

Attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse: A scoping review

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the body of research investigating experiences of psychological intimate partner abuse in relation to attachment theory has grown considerably. While existing literature confirms a link between the two concepts, recent studies exploring the psychological and social mechanisms underpinning this relationship are yet to be considered alongside one another. As such, it is not clear how the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse is constructed.

Using a scoping literature review methodology, this study provides an overview of the breadth of the current literature investigating the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse. Studies were grouped according to whether they investigated the relationship from the perspective of victimization of abuse, or perpetration. Studies focusing on victimization were grouped into four categories, while studies looking at perpetration were grouped into five. Overall, the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse was found to be underpinned by childhood experiences, individual traits, relationship factors and biological factors. Findings indicated a complex, bidirectional model for perpetration and victimization of psychological abuse in committed relationships, however, more research is required to provide further detail.

Future research regarding attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse should take an intersectional approach, ensuring diverse perspectives are represented.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the scope of research surrounding attachment theory has expanded considerably. Originally conceptualized by Bowlby (1969) as a framework to explain different ways children exhibit attachment to their parents, attachment theory is now widely applied to both adult and child interpersonal relationships, as well as providing a useful framework for professionals in clinical settings. Information regarding an individual's attachment style can be valuable in contextualizing their thoughts, behaviours and experiences in relation to others, and inform intervention approaches (Salcuni, 2015).

Strong theoretical links have been forged between adult attachment and relational wellbeing, with evidence linking attachment insecurity with lower relationship satisfaction and wellbeing (Candel & Turliuc, 2019). More specifically, research shows a relationship between levels of attachment insecurity and incidences of abuse in romantic relationships (Finkel & Slotter, 2006; Karantzas et al., 2016). As observed by Outlaw (2009), non-physical abuse occurs more commonly than physical abuse. However, most research to date focuses on physical forms of abuse, or treats intimate partner abuse as a homogenous phenomenon, failing to take into account that the underlying psychological and social processes associated with psychological abuse may differ from those that explain physical abuse, or abuse as a whole. This chapter provides an overview of the literature surrounding attachment theory and intimate partner abuse, and how the two have been linked in research to date. Following this, the rationale and aims of the current research are outlined.

1.1 Attachment theory

Attachment theory, originally conceptualised by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1979), describes the different ways in which infants bond with their caregivers, depending on the parent's responsiveness to the needs of the child in times of distress. As explained by

Simpson and Rholes (2017), it is advantageous from an evolutionary perspective for a child to experience distress when separated from their caregiver, however this reaction should be reduced by parental responsiveness to the distress. This response informs the child's working model of attachment, or their expectations of significant others in their lives to meet their needs, and their own worthiness of these needs being met.

Though early research focused on delineating attachment styles in babies, both Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1989) acknowledged the presence of attachment relationships throughout life, including ongoing parental relationships, close friends, and romantic partners. The presence of attachment in adult romantic relationships was theoretically solidified by Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Bradshaw et al. (1988) which allowed for the application of attachment theory to a multitude of real-life relational contexts, including marriage, interpersonal communication, and the ending of relationships (Gillath et al., 2016).

1.1.1 Attachment styles. Though exact terms have changed over time, today there are four commonly recognised attachment styles used in relation to adults, three of which are considered 'insecure'. In the model popularised by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), attachment is measured along continuous dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. Individuals low in both avoidance and anxiety are considered securely attached, meaning they are usually comfortable forming close relationships and depending on others. High anxiety and low avoidance result in a preoccupied attachment style, while individuals with a dismissing-avoidant attachment style are low in anxiety and high in avoidance. Individuals who are high in both avoidance and anxiety are considered to be fearful-avoidant. As described by Gillath et al. (2016), individuals high in attachment avoidance are likely to value independence, and find vulnerability and closeness to others uncomfortable. Conversely, someone who is high in attachment anxiety attempts to attain a sense of security through closeness to others, and is highly vigilant and sensitive to perceived rejection in relationships.

1.1.2 Measuring attachment insecurity. To date, numerous tools, scales and measures to assess adult attachment have been developed. As outlined by Crowell et al. (2008), these tools were developed based on a range of perspectives, areas of expertise and methodologies, by a number of independent researchers. As such, findings across measures are not always comparable and can lead to misinterpretation. Moreover, many measures assign categorical labels of an individual's attachment style, while Gillath et al. (2016) argue that a continuous, dimensional approach to measurement better detects nuance and provides flexibility when faced with changing levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Commonly used measures include the Adult Attachment Interview, developed starting in the 1980s by George et al. (1996), the Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), the Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney et al., 1994) and the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory and its derivatives, which was developed by Brennan et al. (1998) and revised by Fraley et al. (2000) as an answer to issues with interpretability and generalisability in existing measures at the time.

1.2 Psychological intimate partner abuse

Of the different ways in which intimate partner abuse can occur, psychological abuse is the most common. According to research by Fanslow and Robinson (2011), more than half of New Zealand women are likely to experience intimate partner abuse in their lifetime. Outlaw (2009) outