017). The research compared statistics of sexual assault throughout the nation from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), predominantly White institutions, and community colleges (Muehlenhard et al., 2017). Data from the Campus Sexual Assault Study were used, and the statistics for physically forced sexual assault were the same for both HBCU victims and victims at 2-year community colleges and 4-year colleges and universities, 4.7% (Muehlenhard et al., 2017).

Black et al. (2011) found experiences of IPSV among male and female community college students are different. Women's sexual violence perpetrators are predominantly former or

current intimate partners (51.1%) and acquaintances (40.8%), but men's perpetrators are primarily acquaintances (52.4%). Another gender difference is that women experience IPSV at younger ages than their male counterparts and are more likely to experience severe physical IPSV (24.3% compared to 15% for their male counterparts; Black et al., 2011).

Determinants of Law Enforcement Contact Following IPSV

Law enforcement and Title IX are visible agents of justice for community college students who experience all forms of IPSV. However, victims have noted the feeling of being victimized or revictimized due to contacting law enforcement, which demonstrates the influence of law enforcement in IPSV cases (Xie & Lynch, 2017). IPSV responses require understanding the determinants of campus police contact. The inquiry can be approached from a social determinants framework that takes into account the multiple layers of influence across individual, interpersonal relationships, incidents, communities, and social/structural factors (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009).

Current research has had a limited focus on the socioecological model's interpersonal, incident, and individual levels. Incident characteristics include the use of a weapon, property, and severity (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009). When an incident occurs and a lack of injury exists, survivors are discouraged from reporting the incident (Y. Chen & Ullman, 2010). At the individual level, determinants of police contact following IPSV include awareness and use of support services, medical care, and forensic exams (Marchetti, 2012; Zweig et al., 2014). At the interpersonal level, experiencing violence from a known assailant, including partners, discourages police reporting (Y. Chen & Ullman, 2010; Hills et al., 2021; McGregor et al., 2000), likely reflecting economic or social dependence (Fagan, 1996) and fear of retribution from the perpetrator (Hills et al., 2021; Marchetti, 2012; McGregor et al., 2000). Perpetrators

have been known to engage in direct interference with police contact, manipulating the police or even physically preventing calls to the police (Wolf et al., 2003). Perpetrators target students who live at the intersectionality of minoritized identities at even higher rates than their peers (Porter & McQuiller Williams, 2011).

The structural conditions and benefits from an individual's intersectionality regarding IPSV are not understood when contacting law enforcement (Carbado et al., 2013). Women who contacted law enforcement each time they needed them reported less frequent sexual assault and more injuries than women who did not contact law enforcement. Also, women who decided to use force against their perpetrators indicated more frequent physical victimization, sexual victimization, and higher rates of injuries compared to women who had not used force (Qiu et al., 2023).

The two intersecting domains prevalent in this research are gender and race. Gender discrimination has been documented in response to IPSV (e.g., gender bias, undue skepticism, mistrust of both local and campus law enforcement, sexual shaming, and victim blaming; Crenshaw, 2021; Wolf et al., 2003). All these experiences can undermine the potential for successful engagement in civil and criminal sectors, causing ongoing retraumatization (Crenshaw, 2021). From a historical perspective, rights of women have been deprioritized in policies, including the exemption of marital rape (Bennice & Resick, 2003).

The codification of structural racism into policy has fueled mass incarceration and mistrust of law enforcement officials and campus administrators. This includes the practices of cash bail, racial profiling, minimum mandatory sentences, and poor legal defense (D. E. Roberts, 2004).

Law enforcement and administration-related trust, intended cooperation, and institutional support are higher among Whites compared to their Black and Latino counterparts (Tyler, 2005).

Individual perceptions of law enforcement are linked to the political system in the country (Alalehto & Larsson, 2016). This is due to the historical inequities in the justice system reflected in disparities in the high rates of Black and Latino arrests, excessive police surveillance of Black and Latino neighborhoods, mass incarceration, and racial bias in convictions (Baumgartner et al., 2018; Gase et al., 2016; Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). These inequities prevent or dissuade IPSV survivors from engaging with law enforcement and administrative officials. For some, surviving IPSV extended to engagement with law enforcement due to a lack of confidence in the justice process (Holliday et al., 2020).

Mistrust in the IPSV Response Barriers

To the researcher, abuse survivors are individuals who experience the effects abuse has on their lives. Community college students who survive abuse may not know they are being abused. Students who experience abuse and survive are men, women, and members of the LGBTQA+ community. These quotes come from victims of IPSV interviewed by Holliday et al. (2020). More women are quoted because they were willing to share their stories to help people suffering abuse in silence. Macrosociety does not want to hear or conjure in their minds that men can suffer IPSV from anyone, including female or male perpetrators. The quotes provided can be interpreted as coming from women in heterosexual relationships (Holliday et al., 2020). •

Participant 1: “I’m looking at the police but I’m thinking judicial. It’s not just the police that I need help from. It’s the police’s job to arrest him but it’s not his job to keep him there” (Holliday et al., 2020, p. 8).

- Participant 2: “This is his 17th arrest for the same thing. They’ll get out and they’ll just do it all like they don’t think they did anything wrong” (Holliday et al., 2020, p. 8).

- Participant 3: “Just walk out [of jail] and just get overnight stay or whatever. They [IPSV offender] come home and they are outraged because you ruined their night, especially if they were drinking or partying” (Holliday et al., 2020, p. 8).

Holliday et al. (2020) found some survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence do not report the incidents because they fear they will be arrested for the incident.

- Participant 4: “A lot of people don’t report to the police, there’s consequences when you report. You [the victim] might go to jail. . . . Yeah, both might go to jail . . . usually they take everybody” (Holliday et al., 2020, p. 8).

The concept of the intersectionality framework was created and developed to examine and expose racial and gender differences as they relate to IPSV against women and young girls. The uniqueness of this framework clarifies the structural and community-level determinants of IPSV related to involvement with law enforcement officials (Crenshaw, 2021). An intersectional perspective is essential in understanding and resolving the multiple layers of inequity in IPSV response systems. Black and Latino women fear overzealous law enforcement officials’ responses rooted in racial discrimination, contextualized by historic and present-day police brutality, abuse, and discriminatory policing in their communities. This is often expressed in broad and persistent racism in the structure of law enforcement (Decker et al., 2019).

Quality of Life

Quality of life (QoL) is vital to the self-determination theory for community college students experiencing IPSV. The WHO (2020) defined *QoL* as an individual’s perception of their position or status in life in relationship to the value systems and culture associated with the standards, goals, expectations, and concerns. Researchers who study QoL rarely focus on physical and mental health outcomes (WHO, 2020). Research has indicated a gap in the literature

regarding IPSV and QoL and the emotional condition of women in situations of IPSV. It is vital to explore effective prevention and intervention programs for exposure to IPSV in childhood (Guobao et al., 2021).

Additional research has indicated the frequency of IPSV experiences in childhood is negatively linked to lower health-related QoL among students as they enter college (Guobao et al., 2021). The relationship between self-determination theory and QoL has been studied extensively across multiple disciplines over the decades. This includes dietitians, psychologists, and public health professionals because QoL is a significant indicator of an individual's wellbeing (Proctor et al., 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

QoL and the self-determination theory have been studied and researched with populations including individuals experiencing homelessness, young adults, children classified as obese, and people with intellectual disabilities (Feeding America, 2014; Krabbenborg et al., 2017; PinhasHamiel et al., 2006). The self-determination theory is based on two assumptions. First, people actively strive for growth. To develop a cohesive sense of themselves, people need to gain mastery over challenges and take in new experiences. Second, the autonomous part of the theory focuses on the importance of self-motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). People are often motivated to act by external rewards and acts (e.g., money, prizes, acclaim from others). Self-determination theory focuses primarily on internal sources of motivation (e.g., need to gain knowledge, independence). The primary concern for a person is to better themselves (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Reviewing positive well-being indicators can be significant for community college students classified as vulnerable and whose QoL can be negatively impacted by stigma. The selfdetermination theory has a positive link with QoL through increased motivation for health behaviors, decreased psychological distress, and increased focus on control (Krabbenborg et al.,

2017; Ng et al., 2012; Wehmeyer, 2020). According to Andersen and Chen (2002), knowledge about the self is linked with knowledge about others.

The Role of the Campus Community

Colleges and universities provide services for student survivors who experience IPSV that include campus law enforcement officials, counseling, victim advocacy programs, crisis centers, and medical services. These services are provided to students who experience the negative effects of violence to enhance the safety of survivors on campus and improve the community college campus climate related to violence (Murray & Kardatzke, 2011; Sabina et al., 2017). These efforts by campus officials make students feel uninformed about accessing campus resources (Sabina & Ho, 2014). The support student survivors receive from the campus community has been shown to cushion the negative impacts and experiences of IPSV (Kaukinen, 2014).

Anytime student survivors seek help from family, friends, and social institutions, a decrease in trauma occurs (Folger & O'Dougherty, 2013). Additional campus indicators to decrease trauma include the campus community and a sense of safety. Banyard et al. (2009, 2017) found increased safety on campus is correlated with sense of campus community (e.g., likelihood of intervening in situations of sexual violence, more examples of friend groups in the case of sexual violence, increased willingness of bystander behaviors).

Community college campuses have responded to the expressed needs of students in part through the development and implementation of campus-based advocacy (CBA) programs to provide supportive services to survivors, with a specific focus on IPSV and stalking (Javorka &

Campbell, 2019; Klein et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2021). CBA services are adapted from community-based service models and focus on resources, community support for students, and safety (Klein et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2021).

CBA services provide support to survivors of IPSV, stalking, and other types of harm or violence. These services, similar to community-based advocacy for IPSV, are typically based on tenets of trauma-informed care, social justice, and empowerment theories (Wood et al., 2020) and use a student–survivor-centered model (Klein et al., 2023; Voth Schrag et al., 2020). Gauthier et al. (2018) found IPSV victims who had adequate housing and food support and knowledge of public assistance resources were more capable of deciding to seek IPSV support services than victims without knowledge of traditional support services. They did not feel stigmatized regarding their situation. IPSV support services on community college campuses may center on IPSV prevention efforts and support services, based on the student demographics used for college recruitment and admissions.

IPSV and stalking are consequential public health and safety issues with wide-reaching results on emerging adults (ages 18–25), including those on community college campuses. Research throughout the last decade has indicated a high prevalence of these forms of violence, with IPSV rates ranging from 7%–25% (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2017; Cantor et al., 2020; Krebs et al., 2016). The research has shown strong evidence social and emotional support cushion the negative student experience of IPSV. It helps explain why those with a sense of campus community may experience some cushioning of the negative effects of dating violence (A. Coker et al., 2002; Kamimura et al., 2013; Kaukinen, 2014).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework provides a unique perspective for viewing the study. Further, the selected framework helps shape and mold the research problem and structures the writing of the review of the literature for the study (C. Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The theoretical framework that informed this study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory served as the conceptual framework.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's research began in the early 1940s with the theory of motivation, which he used to create Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, human beings are motivated by external and internal factors. His perspective was based on the holistic approach of human motivation and considered the individual more than the summation of their parts (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's philosophy was that human motivation is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to understand. However, Maslow's hierarchy of needs showcases a stable framework that explains why IPSV is essential to the understanding of the development of this study.

According to Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018), Maslow's hierarchy of needs may be used to explain why experiences of IPSV among students are linked to the students' inability to engage in the higher learning required at the collegiate level. Maslow surmised that five goals comprise his pyramid-shaped hierarchy of needs. They include, from top to bottom: (a) physiological needs: air, water, food, shelter, sleep, and sex; (b) safety, security, and order; (c) social affection: love and belongingness; (d) esteem and status: self-esteem and esteem by others; and (e) self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

This research study focused on how students experience IPSV and their selfdetermination in achieving academic success. The physiological needs (i.e., including air, water, sex, shelter, and food) are the most fundamental in Maslow's (1943) five stages. Safety is the next stage and offers security, safety, and order. The third stage is social affection, which encompasses love and belongingness. The fourth stage is esteem, comprising status, self-esteem, and respect from others. The fifth stage is self-actualization, representing individual personality (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied to higher education. If a student does not have a safe place to work and study, or if they fear for themselves or their children, they will never be academically successful. Students who do not have access to shelter, in addition to a safe atmosphere, due to IPSV will never be able to stay focused on achieving a higher goal of self-actualization in a college setting. This includes obtaining a degree or certificate with the possibility of pursuing education beyond community college (Maslow, 1943).

Self-Determination Theory

The conceptual framework guiding the research comes from Deci and Ryan (1985). Selfdetermination theory is a psychological model that highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs that influence intrinsic motivation and personal well-being. Self-determination theory is often used in studies of human motivation and explains how environments that support autonomy affect health and wellness outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The social environment includes dimensions such as autonomy, connectedness, and relatedness. *Autonomy* refers to an individual's feeling of having a choice in their actions. *Competence* is how an individual perceives their skills to complete a task or reach a goal. *Relatedness* describes the need to connect with others and experience a sense of belonging (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Research indicates motivation, in particular, is dependent on the learning experiences of community college students, which not only have a direct effect on outcomes but also have an indirect influence through motivation as a mediating factor (Lo et al., 2022). Further, community college student survivors who experience IPSV have high rates of persistent fear and problems with daily routines after victimization (Cho et al., 2020). This includes poor academic performance, low GPA, decreased interest in engagement with the course material, and an inability to follow academic schedules (Banyard et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2020).

Research on self-determination has addressed the interactions of participants among others in the contexts of their campus environment, aiming to comprehend the historical and cultural settings of participants. Further, research may recognize the backgrounds of participants may shape and mold their interpretations of IPSV. They may adjust their perspectives from their personal, historical, and cultural experiences. The intent of self-determination theory is to interpret meanings others have about the world. Instead of starting with the theory, they inductively create an argument or pattern of the definition (Creswell, 2014)

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) aligns with the primary tenets of critical theory in that it is substantively focused on human liberation and enhancement. As well as on the link between our inherent tendencies toward active growth and realization of potentials and ambient social, economic, and cultural supports and obstructions (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). Compared to critical theory, which focuses on the collective whole of the individual, selfdetermination theory focuses on the individual's beliefs, experiences, and decisions. Selfdetermination theory assumes individuals internalize cultural values and ideologies that shape their meanings, perceptions, and experiences, which in turn determine behavior. These assumptions are consistent with the critical theory concepts of enlightenment and emancipation

and are an appropriate frame for this educational research methodology, which focuses on understanding the lived experiences of often-marginalized individuals.

Central to self-determination theory is the concept that all humans actively develop a unified sense of self. Individuals naturally strive to grow. They search for challenges and discover new perspectives (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Naturally curious people assimilate knowledge, customs, and values from their surroundings. Educators can tap into and encourage these innate tendencies, creating active learners, or they can introduce controls that often result in disengagement (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Self-determination theory is a macrotheory of motivation and development researchers have applied to education for more than 20 years to understand how aspects of campus environments contribute to or hinder individual student achievement.

Self-determination theory is substantively focused on human liberation and enhancement, and on the association between inherent tendencies toward active growth and realization of potential and ambient social, economic, and cultural supports and obstructions (Ryan & Niemic, 2009). Self-determination theory focuses on the individual. As stated previously, it assumes individuals internalize cultural values and ideologies that shape their meanings, perceptions, and experiences, which determine behavior. Satisfaction of basic psychological needs is a critical determinant of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs and self-determination theory relate to and inform the current research because the needs of community college students who experience IPSV can influence their motivation to meet academic needs in the hierarchy and can shape their selfdetermination. These theories guided the current research by emphasizing the connection

between needs of students who experience IPSV, the impact on self-determination in the hierarchy of needs, and their relationship to being a community college student.

The goal of this research was to understand the lived experiences of community college students with IPSV. This study identified which support services are likely to increase students' chances for success. The research focused on the lived experiences of the participants, the role of the campus community, and the impact on their motivation to complete their degree requirements.

Lived experiences are very personal to individuals and the encounters that have shaped their existence. Social norms, labels, and attitudes between society and individuals can affect experiences and taint outcomes due to stress, perceptions, and responses by others (Carver et al., 2017). For this study, the lived experiences of community college students included mental, physical, and emotional distress of IPSV, and whether any of these impacted the success of students. The experiences of these community college students were considered firsthand accounts to understand their personal interactions with IPSV.

Research has linked satisfaction with community college support services to student behavior in the classroom, academic achievement, cognitive learning, and persistence in school despite trauma (Brokelman, 2009; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Ryzin et al., 2007). This transcends age, cultures, and gender (Chirkov, 2009; Guay et al., 2008; Jang et al., 2009; Sheldon et al., 2009; Shih, 2008). Support of psychological needs has been correlated to autonomous motivation, which in turn has been linked to student engagement and academic success (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryzin et al., 2007). An emphasis is placed on support for autonomy from campus administration. Behaviors of campus leaders inside and outside the classroom have been shown to either support or hinder students' perceived autonomy, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation

(Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Support by educators for student autonomy has been linked to the autonomy support they receive (Roth et al., 2007), providing an avenue for improving the instructional environment.

Additional research should be conducted on the self-determination of community college students and how it empowers them to make appropriate decisions in college that can transform their lives. Further studies could explore at-risk populations and female students' internal motivations, engagement levels, and resilience to succeed in academic settings.

Reflection on the Stigma of IPSV

According to researchers, experiencing IPSV as a community college student can contribute to a range of emotional traumas that can last decades. Sexual violence can be described as a stigmatized form of trauma. The stigmatized experiences of the individual who reports sexual violence are assumed rather than measured (Mellen & Hatzenbuehler, 2023). Exposure to IPSV can contribute to a range of psychological and emotional issues, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation (Kaslow et al., 2013). One study indicated approximately 40% of female survivors have considered suicide, and nearly 25% of IPSV survivors have attempted suicide (Kaslow et al., 2013).

Research has suggested service providers to all IPSV survivors must remember victimsensitive referrals to counseling and therapy could help mitigate past or current trauma. This can include trauma due to exposure to violence (e.g., small children or bystanders who witness IPSV). Efforts of people who witness violence are futile due to their position of legal powerlessness (Kaslow et al., 2013). Furthermore, the perpetrator's disclosure of suicide threats by the victim is often intended as a controlling mechanism or shaming and may necessitate referrals for services.

Anytime victims are referred for services (e.g., counseling, mental health treatment), providers must exercise active listening skills (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). They cannot, under any circumstances, shame the victim (Kaslow et al., 2013). Mental health providers, administrators, and college administrators should try not to coerce or force a survivor into therapy or counseling. They cannot, under any circumstances, recommend couples to seek counseling for IPSV (Kaslow et al., 2013). Research has indicated it is vital to know use of suicide threats to control victims does not mean the abuser is unwilling to use violence against himself, the victim, or the family. This is a common occurrence in families, and many people have been murdered by the abuser, followed by the abuser taking their own life (Auchter & Moore, 2013). Suicidal threats in IPSV relationships can be a huge red flag that catastrophic violence is on the horizon. Familicide, where an abuser kills himself and the family, is rare, but it is correlated with both firearms and past IPSV (Auchter & Moore, 2013).

Community college students experiencing IPSV can be reluctant to seek services because of the stigma of being labeled a victim and the negative attachments associated with it (Devries et al., 2011). Stigma is a powerful term that describes the adverse effects and impacts of society's bias and prejudice about suicide and mental illness. Stigmatization is important because of the shame felt by many survivors of IPSV. All mental health providers must understand this because it shapes and molds survivors' behaviors (Devries et al., 2011).

Stigma about suicide is also correlated with a survivor's general confusion about the court system. Often, survivors may believe revealing thoughts, feelings, and information about suicidal ideation, whether their own or their abuser's, could be harmful to their cases (Devries et al., 2011). Survivors may tend to overemphasize the mandated reporter duty of court professionals and believe that if they discuss suicide, their children may be automatically

removed, especially if they witnessed the abusive behavior of the perpetrator (Devries et al., 2011). Thus, the court will be less inclined to grant them protection against an abuser. Research indicates an abuser may disclose or overemphasize a survivor's suicidal statements via phone or text message to gain an advantage in a custody case or, worse, to wage a war of emotional attrition against victims with mental health needs (Devries et al., 2011). Confidentiality and trust are vital, along with a nuanced perspective by providers when analyzing evidence of suicidality (Devries et al., 2011).

Barriers exist that could keep community college students from reporting IPSV and seeking help. Barriers include cultural and internal stigma about how they and others around them view IPSV (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Those cultural and internal barriers prevent community college students from seeking services. Tsan and Day (2007) found sexual and gender identity are significant in students seeking online services. Sabina and Ho (2014) found college IPSV survivors generally have low rates of help seeking and tend to seek more informal than formal sources of help due to barriers like not thinking the abuse is serious enough or fear of victim blaming. The advent of social media has contributed to victim blaming.

Research has suggested female students are more willing to seek online counseling in comparison to their male counterparts (Toscos et al., 2018). Additional research has indicated Asian students experiencing IPSV preferred online mental health counseling (Lungu & Sun, 2016). Research based on racial and ethnic differences showed most online counseling users were White female students who were comfortable using online services (Leibert et al., 2006).

All providers must understand IPSV is not only a crime; it is a mental health problem. Suicide is only one dimension of IPSV (Wolf et al., 2003). All providers must remember viewing reactions to IPSV as solely a mental health or substance abuse problem is incorrect and is

sometimes referred to as pathologizing IPSV (Wolf et al., 2003). A professional minimization and victim-blaming mindset can be highly detrimental to IPSV survivors. Providers can advocate for courts to appoint experts who are trained and dedicated to IPSV research and can examine suicidality in the nuanced context of the relationship (Wolf et al., 2003). Each factor may eventually affect the student, their studies, and their academic success. This study explores how violence affects the student using these lenses and frameworks.

Conclusion

The literature review provided a summary of the research on IPSV, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, and the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The researcher also reviewed QoL and its association with self-determination theory. However, this review highlighted existing gaps in the literature on self-determination theory and the college experiences of community college students who have IPSV experiences.

This chapter synthesized information by organizing themes relevant to the study's focus. The themes of the literature reviewed included (a) IPSV trauma and depression, (b) academic results of college dating violence, (c) IPSV and sexual orientation, (d) IPSV and race/ethnicity and gender, (e) QoL, (f) the role of the campus community, (g) theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and (h) reflection on the stigma of IPSV.

The following chapter provides information regarding the study's methodology, ethical considerations, research design, data collection sources, site selection, study participants, limitations, instrumentation, alignment table, and study quality.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter reviews the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study. The methodology used in the study, including the qualitative research methodology, rationale for its selection, research design, site selection, study setting, participants, and instrumentation, is presented. Information is also presented on the data collection processes, data sources, and methods for data analysis. The chapter provides information on study quality, ethical considerations, limitations, and a chapter summary.

The recommended sample size for research studies of this type is between one and 12 individuals, with a preference for lower to middle numbers (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The researcher planned to interview eight to 12 participants. To ensure trustworthiness throughout the research process, the researcher carefully examined their positionalities and how these may have affected the research process. The researcher reflected on the gender, race, ethnicity, class, education level, and any other privileges that accompany the socioeconomic status. Selfevaluation was vital in this process. The researcher was aware of their biases when questioning subjects.

In addition, the researcher used the work of other scholars who had conducted previous studies in criminal justice, public health, psychiatry, and psychology to ensure the data collected from interviews in this study were trustworthy. The researcher reviewed quotes from survivors to ensure consistency and to determine themes. Reading interview transcripts offers an opportunity for further reflection and to reassess decisions made during interviews. Conducting and analyzing data about IPSV presented emotional challenges for the researcher. Although empathy and connecting with participants are essential in qualitative research, they can also create

particular difficulties in the research process. The researcher must have an open mind and eliminate unconscious and cognitive biases (Cuncliffe, 2016).

Qualitative Research Methodology

This study was a qualitative analysis of the experiences of community college students. The researcher sought to understand the human experience and how it related to participants' communities, social situations, and world occurrences. In qualitative analysis, the first contributing factor is illuminating meanings and how individuals engage in meaning making (Patton, 2015). It is based on the perceptions of how individuals see the world. For the researcher, qualitative analysis focuses on what participants believe and how they think regarding important goals for human science research (Camic et al., 2003). The key ingredient of qualitative research is the participants' individual constructions of reality in interaction with their social worlds (Camic et al., 2003). Individual social interaction is based on participants' realities and how they are created and constructed. Qualitative analysis offers insight into how individuals construct and develop meaning from their experiences.

The best qualitative research is conducted in natural settings to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences. The researcher asks about human interaction and meanings during cultural and social exchanges. Qualitative research involves first-person analysis and prompts questions that encourage detailed responses. The researcher aims for a broader and more complex understanding of human experiences. A smaller sample size is used instead of a larger one, as in quantitative studies, to develop theories that can be applied in future research (Mantzoukas, 2004). The researcher hoped this study would prompt some readers to reflect on their own experiences and whether they should seek assistance.

Generic Qualitative Inquiry

Generic qualitative inquiry is a realistic, descriptive research method used when the goal of a study does not align with strict frameworks like phenomenology or grounded theory. It focuses on understanding subjective experiences, meaning making, and interpretations of a specific phenomenon. Researchers tend to use it when traditional methods (e.g., case studies, ethnographic studies) are restrictive or inappropriate for the research question (Caelli et al., 2003).

Generic qualitative research studies are those that refuse to claim allegiance to a single established methodology. There has been significant debate in the qualitative literature regarding the extent to which rigor can be preserved outside of the guidelines of an established methodology (Kahlke, 2014). The generic approach seeks to discover and understand a story or phenomenon in a story, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the persons involved (Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam, 1988). Researchers using a generic approach should make their theoretical position explicit (e.g., the researcher's motivation to undertake the study, congruence between methodology and methods and sufficient description to distinguish between them). For example, if observation is used, it should be sufficiently described to distinguish it from ethnographic observation. There should be clear strategies to establish rigor, and the analytic lens through which data are examined should be identified (e.g., how the researcher has engaged with the data; Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam, 1988).

Over the past decades, qualitative research has evolved. Researchers in the field have struggled with a persistent tension between a need for both methodological flexibility and structure (Holloway & Todres, 2003). In the development of qualitative research, three major methodologies are discussed most frequently and are often viewed as foundational:

phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory (Holloway & Todres, 2003; M. Johnson et al., 2001; Morse, 1989; Richards & Morse, 2007; J. Smith et al., 2011). Since these methodologies have appeared on the landscape, newer methodologies (e.g., discourse analysis, life history, narrative inquiry) have been defined and largely accepted in qualitative research communities (Kahlke, 2014).

Researchers have discussed these well-established methodologies in terms of the degree of deviance from methodological guidelines and rules that are acceptable, but the debate around research genres and studies that do not fit in established methodologies has been increasing (Caelli et al, 2003). One research approach under this broad category is known as generic qualitative research, which is subsequently subdivided into genres of interpretive description and descriptive qualitative research (Caelli et al., 2003). Studies of this type tend not to declare allegiance to one of the specific approaches, instead taking a general approach toward clinical issues (Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam, 1988).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the college experience of community college students who have experienced IPSV to understand their motivation and self-determination to succeed in college, and which support services strengthen their likelihood of success. Also, this study provided insight into the influence of the college experience on the students' career and life goals.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. How do community college students who have experienced IPSV describe their motivation and self-determination to succeed in college?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of community college students who have experienced IPSV of college support services that strengthen their likelihood to succeed?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is the theoretical framework for this study. The most basic needs are at the bottom, and the advanced ones are at the top. The psychological safety, love, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization research supports the notion that when children's basic needs are insecure, children experience anxiety, depression, and behavior problems, with links to aggression and hyperactivity (Campbell et al., 2010). Tackling the basic needs of community college students can encourage them to interact with campus support services, promote their well-being, and motivate them to climb Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, thereby possessing the opportunity to reach self-actualization, thus allowing students to thrive and prosper independently. Isolation and separation are further explored by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which suggests people require a foundation layer of campus support and a sense of security before they can feel comfortable or confident enough to redevelop connections with other members of the student body, their family, and friends and begin to feel confident. This study focused on the psychological aspects and experiences of students who experienced IPSV and the services provided to community college students dealing with this trauma.

The conceptual framework used in this study was the self-determination theory, a motivation theory that suggests people are driven by a need to grow and find fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Administrators can apply this theory to help students who lack motivation and face the trauma of IPSV to succeed academically (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory offered a framework for exploring services and changes that could be implemented to support students experiencing IPSV while they succeed despite the trauma.

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative research design. The researcher opted for a generic qualitative approach instead of a narrative design. The qualitative approach's concern is the human experiences of students and the problems in organizational, societal, and cultural settings (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). The focus of the quantitative approach is to explore and describe the trends, patterns, and relationships in numeric data. The researcher believed a quantitative approach to this study was not feasible because it did not capture the depth of the participants' experiences. Contrasting the rationale for using a qualitative research design for this study is the detailed and descriptive human experiences and perspectives of the participants in the research.

A qualitative methodology involves various approaches for studying how people find meaning in their lives through storytelling (Polkinghorne, 1989). This study used a generic qualitative design, focusing on exploring stories students shared about their experiences in a college setting. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to examine current perspectives, and historical research offered insights into past perspectives that may not have related to current events. According to Creswell (2007), the qualitative research mission is to achieve, as best as possible, what he described as a deep knowledge of some social setting or phenomenon. Striving for understanding requires spending extensive time in the field.

A biographical study is a form of qualitative analysis that allows the researcher to write and record the experiences of the participant's life in research (Creswell, 2007). This approach to research removes assumptions and focuses more on the interpretation of data collected and the description of the participants.

Finally, the phases for the researcher include:

- Phase 1: managing and organizing the data (preparing the data).
- Phase 2: reading and memoing emerging ideas (looking and editing the transcript).

- Phase 3: describing and classifying the codes into themes.
- Phase 4: developing and assessing interpretations (Creswell 2007).

For this study, the researcher chose the biographical approach through interviews because they believed it would help eliminate preconceptions, biases, and prejudice from previous research. Additionally, this approach enabled the researcher to actively listen and gain insights related to the research and its questions.

Site Selection

Site selection was conducted among multiple community college campuses nationally based on reputation for strong student services success. Additionally, the researcher used national associations of student service personnel and professional community college counselors/advisors who had been recognized for best practices in this field.

Study Participants

The participants in the study were identified based on the collected data used in purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when the researcher selects research sites or individuals based on a specific criterion (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). In this study, the first criterion was students who patronized the Student Life Center, had experienced IPSV, and had used the support systems provided by the college. The second criterion was that participants received financial assistance at their college. For this study, student life coordinators at the selected colleges oversaw operations in the campus market. Student life coordinators possessed decision-making authority and insights into financial situations in the campus community. The student life coordinators assisted the researcher with the recruitment of students from professional associations such as the American Association of Community Colleges, the National Community College Associations, the American Psychological Association, and the American

Sociological Association. This was a self-referral directly from the subject to the researcher. The secondary recruitment strategy involved referrals from student life coordinators. These were based on the relationship and knowledge of the subject's experience with IPSV. The researcher interviewed 10 participants from two of the district's community colleges.

Instrumentation

The interviewer/researcher in qualitative research is the instrument, and the researcher interprets the results of the interviews conducted in the study (Xu & Storr, 2012). The interview questions in this study were semistructured and unstructured for detailed responses, with followup/probing questions. Participants were allowed to respond without constraints or bias from the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection and Data Sources

The researcher obtained approval from the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before proceeding with data collection. Once approval was received from the university IRB, the researcher gained approval from the home institution of the students who were interviewed. Participants were identified through the process outlined previously. An introductory letter was sent via email to potential study participants and to the administrator or designee of each college involved to request their participation. This request aimed to identify participants who would benefit the most from the research (see Appendix B). Once the participants were selected for the study, an introductory email containing an informed consent form was sent, asking all participants to agree to video and audio recordings of their interviews (see Appendix C). Informed consent was gathered from each participant before the interview.

The questions for the interview were pilot tested prior to the study. Piloting was vital for three reasons. First, the researcher tested the length of the study. Second, the researcher

determined the wording of the questions was clear and appropriate. Finally, the researcher determined the organizational structure of the interviews was logical and effective (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

The protocol for the interviews consisted of acknowledging the time the interviewee provided with a statement to the interviewee (Creswell, 2014). The discussion began by asking questions about demographic data. This was followed by 15 semistructured, open-ended questions.

The data collection source for this study was participant interviews. The protocol for the interview questions is located in Appendix D. The estimated time for each participant interview was 40–45 minutes. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, an online video platform. Using Zoom software allowed the researcher to produce and create transcripts verbatim for future reviews and coding themes using the self-determination theory. Member checking and the triangulation of sources were used during the data collection process to ensure the trustworthiness of the collected data. Recordings of all participants in the study were stored on a protected external hard drive with a secure password and secure location for 60 months, after which the data would be destroyed by overwriting it.

Another form of data collection is document analysis. The main focus is on the study of was talk and texts, which involved the study of talk in social practice. The fundamental privileging of data occurred naturally in the classroom (Potter, 1997). Document analysis occurred through analysis of the participants' interviews, themes, language, and body language (i.e., facial expressions). As the data were collected, the researcher allowed unexpected themes to emerge. The researcher took detailed notes of questions and statements discussed with the

participants. The focus of participant interviews was gathering information on their experiences as community college students who experienced IPSV and sought services despite their trauma.

Data Analysis

The worldview used to focus this study was Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Charmaz (2001) described data collection and data analysis as working simultaneously regarding coding. In a narrative analysis study, the site location can become the story (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). All data were coded using the self-determination theory as the conceptual framework for this study, which aligned with the research (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Several themes guided the coding including first-generation students, nontraditional students, race, gender, and age. The semistructured and unstructured interview questions aligned with the research questions, and coding was based on the conceptual models chosen to guide the study. According to Saldaña (2016), a code in qualitative inquiry research is a word or short phrase symbolizing a salient, essence-capturing, and summative portion of language-based or visual data.

The triangulation method is a credibility procedure wherein a researcher seeks to establish evidence across multiple data lines to reduce bias and enhance the validity and credibility of the research findings (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). The triangulation method was used to maintain credibility in the research study. This reduced bias from the researcher and enhanced the credibility and validity of the research findings (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

Being the researcher in generic qualitative analysis requires maintaining an open mind and setting aside preunderstandings and presuppositions to stay open to the individual differences of the participants in the study. Being open is always constrained by preunderstanding (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). All researchers must deal with presuppositions to maintain an open mind throughout the process. The researcher in qualitative analysis values philosophical beliefs.

The interviews, documents, transcripts, and observations were reviewed for patterns and similarities. Any themes occurring outside the model were coded. This process was used for Research Question 1. Research Question 2 addressed Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs interviews, assigned codes review, and analyzed phrases or other similarities.

Manual Coding Process

The data analysis the researcher used was a manual coding process that identified the key themes and patterns from the narratives of participants. This approach was more beneficial to the researcher than using software, as it provided a deeper and in-depth analysis of data by considering the participants' verbal responses, body language, tone of voice, and emotional expressions during the interviews. Qualitative research often benefits from a more immersive, manual coding approach, which helps the researcher see the layers and subtleties of meaning embedded in participants' responses. The thematic analysis process enabled careful examination of each story to gain insights into how the intersecting identities of gender and ethnicity shaped leadership experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The initial, open coding process involved carefully reading and listening to each transcript on numerous occasions and identifying relevant words, phrases, and ideas, followed by transcription. Open coding can be described as explaining qualitative data into distinct parts to examine and compare concepts, ideas, and meanings in participants' narratives. This process involved manually highlighting text segments and taking detailed notes on emerging codes, capturing initial themes related to participants' lived experiences (Saldaña, 2016).

The researcher manually applied axial coding. This is described as bringing the data back together and connecting categories and subcategories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this stage,

codes were organized into broader categories and subcategories, focusing on identifying recurring themes related to the intersection of gender and sexual orientation in participants.

Once the data were coded, a thematic analysis was conducted to develop overarching themes. Themes were refined by examining connections, contradictions, and patterns in the data, leading to a coherent set of findings that addressed the research questions. Thematic analysis involves searching across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning. Through a manual review of the coded segments, themes were organized into a final structure that reflected participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Alignment Table

Appendix A is an alignment table that provides a summary of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as the theoretical framework and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as the conceptual framework. The problem-based findings of the literature aligned with the research questions, methodology, and interview questions.

Limitations

Research studies have some limitations (C. Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Limitations beyond the researcher's control can exist in any study. Three colleges were selected for the research, with an equal number of subjects at each college. The researcher interviewed two to four students from each college selected in the study (10 total interviews). A limitation of the study was the small sample size of students. Additionally, potential subjects in the research study may not have responded if they associated IPSV with being stigmatized (Gordis, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), ethics are the foundations of the entire research process. The researcher followed ethical standards to protect human subjects from harm.

The researcher sought appropriate approval from the IRB at Kansas State University to interview human subjects. After approval was granted, participating colleges, which were part of a multicampus district in the southwest, provided an expedited approval process for site authorization. The informed consent forms were approved by Kansas State University and the community college district and were signed and collected from participants in the study. All informed consent forms highlighted that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without facing negative consequences. Furthermore, participation in the research study was voluntary. All human participants' confidentiality and privacy were maintained through methods of data storage selected and the use of pseudonyms. All data from this study were stored on an external hard drive for 60 months (5 years) with a protective password.

To alleviate bias from past experiences in previous research, the researcher used external auditing of the interview questions and member checking. After the completion of initial coding, the researcher reviewed interview transcripts to reduce any bias. The researcher displayed professional competence throughout the study by recognizing any limitations of the researcher's expertise and the need for ongoing education to remain professionally competent at all times. The researcher displayed integrity by conducting professional activities worthy of trust and confidence. The researcher accepted scientific, professional, and scholarly responsibility and consulted with colleagues to avoid or prevent unethical conduct (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

To avoid a conflict of interest in the research and transparency in the study, a reflexivity statement providing a summary of background and experience follows in the next section of the paper. Lochmiller and Lester (2017) defined *reflexivity* as the intentional accounting for the researcher's biases, experiences, assumptions, and identities that can impact or harm the research.

The researcher chose to study a topic that holds personal significance. Therefore, the research was fueled by passion, dedication, and personal connection. However, because of the researcher's personal experiences related to the topic, it is important to recognize personal beliefs. The researcher aimed to stay open-minded and approached the research and participants from a stance of not knowing and avoiding judgment, instead acknowledging the uniqueness of each participant.

Reflexivity Statement

For the 10 years prior to this study, I was a full-time educator in the community college system. I worked in the cultural sciences department under three department chairs with different administrative and leadership styles. They allowed me to use my experiences to meet students' needs as they completed their education requirements. In this role, I could share stories of my experiences with IPSV while educating students. This included creating assignments and bringing in speakers, including mental health providers committed to combating this epidemic. This allowed me to create a safe environment for my students, faculty, and staff to share their experiences with naked honesty. During this time, I expanded my duties to a satellite campus 15 miles east of the main campus. With virtual options after the COVID-19 global pandemic, I used a virtual learning environment to share stories about the IPSV epidemic with people from around the country. In 2023, I facilitated a listening session with students nationally and internationally. These experiences have enlightened me on IPSV among community college students. My experiences have created implicit biases about IPSV; however, the study was designed to account for any biases I might have had.

Study Quality

The researcher used the “big tent” criteria developed by Tracey (2010) to ensure the quality of research in a qualitative design (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Tracey’s big tent is an eight-criterion approach for producing a quality study (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). The criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, sincerity, rich rigor, ethics, meaningful coherence, resonance, and a worthy topic (Tracy, 2010). The research conducted on IPSV was relevant, timely, and worthy, as IPSV had increased in the community college environment over the few years prior to the study. The theoretical framework in the study supported the richness of the research. The sample ensured data collected led to data analysis and transferable findings. The researcher showed credibility by collecting data through semistructured or unstructured face-to-face and Zoom interviews.

The researcher coded the data based on the cynefin framework and the five situational domains. *Cynefin* refers to the habitat used in decision making that impacts individual circumstances (McLeod & Childs, 2013). The five domains included complicated, complex, chaotic, disorder, and obvious (Snowden, 2010). The researcher expressed sincerity in the research through ethical considerations and a reflexivity statement written in this chapter. The significance of the reflexivity statement is that it displays the transparency of the research and the researcher. The researcher used a procedure known as triangulation validity to ensure the study’s credibility.

Summary

This chapter reviewed (a) the purpose of the study, (b) qualitative methodological procedures used to conduct the research, and (c) the research questions that guided the study, including analysis procedures and data collection. This chapter reviewed the purpose of the study

and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Finally, it included the sample size, ethical considerations, limitations, reflexivity, study participants, instrumentation, and study quality.

Chapter 4 - Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to understand the motivation of community college students who experienced ISPV during college. Both female and male students participated in the study. As noted in Chapter 3, 8–12 students were the target sample size for interviews. The researcher interviewed 10 students. Each student was offered the option to be interviewed in person or via Zoom. One student selected the Zoom format. Nine students chose to be interviewed in person. All claimed the in-person format was more personal and made them feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with the researcher. They claimed being able to reconcile their perspectives with perspectives of those who had not had the opportunity to share their experiences allowed them opportunities to help faculty, staff, and administration better provide services to all students on the community college campus experiencing IPSV. Previous research, as outlined in Chapter 2, has devoted a great deal of attention to self-determination and motivation of community college students who experience IPSV while achieving academic success.

Research Findings

The study was designed to understand how to address the motivation of community college students who experienced IPSV.

Setting

There were no reported personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants in their interviews. Neither were there any apparent conditions at the time of the interviews that may have influenced the interpretation of the results. As stated earlier, one interview was conducted via Zoom. Seven interviews were conducted in the researcher's office on campus with the doors closed and secured to ensure confidentiality for the participants. Two

interviews were conducted in secure locations at a separate campus location, with the door closed to ensure confidentiality. To the researcher's knowledge, there were no conditions present to influence either participants' responses or the interpretations of those responses.

Participant Demographics

As stated earlier, the researcher interviewed 10 participants from different community colleges in southern Arizona. Participants were not screened for their ages, races, ethnicities, religious preferences, college majors, genders, or economic statuses. However, during the interviews, participants shared their biological (i.e., demographic) characteristics. The primary consideration was to recruit community college students who had experienced IPSV and sought campus services while pursuing their degrees. Participants were recruited with the assistance of the Student Life and Leadership Department at the community colleges. Also, flyers were distributed at meetings where the main topic of discussion among participants was IPSV. The demographics for each participant are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Race	Gender	Major	Classification
A	34	White	Female	Social work	Nontrad
B	N/A	Latino	Female	Special education	Nontrad
C	37	Latino	Female	Business	FYE
D	27	Black/AA	Female	Administrative justice studies/ sociology	FYE
E	19	Black/AA	Female	Sociology/psychology	FYE
F	21	White	Female	Administrative justice studies	FYE
G	N/A	Black/AA	Female	History	FYE
H	54	Latino	Male	Education	Nontrad
I	N/A	White	Female	Anthropology	FYE
J	N/A	Latino	Male	Aviation/carpentry	Nontrad

Note. AA = African American. FYE = First-year experience. Nontrad = Nontraditional student.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semistructured interviews. All participants were asked the same 15 open-ended questions (see Appendix D). Questions were designed to determine participants' motivation and self-determination despite experiencing IPSV. Each question focused on participants' pursuit of academic success while seeking campus services.

The researcher conducted interviews from the morning of Thursday, March 26, 2026, to the morning of Friday, May 1, 2026. Most interviews were conducted on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. This was due to participants' schedules. As stated earlier, all interviews were conducted in person except the first participant interview, which was conducted via Zoom. The researcher asked each of the 10 participants 15 questions (see Appendix D). All interviews lasted 20–25 minutes. The interviews were recorded through Zoom, capturing both audio and video for transcription. The audio interviews were transcribed using Turbo Scribe and then reviewed while viewing the video files to ensure transcription accuracy.

Data Analysis

Coding

The researcher read and listened to the audio recordings of the interviews to assess the themes. The themes were identified across all 15 questions. All questions were reviewed for commonalities, and the themes that appeared in each question were combined to identify the major themes. This analysis required several reviews of the participant interviews. Another stage of the coding was secondary reading and listening to participant interviews to identify any sexually oriented or gender-specific responses. The final stage of the coding process was to identify commonalities in participant responses. Generative phrases and wording were based on

the phrases of the questions asked. These findings were reviewed by the researcher as a way of comparing details into broader subthemes of the research.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

At the beginning of the study, the researcher considered conducting follow-up interviews with participants, if needed, to ensure the information provided was credible. Initial participant interviews provided detailed and credible information; thus, no follow-up interviews were conducted or deemed necessary. However, each participant was contacted via email as a followup to the interview, which provided the researcher an opportunity to correct any misinterpretation of the participants' responses and to ensure each participant had information on counseling or support services. No interviewees expressed a need for support. Finally, each interviewee was asked if they would like to provide additional information to enhance the research. This practice reassured the researcher's bias was limited.

Dependability

The strategies for establishing dependability included a consistent interview protocol and personal log. The interview protocol consisted of a script that was read to each participant at the beginning and end of each interview. A personal handwritten log was created by the researcher that included the dates and times of participant interviews and genders of participants. Each interview participant was labeled with an alphabet letter starting with the letter A and ending with the letter J. Each interview was conducted consistently with the same order and number of questions.

Results

The following four major themes were identified after combining the data from participant interviews. These themes include:

- Theme 1: Supportive faculty and campus personnel are critical to the student experience and expand the likelihood of student perseverance.
- Theme 2: Campus safety is critical to IPSV students' sense of security and their eventual success inside and outside the classroom.
- Theme 3: Providing campus services with trained professionals prepared to support IPSV students is a game changer for those students.
- Theme 4: Having the opportunity to share personal testimonials in a safe environment is healing and can provide motivation for the healing process.

These themes were identified and linked with each other based on the experiences of the participants in the study.

Theme 1

The first theme that emerged from the results was: Supportive faculty and campus personnel are critical to the student experience and expand the likelihood of student perseverance. All 10 participants, particularly in interviews, emphasized the importance of supportive professors and sociology classes while expressing concerns about professors who seemed uninterested in student success. Students expressed comfort level due to the creation of a safe space in the classroom. Participant A stated:

I had a positive experience with a professor who provided both academic and emotional support during challenging times in her studies. The professor helped me navigate

difficulties, reminded me of my goals, and reassured me that my feelings were valid while encouraging me to continue with my education.

In response to Interview Question 7 regarding participants' college motivation and support system on the college campus, Participant A stated, "My support system helps me persevere on difficult days. I want to become more educated and understanding to provide support and resources to others who may be experiencing similar challenges." When they were asked about self-determination and motivation to attend class, Participant A stated:

My motivation for continuing in college is my support system that helps me persevere on difficult days. I become more educated to provide support and resources to others who may be experiencing similar challenges. My support system reminds me of my goals and the need to help others.

Participant A shared more of their experiences of a supportive environment on campus. They stated, "My experience in sociology and sports classes where professors showed they cared and respect, contrasting these with other classes where professors demonstrated a lack of interest in student success."

Participant B shared experiences similar to those of Participant A. They stated, "A supportive professor and community group helped me persevere through difficult times, and ultimately graduating." They provided a further assessment regarding their community college experiences in the classroom versus the 4 year colleges and universities, and the safe space provided by their professor. Participant B stated, "Community colleges felt more like home and less intimidating" and noted the significant impact of a supportive community college professor who introduced us to a group of students facing similar challenges."

Participant C shared similar experiences of being a student at the community college and their self-motivation. They stated:

The community college provided a supportive environment and network, particularly through volunteer work and connections with faculty like Mr. Z, who helped me escape a difficult situation. My academic performance was initially affected by my experiences; however, I maintained an honors status and was highlighted by the importance of personal connections with administrators and faculty who provided emotional support.

Participant C continued, stating:

I'm motivated by wanting to help others who may not know about available resources and opportunities, and to avoid living in poverty. I described myself feeling like a role model due to my experiences as a first-generation college student and someone with a traumatic brain injury, and different aspects of my identity resonate with different people.

Participant F shared their personal experiences in the classroom. They stated:

I had a positive experience finding myself and exploring my identity in college. It led to meaningful relationships, including a 1-year anniversary with a partner I met in college. College helped me develop as a productive member of society and learn about love. I miss my classmates from my spring semester 2024 class.

Similar to other participants, Participant G emphasized, "The value of understanding students' experiences and treating them with compassion, particularly from faculty members."

The participants highlighted here and the other participants in the study indicated the college experience and environment are created by administrators, staff, and faculty. They emphasized how the college could provide a supportive environment. It is not the institution's responsibility; however, it relies upon individual professors choosing to create safe spaces for

their students. This includes professors creating an environment where students are not judged for their past experiences.

Theme 2

The second theme that emerged was the importance participants placed on student safety on the college campus: Safety on campus is critical to IPSV students' sense of security and their eventual success inside and outside the classroom. Although each participant had a unique approach to student safety on campus, it was abundantly clear their concern was feeling safe in academic settings. This burden is often placed on the faculty. This includes both the classroom environment and other educational activities on campus. Participant B shared an on-campus experience. They stated:

A student shared her experience of being catcalled before class, which led to a discussion about how such behavior makes students feel threatened. ASU felt crowded and NAU felt lonely and secluded. The community college felt more like home and less intimidating.

As Participant D stated, "Effective professors should be active listeners, show care for their students, and create welcoming environments allowing students to share their experiences, even in nontraditional academic settings." Participant D elaborated on the seating in the classroom, stating:

I developed the ability to choose comfortable seating based on intuition about my surroundings, including parking spots and room locations. The assignment regarding stalking resonated with my classmates and me. The focus group was important because we shared food as we formed a close community.

Participant D continued sharing their feeling about their classmates and family, stating:

People I care about, including my siblings and classmates, along with feeling safe in the classroom environment, motivate me to come to class. The personal attention from my professors and the supportive community college environment help create a sense of safety on campus.

Participant E shared their sentiments regarding safety on campus. They stated:

The importance of feeling safe and cared for in academic settings emphasizes how caring faculty can impact student attendance and performance. My personal experiences about skipping classes and assignments during my first semester at the college were attributed to negative influences from people in my life who prioritized their own motivations over my academic goals.

Participant G shared their sentiments of safety on campus. They stated, “My safety on campus is important because of past family difficulties and workplace harassment that has impacted my academic performance, particularly in online classes.” Similarly, Participant H stated their thoughts on campus safety and the connection with communication, saying:

Faculty can create safe spaces on campus through open communication with students. In my personal experiences with academic commitment, I have only missed three classes this semester, and I plan to complete my GEC requirements in the fall and spring. My past experiences have influenced my attendance and academic performance. My commitment to education is based on my childhood upbringing.

Participant I shared a comparison between an unsafe/safe environment in the classroom. They shared:

I was the only female student in a class where inappropriate jokes were made about my situation, leading me to leave the class immediately and later drop the course. I had a

positive experience with an anthropology professor who involved students in research activities and created an engaging learning environment. My choice to attend community college instead of a 4-year university was to avoid debt and benefit from smaller class sizes and more personal interaction with professors.

Participant J shared their perspective regarding campus safety. They stated:

The challenges of maintaining routines in unstructured environments, using the example of general contractors. Community college leaders create safe spaces for discussion. I am a veteran, and another veteran was not being properly listened to during a monthly checkin, which triggered concerns about their safety. The importance of being aware of one's surroundings and knowing when to intervene in potentially dangerous situations. Participant J described their perspective on safety on campus and mental health from past experiences. They stated, "I didn't complete assignments due to being unsafe, PTSD [posttraumatic stress disorder] symptoms, and daily setbacks."

Participants' shared perspectives included similarities with other participants in the creation of safety on campus. According to participants, safety on community college campuses is the role of administration. Further, they believed the role of the faculty is vital to the academic success of the student.

Theme 3

The third theme from the data is: Providing campus services with trained professionals prepared to support IPSV students is a game changer for those students. IPSV and stalking are consequential public health and safety issues with wide-reaching impacts on emerging adults, including those on college campuses in the United States. In response to high rates of violence among college student populations, colleges and universities can develop CBA programs. They

support survivors of IPSV through support connections, safety planning, and resource acquisition. Participants shared their experiences with various campus services that impacted them and eventually allowed them to be successful and motivated to continue their studies. Campus services took many forms (e.g., athletics, various counseling services, campus police, veterans services). Participant A shared a positive experience with campus safety officers. They described their experience with campus security, noting how they helped address a situation in which their significant other was following them on campus. They stated:

My significant other would follow me on campus, wait outside of my classroom, follow from classroom to classroom, sit outside the classroom, and try to enter the classroom without permission from the instructor. Campus security had to escort the person off campus. They had to inform me that they noticed the behavior of the significant other before I did. After this occurred, I felt more comfortable on campus. I saw the security officer more frequently. It was nice to feel somebody else was looking out for me.

Participant B had a unique perspective on using campus services. They shared, “I am a college athlete, and I used sports as an outlet and found support through a professor of sociology. The class provided a safe space and a sense of community.”

Participant F stated, “I had used counseling services three times over 2½ years and primarily sought support from professors and friends. I had positive interactions with campus police and public safety officers,” mentioning specific individuals.

Participant G shared how campus services helped through a difficult period during their college experience. They stated:

I signed up for We Care Wednesdays provided by Student Life and Leadership. They helped me with food security because I was spending \$300-\$400 monthly on gas while

working a previous job. I had positive experiences with campus resources like We Care Wednesdays and their current campus advisor, who helped resolve a graduation application issue.

Participant J shared how campus services for nontraditional students impacted their college experience. They stated:

As a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces, I received support from campus resources, including counseling services and VA [Veterans Administration] facilities. They provided a sense of normalcy and served as a pathway for future goals of helping others who have similar experiences.

The experiences shared by the participants in this study demonstrated the positive impact of campus-based services on survivors of IPSV. Furthermore, these support programs not only enhance individual survivor safety and academic outcomes but also support the overall climate and safety on community college campuses for survivors or any other student.

Theme 4

The fourth theme was: Having the opportunity to share personal testimonials in a safe environment is healing and can provide motivation for the healing process. Survivors of IPSV who publicly speak out create change in the silence that surrounds this crime. Sharing their stories can end the false sense of shame survivors often carry. Observing a survivor cast off the shame may inspire others to do the same (RAINN, n.d.). During the healing process, selfdetermination and motivation can serve as the foundation for individuals to exercise maximum decision-making capacity and proceed along a continuum of shared decision making for greater support (Thomas et al., 2019). Motivation for survivors who are ready to share their stories can play an impactful role in healing from the trauma of IPSV. Individuals are motivated

and determined because they reclaim control over their lives (Domestic Violence Awareness Project,

n.d.). Participants had unique perspectives on faculty inviting guest speakers who are survivors of IPSV to share their personal testimonials. Participant F stated:

In my gender and sexuality class, which had a significant impact on my academic journey and sense of belonging, we had powerful guest speakers and discussions on uncomfortable topics like sexual assault and domestic violence. It taught us the importance of speaking up against hate rather than remaining silent. The class environment felt uniquely supportive and uplifting compared to previous experiences, and I learned the concept that silence is compliance.

Participant H shared their perspectives on the personal testimonials they heard from survivors who were invited to their class. They shared, “I’m sharing my personal story because it can have a positive impact on others. When I listen to other’s stories, it helps me gain perspective and resilience and express willingness to help others through their own experiences.” They shared further motivation to complete their education as follows:

I have strong satisfaction with my experience as a student. I love being a student and do not have dislikes about the campus or professors. My motivation comes from taking Spanish classes to pass down the heritage to my 3-year-old son. I’m a nontraditional student and a grandfather with teenage grandchildren.

Participant I shared their college experiences regarding the perspectives from other students. They stated, “Being exposed to students from diverse backgrounds sharing their experiences has broadened my worldview. I feel more reserved in class with the majority of male students due to my past experiences with assault.”

Participant J shared their perspective on being motivated by the stories of survivors of IPSV, saying, “When people share their personal stories, it motivates others in similar situations, especially people who are disabled individuals in their housing complex. I am motivated by my family, especially my partner, who has been supportive of my education.”

These four participants, along with other participants in this study, shared how they were motivated to share their stories when they heard testimonials from others who had similar experiences. As Participant F stated during their interview, “I learned in my Gender and Society sociology class that silence is compliance.” All participants concluded, “If we stay silent, we cannot help or assist others.”

Summary

This chapter began with a review of the research questions followed by participant demographics, setting, coding, and the trustworthiness of the evidence. A table was created providing the demographics of each participant. The researcher made a calculated decision to present and organize the data in themes. Participants described IPSV consistently as barriers to (a) completion of assignments, (b) feeling safe on campus, and (c) completing their degrees. Throughout their interviews, participants described campus services, supportive faculty, safety interventions, counseling services, and peer communities as factors that helped restore their sense of safety, motivation, belonging, and commitment to completing their educational goals. Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive analysis of the data related to the research questions, purpose of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for positive impact on social change.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand the self-determination and motivation of community college students who experienced IPSV and excelled academically despite the trauma. The study was a qualitative analysis placed in proper perspective. Qualitative analysis was important in this research because the method focuses on how stories interpret human motivation and experiences. It focuses on the stories participants tell in context based on the research (Riessman, 2008).

The study considered the self-motivation and determination of those community college students and what supported them to achieve their educational goals. Most studies have referred to individuals who experienced IPSV as *victims*. In Chapter 4, the individuals who participated in this study were described as participants. In this study, they also are described as survivors.

Four themes were identified from the data analysis and collection. The first of the four themes is that supportive faculty and campus personnel are critical to the student experience and expand the likelihood of the student's perseverance. The second theme is that safety on campus is critical to an IPSV student's sense of security and their eventual success inside and outside the classroom. The third theme is providing campus services with trained professionals prepared to support IPSV students is a game changer for those students. The fourth theme is having the opportunity to share personal testimonials in a safe environment is healing and can provide motivation for the healing process.

Each of the four themes had subthemes, including the first subtheme, childhood trauma. The second subtheme is selective seating. The third subtheme is family support. The fourth, and final, subtheme is sharing stories in the presence of a researcher, linked with the motivation of

listening to guest speakers. The chapter concludes with unexpected results, recommendations for future research, and perspectives and conclusions of the researcher.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do community college students who have experienced IPSV describe their motivation and self-determination to succeed in college?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of community college students who have experienced IPSV of college support services that strengthen their likelihood to succeed?

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of the study are linked with the literature review from Chapter 2 specifically addressing issues of motivation and self-determination among community college students experiencing IPSV. This study found, although students acknowledged being stigmatized from past experiences, being silent was detrimental to survivors' overall mental health. All participants emphasized the importance of listening to other students and speakers, who shared testimonials that inspired them to share their stories and experiences. When the researcher analyzed the data using self-determination theory, they understood the current political discourse was a motivator to participate in this study. Further, all participants believed if they shared their story, it could help others who are suffering in silence.

Theme 1 (RQ1)

The first theme, supportive faculty and campus personnel are critical to the student experience and expand the likelihood of student perseverance, emerged from the text and audio interviews and centers the student experience in academic settings. Participants emphasized the importance of developing friendships throughout their college experience. This includes collaboration on academic assignments and continuous emotional support throughout the

semesters. Participants enrolled in the same classes based on shared interests. Participants stressed that if they were engaged by an instructor who cared about their students, it contributed to their motivation. The professor must be an active listener. They must know the students' names and create a positive environment. Thus, attendance increases, and missed assignments are minimized. They sought faculty members who would ask questions about their mental health and well-being. This subtheme is linked to current research into undiagnosed and untreated childhood trauma as it relates to IPSV (Zhu et al., 2024). The participants in this study found it was easier to deal with trauma when they found a supportive and nonthreatening educational/classroom environment.

The findings in this study indicated personal stories are part of the process and experience in academic settings. The subtheme coincides with the overall theme and past trauma. The statements by participants in the study strengthened the theory that faculty play a vital role in the self-determination and motivation of students in their college experiences.

Theme 2 (RQ 2)

The strong alliance of safety on campus was the second theme that came from the data analysis: Safety on campus is critical to an IPSV student's sense of security and their eventual success inside and out of the classroom. As the researcher analyzed the audio and transcribed interviews, it was apparent participants placed a heavy emphasis on learning in a safe academic environment, inside and outside the classroom. The safe environment includes the classroom, admissions, enrollment center, and library. Participant interviews revealed their academic success was correlated with safety on campus. One participant shared their transition from psychology to sociology as their major, describing how sociology classes and supportive professors helped them recover from a difficult 1st semester where they failed all classes due to

personal trauma and negative influences. They emphasized how the college environment provided a supportive space for their recovery, noting sociology classes, in particular, felt therapeutic and helped them understand they were not alone in their experiences and why they felt the emotions they were feeling.

A subtheme to this theme is centered around selective seating in all academic settings. All participants described intentionally selecting where they sat in the classroom, and often seating determined their comfort and safety level in the classroom. The comfort level in the classroom was also linked to their academic success. One participant shared, “I would meet with the professor before classes started, and we would go to the assigned classroom. They would allow me to select three seats where I would be comfortable sitting.” They added, “When I arrived at the campus parking lot, if I didn’t feel comfortable with the parking spot, I would sit in my car until a parking spot was available that suited my comfort level.”

Participants shared they selected seats based on their comfort level with their classmates. Also, they shared the importance of “being able to see the door and the four angles of the classroom.” This was a common theme of the subtheme emphasized by the participants: they wanted to sit close to the door with their backs against the wall. A participant shared: If my instructor had guest speakers, educational lectures, or focus groups, I would text my instructor or classmates to save seats for all of us. Only students with whom I were comfortable and familiar with would be allowed to sit me.

Other participants also shared they do not feel safe on campus, and they were always trying to find “escape passages coming into classrooms.”

Their feeling of being safe on campus was based on trauma from their past experiences, and this heightened their awareness regardless of the location on campus. The researcher listened

to the audio recordings and read the transcripts, and based on the data, all participants claimed the role of the instructor in the classroom (i.e., their capacity to create a safe space) determined their feeling of safety on campus. They emphasized the importance of faculty understanding students' experiences and treating them with compassion.

Theme 3 (RQ2)

The theme of campus services (i.e., providing campus services with trained professionals prepared to support IPSV students is a game changer for those students) was evident in the responses from participants about their community college experiences. Several participants shared how staff personnel in financial aid, disability services, campus police, and Veteran affairs provided additional support during difficult times. Two of the participants who classified themselves as nontraditional students mentioned their experience working with a social services counselor on campus who helped them navigate the learning management systems (i.e., Blackboard, Canvas, and D2L). Other participants emphasized support from college instructors who were assisted by staff from other departments. Participants believed they benefited academically from the additional support. They claimed the staff had been tremendous. Another participant shared they had used counseling services three times over 2½ years and primarily sought support from professors and classmates. They reported positive interactions with campus police and public safety officers. Another participant shared they benefited from We Care Wednesday, a day when students could obtain food assistance through student services. This service helped with stress management, especially related to the cost of gas. This allowed the student to use the money on other items such as rent and automobile services.

Another student was a dual enrollment student and failed all of their classes due to past traumatic experiences. They emphasized the role of the counseling department and a sociology

faculty member in the Cultural Sciences Department who helped them navigate through a difficult period at the college. They claimed college classes served as therapeutic and motivational tools for recovery and shared personal experiences of returning to college after a difficult period and gradually increasing course load from two to five classes. They emphasized that the sociology professor provided a place where students can thrive.

The subtheme from campus support services was family support. Participants stated campus services, coupled with their own family support, were invaluable to their academic success. Participants classified as nontraditional students informed the researcher their children helped them navigate online learning when being on campus did not feel safe. Other participants described how their family provided financial assistance, emotional and psychological support, and transportation.

Another participant emphasized being motivated by their family and the history of PTSD and depression in the family. They wanted to showcase the best version of themselves. Most importantly, not letting their family down. They stressed the importance of taking mental health days to “get themselves together.”

Theme 4 (RQ 2)

The fourth, and final theme, having the opportunity to share personal testimonials in a safe environment is healing and can provide motivation for the healing process, related to sharing personal testimonials and how they motivate students who are survivors of IPSV. The review of audio recordings and reading transcript interviews indicated many of the survivors in this research were motivated to share their stories regardless of the stigma. Survivors providing a voice to their pain and suffering, along with their resilience and strength, embodied the

movement to end IPSV. The survivors were motivated and self-determined to become advocates to help others in the healing process (Domestic Violence Awareness Project, n.d.).

All participants wanted to share their stories after listening to a presentation by a guest speaker in a sociology course earlier that academic year. They expressed sharing their stories as a positive experience. They explained their decisions to interview in person rather than via Zoom, emphasizing the personal nature and the potential to help others. They shared insights about motivation and learning from different perspectives, highlighting how hearing others' stories can inspire personal growth and reflection. Other participants shared they were motivated to share their stories and give back to others who were silenced by the social structure and stigmatized by associates and family. They did not want other people to experience IPSV.

The researcher analyzed the data, and like the previous three themes, a subtheme emerged. The emerging subtheme is sharing their story in the presence of the researcher. All participants were given a choice to be interviewed via Zoom or in person with the researcher. All participants except Survivor A wanted to be interviewed in person. Survivor A informed the researcher that their school schedule would not allow them to be interviewed in person. Thus, they chose the Zoom option.

Participants who were interviewed in the presence of the researcher emphasized that their story must be told in person—it was too important to share via Zoom. One participant stated, “If my story were shared via Zoom, it would not be real.” Another participant shared, “I hate Zoom. I want to share my story with the researcher.”

Surprised by the Findings

The researcher had several expectations of the students who participated in this research study. First, they assumed all students sharing their stories based on their experiences in IPSV

would share on Zoom. Second, all participants, if they agreed to an interview, would arrive late, cancel the interview, or reschedule. Third, participants would not be forthcoming with their personal testimonials. Finally, participants would not complete the interview based on the content of the questions.

The researcher was surprised by the participants. Regardless of the interview format, they were candid, comfortable, and emotional. They were willing to share personal details about their experiences. The researcher noticed a high comfort level among all participants based on their body language. Participants showcased all their emotions, from anger and profanity to sadness and tears. Interestingly, none of those interviewed felt the desire to meet with available counseling personnel. Several mentioned the discussion/interviews provided a cathartic experience and were pleased their interviews may result in college leaders providing even better services to other survivors.

Several themes and subthemes emerged from the findings:

- Theme 1: Supportive faculty and campus personnel are critical to the student experience and expand the likelihood of student perseverance, with a subtheme of childhood trauma.
- Theme 2: Campus safety is critical to an IPSV student's sense of security and their eventual success inside and out of the classroom, with a subtheme of selective seating.
- Theme 3: Providing campus services with trained professionals prepared to support IPSV students is a game changer for those students, with a subtheme of family support.

- Theme 4: Having the opportunity to share personal testimonials in a safe environment is healing and can provide motivation for the healing process, with a subtheme of sharing stories in the presence of the researcher.

The participants' academic experiences were based on faculty members in the classroom. Participants emphasized faculty members who engaged them, welcomed them, and did not judge them based on their appearance and experience made learning enjoyable. Faculty understanding and assessing the participants' needs allowed students to be the best version of themselves.

The second theme, campus safety, can be linked with the first theme based on the research. Participants emphasized their safety on campus was linked to their academic performance. It determined if they complete assignments, prevented sporadic attendance, and kept them on the path to graduation. They were always aware of their surroundings with an escape plan in every academic setting.

The third theme, campus services, was emphasized as important as the supportive instructor in the classroom. Participants shared how campus services help create a positive community college experience. Survivor B shared, "ASU is crowded with many resources but intimidating, while NAU felt lonely and secluded, and community colleges felt more like home and down-to-earth." A professor and support staff introduced them to a community of women going through similar experiences. Campus services motivated survivors during a tough time in their lives.

The final theme was sharing of personal testimonials from guest speakers who shared similar stories, which helped motivate survivors to participate in this research study. The personal testimonials helped them to complete their education. Participants emphasized that

because of shared experiences, they wanted to share their stories to prevent students from experiencing IPSV.

The researcher was surprised by these themes and the creation of subthemes, which enhanced the survivor community college experience. Despite the diversity of the survivors who volunteered for this study (based on ethnicity, age, race, and college attended), the similarities they shared with this researcher were significant. These themes can be used as best practices for administrators, campus staff, and faculty.

After listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts for each survivor, another surprise awaited the researcher. It started after each interview, beginning on the morning of Monday, March 30, 2026, with Survivor B, and concluded with Survivor G on Wednesday, April 20, 2026. Each survivor asked the researcher if they could receive a hug as the interview concluded. The researcher assumed they were relieved to share their stories with someone who was an active listener and, most importantly, who would not judge and stigmatize them based on past experiences.

The Findings That Relate to the Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with a combined emphasis on self-determination theory in qualitative narrative analysis. The use of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs combined with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) allowed the researcher to focus on understanding the student experience while seeking campus services despite IPSV and achieving academic success.

Maslow's (1943) five goals are in a pyramid-shaped diagram in the hierarchy of needs. The psychological needs are at the top. Second is safety, security, and order. Third is social affection, belongingness, and love. Fourth is esteem and status. Fifth is self-actualization

(Maslow, 1943). Data were analyzed using qualitative narrative analysis of reading and listening to audio-recorded interviews, identifying themes, writing a summary, analyzing transcripts, clarifying themes, and identifying subthemes (Riessman, 2008). Four themes were analyzed, and subthemes were created from the main themes in the research.

The research focused on how the students experience IPSV and how their motivation and self-determination allowed them to achieve academically. The theoretical concept of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs in education were applied to this study. The five goals in the pyramidshaped diagram linked to the lived experiences of the participants. Several examples include participants who shared the positive impact of learning in a safe space. This would be linked with the second tier of the pyramid, safety and security. As another example, participants shared how the classroom experience created a sense of belonging, community, and love. This linked to the third tier of the pyramid. The participants interviewed for this study exemplified Maslow's hierarchy of needs combined with motivation and self-determination. If they did not have a sense of belonging in all academic settings, they were not motivated and lacked the self-determination to achieve academic success. Further, if they did not believe they were safe on campus, attendance became sporadic, and missed assignments increased. The outcome was the inability to complete the degree requirements for graduation.

Methods were taken to ensure methodological rigor. The written and audio transcripts were checked for transcription errors. Credibility was established through the researcher's attention given to the subject for more than 10 years. The researcher listened to the audio transcripts several times and compared them with the written transcripts to ensure accuracy of the participant's narrative in the context of lived experience. The researcher analyzed the data, developed codes and themes, and interpreted the results to minimize interpretation errors

(Creswell, 2009). The triangulation method was used, incorporating data from interviews and observations during interviews to ensure an understanding of the participants' experiences in the study.

Findings That Relate to the Literature

Each participant's experience of IPSV was unique. The 10 participants in the study were from various backgrounds, generations, and experiences. Participants were men and women. The level of violence in each relationship varied from verbal disagreements and verbal assaults to physical abuse and sexual violence. Several participants in the study came from abusive backgrounds. Other participants were involved in abusive relationships during college.

The literature indicated students may be reluctant to seek services while attending college due to the fear of being labeled or stigmatized. Community college students who experience IPSV experience emotional trauma. These stigmatized experiences result in poor academic performance, missed assignments, and poor attendance (Kaukinen, 2014; Mengo & Black, 2016; Voth Schrag & Edmond, 2017, 2018; Wood et al., 2018). Additional research has suggested individuals who experience IPSV suffer invisible scars resulting in behaviors linked to academic disengagement, including attending class while intoxicated, arriving late to class, and submitting assignments late (Huerta et al., 2006).

Participants in this study shared the importance of supportive faculty in the classroom and other educational settings. Several participants noted faculty should know their students. More than just know their names, faculty should care about their students as people. Further, they appreciated that faculty were concerned about their mental health and stability. This study indicated several resulting academic improvements. First, attendance improves, and participants are motivated to attend class. They stressed in their interviews that faculty engagement created a

community atmosphere. Second, they were not judged for their experiences with IPSV. Several participants in the study shared faculty would benefit from workshops regarding IPSV and student behavior. Finally, participants shared the importance of learning in a safe environment. The research indicates a safe environment is linked with academic success.

An additional aspect of the research and literature is the role of administration and the campus community. Community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities provide a wide range of services to students who experience IPSV. This includes crisis centers, servicing Veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, medical services, victim advocacy programs, and counseling. These services, often provided by the campus, enhance the safety of survivors on campus, which improves the campus climate (Murray & Kardatzke, 2011; Sabina et al., 2017).

All participants in this study indicated campus services made available to them had a positive impact on their academic success. This transcended all demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity, race, and discipline. Participants shared staff personnel in counseling services, financial aid, student life, campus police, and Veteran services provided critical support during difficult times. The participants believed they reaped the benefits academically from the support of campus services, and this motivated them to complete a college degree or certificate.

Each participant in this study shared similar perspectives on their motivation and selfdetermination to succeed academically despite their experiences of IPSV. First, they were determined to succeed because they heard stories from guest speakers who were successful after similar experiences. Second, they saw themselves as role models who could inspire others who had similar experiences with IPSV. They believed they could be a beacon of support to people silenced due to being stigmatized by macrosociety.

Implications for Practice

Positive Social Change

The present study provided necessary awareness for faculty, staff, and administrators at community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities regarding survivors of IPSV. Further, it is clear from the research study that this social problem is not a gender specific issue. Increased awareness among college personnel for survivors was identified in this study as a key ingredient of preventing IPSV in the future. Research has indicated male survivors of IPSV need better services, starting with the recognition that male students are also survivors of IPSV, regardless of their sexual orientation or marital status. Professionals must recognize this when they provide formal and informal services to this forgotten population (Hine et al., 2020). Campus services and other resources for male survivors of IPSV must be created to combat stigma in the social structure narrative (Hine et al., 2020).

Another aspect of positive social change addressed by this study is how the fields of sociology, administrative justice, and other disciplines present the issue of IPSV at the community college level. In each discipline, the role of faculty determines the support for students who experience IPSV through academic assignments and guest speakers invited by faculty. Further, faculty pedagogy is vital to supporting survivors. Faculty must take on the role of active listeners. All survivors of IPSV must have their needs met when they enter academic settings. The findings of this study can help bring attention to the reality that IPSV survivors are not confined based on gender, age, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or academic classification.

Informed Decision Making Based on Data From the Research

The significance of the research lies in its use of data to educate and inform community college administrators about students who experience IPSV while seeking campus services. It is appropriate for community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities to analyze, collect, report, and understand data for the best interests of their students. They must understand their needs to evaluate effective measures to ensure their academic success.

Improving Communication and Consciousness

The research emphasized the power of communication and consciousness about the role of faculty in the classroom. The administration's role is to develop strategies for hiring faculty who are culturally competent. Community colleges can develop strategies with the intention of creating workshops for faculty and staff on trauma-informed approaches. The workshops can be centered on sensitive topics like domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape. These workshops can occur on each campus in a community college district. They can be offered annually and should be made mandatory for campus personnel. Further, the administration on community college campuses must engage students. Educators must be the voice and very often a listening ear for the students. This includes hiring faculty who are culturally competent in the needs of the student and are open and prepared to support students in a time of crisis.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on community college students who experienced IPSV, and their selfdetermination and motivation while seeking campus services despite the trauma. The results were that participants in this study were aware of the shame and stigma many survivors of IPSV feel while matriculating in a college setting. However, participants indicated guest speakers and

discussions on uncomfortable topics like sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence taught them the importance of speaking up against hate rather than remaining silent.

Extensive research must be done focusing on all students', including international students', experiences of IPSV, as international students seem to be a forgotten population. It is important to provide campus support services in their native language. Another forgotten population is students with disabilities. It is important to research how the campus disabilities services department can provide counseling and other mechanisms of support during moments of anxiety and stressful situations. Specifically, a mixed-methods, national-level study should be conducted using surveys and focus groups of students and faculty who serve these students to comprehend the magnitude of the problem and the variety of supports necessary. These surveys and open discussions with interpreters, if needed, should be offered in multiple languages to address IPSV.

Another recommendation for research is inclusion of students who enroll in classes entirely online. Those students are less likely to engage with faculty and peers. Thus, they can be classified as a hidden student population. Due to a lack of engagement with faculty and peers, they may be reluctant to share their experiences of IPSV.

Furthermore, a study on how IPSV impacts mental health and well-being for all students could be done to see how college services and staff training impact student success. Next, community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities could study and evaluate intervention methods for responding to and preventing IPSV in all students and their subsequent success in college. Any study should fully include all students regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. This study can be extended to exploring how students who are willing to share their experiences via surveys, focus groups, or interviews are

motivated by the current global political climate. The research could create a larger network of community-based sharing and collaborative learning among various institutions.

Another recommendation for additional research is related to student completion and students who disappear due to the lack of support from multiple entities (e.g., family, peers, administration at the colleges they attend). In the college, departments (e.g., campus police), faculty, and staff must be informed about IPSV. Faculty can be required to place a statement in all their syllabi on their values and their commitment to violence prevention. This will assist all students, including online students. Annual workshops, in-person or online, can educate faculty and staff on how to respond and respond to IPSV. A best practice method is safe bystander intervention workshops, if needed.

A campus advocacy program can be created. It can offer culturally inclusive and traumainformed response training with technical assistance to campus victim assistance faculty, staff, and community partners. It can address stalking, domestic violence, rape, and sexual violence in higher education. It can promote and inform standards of knowledge among those serving survivors of violence and trauma to ensure each individual receives equitable access to an education and a campus community of healing.

This research focused on the community college system. A best practice recommendation is expanding the research to 4-year colleges and universities throughout the country. This can include students in dual enrollment programs. Community college leaders and administrators can implement workshops, content experts, guest speakers, and training opportunities for faculty during the week before the beginning of the semester.

Conclusion

What became evident to this researcher in this study is that faculty and a host of other support team members each play a vital role in the recovery of students who are survivors of IPSV. Throughout the interviews conducted for this study, the participants provided detailed answers to all questions asked. The researcher was shocked by all survivors' motivation to share their experiences. All participants arrived for their scheduled interviews earlier than the time scheduled. Participants were motivated to elaborate on how their education and life experiences made them who they were. They were more than comfortable sharing their stories. Many survivors were emotional while recounting parts of their experiences, but they also felt it was important they told their stories because telling their stories would allow college administrators and faculty to better understand what they could do to support IPSV survivors. Participants highlighted the importance of faculty being committed to students' psychological needs. They also discussed concerns about faculty lacking trauma-informed approaches in college education, particularly regarding sensitive topics like sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence. Their stories highlighted how professors sometimes minimized students' experiences, which can be damaging for future students and even professionals in these fields.

The onus is on community college administrators to implement workshops and training programs for faculty and staff, regardless of their roles on campus, to reshape the mindset around IPSV. This can raise awareness of this important issue while enhancing the college students' experiences.

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Appendix A - Alignment Table

Literature Findings	Research Questions	Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	Methodology	Interview Questions
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Norgorny et al., (2023) and Waterman et al., (2024) found intimate partner sexual violence and basic needs insecurity is strongly linked to a decrease or lack of motivation in academic performance among community college students.	RQ 1. How do community college students who have experienced intimate partner sexual violence describe their motivation and self-determination to succeed in college?	Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985) Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1943)	Generic Qualitative Research	Interview Questions
Tolman & Rosen (2001) found several social, physical, and psychological consequences for students who experience violence within intimate partner relationships.	RQ 2.What are the perceptions of community college students who have experienced intimate partner violence on college support services that strengthen their likelihood to succeed ?	Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985) Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1943)	Generic Qualitative Research	Interview Questions

Appendix B - Letter to Students

Dear Students,

My name is Rod Golden, Sociology faculty at Mesa Community College in Maricopa County Community College District. I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University in the Community College Leadership Program. I am conducting a study to complete the requirements of my doctoral degree. The purpose of my research study is to understand the educational journey of community college students who have experienced intimate partner sexual violence

and their perceptions of motivation and self-determination to succeed in college. As the researcher, I would like to conduct an interview with you for no more than an hour via Zoom or in person (on campus, if necessary). During our time together, it would be great to discuss your educational experience with me, and how intimate partner sexual violence impacted your experiences in college.

As a researcher, I request your participation in this confidential research project. The results of your interview will be analyzed to describe and further understand your experiences while attending community college. The research could inform leaders and administrators to increase resources focused on prevention and student support.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous for reporting purposes. Participation in the research is completely voluntary. By consenting to participate, you are also allowing me to include your responses in the data analysis, but you will not be identified. You can end the interview at any point.

In the first portion of the interview, you will be asked for your informed consent. Again, this is completely confidential and voluntary. A copy of the study can be provided upon request by contacting me at xxxxx@ksu.edu.

Thank you for your time and patience with this request to participate in this important research study. I am looking forward to listening and learning more about your educational experiences in the community college system.

Rod Golden xxxxx@ksu.edu

XXX-XXX-XXXX

Dissertation Committee Chair(s): Dr. Terry Calaway and Dr. Beverlee McClure-Shaw

Appendix C - Informed Consent

Project Title: The Stories of Self-Determination and Motivation of Community College Students Who Have Had Experiences of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence.

Project Approval Date: {date}

Project Expiration Date {date}

Length of Study: 30 minutes

Principal Investigator: Dr. Terry Calaway

Co-Investigators: Rod Golden / xxxxx@ksu.edu

Contact Details for Problem Questions: Dr. Terry Calaway / xxxxx@ksu.edu /
XXX.XXX.XXXX

IRB Chair Contact Information: Dr. Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 5323224; Cheryl Doerr, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Project Sponsor: Kansas State University or Not Applicable?

Purpose of the Research: This study aims to understand the experiences of community college students with intimate partner sexual violence and their perceptions of motivation and selfdetermination in their academic success.

Procedures or Methods to be used: The research methods for the proposed study consist of a generic qualitative narrative analysis of interviews to explore the stories based on interviews of the community college student participants who experience intimate partner sexual violence. The narrative analysis allows the researcher to learn from the individual's storied life. Narrative research can include data other than interviews. Research indicates that narrative research can be found in written communication from letters, diaries, and through a series of photographs.

Risks or Discomforts Anticipated: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts from participation in this study.

Benefits Anticipated: The focus of this study is designed to contribute to the body of knowledge on promising practices in addressing intimate partner sexual violence. The study is designed with a clear intention of informing policies and best practices at institutions/colleges that serve students who experience intimate partner sexual violence. This study will contribute to acknowledging the student experience of intimate partner sexual violence.

Extent of Confidentiality: The participants and institution's identities will be kept confidential. They will be identified using letters and numbers. Recordings of all participants in the study will be stored on a protected external hard drive with a secure password and secure location for 60 months. After 60 months, the data will be destroyed by overwriting the data.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Signature_____ Date_____

Appendix D - Qualitative Questions

- A. Tell me about being a student here (name the campus). What do you like about (name the campus)? What don't you like? How would you describe to someone else what it's like to go to school here? Tell me a class or activity that gets you motivated?
- B. Why are you in college?
- C. What is your major/what program are you in/what are your career goals?
- D. What support services have you used, or do you intend to use, to keep you on track to graduation?

- E. How do you describe your own self-motivation?
- F. How do you describe motivation? What motivates you to continue in college?
- G. How would you say self-determination and/or motivation motivates you to come to class, Maybe even on days when you don't want to, or don't feel like you can?
- H. How do community college leaders/administrators/faculty/make you feel safe campus?
- I. How have your past experiences caused you to miss/skip classes and assignments?
- J. How have your past experiences impacted your grades?
- K. What campus services or resources have you used, or do you plan to use, to support you with your recovery and your academic success? Tell me how the people or sessions have had an influence on you?
- L. What interactions have you had with campus police/campus safety? Tell me about those discussions?
- M. How do you think "going to college" influences your recovery?
- N. How do you think "going to college" will influence your future?
- O. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your college journey?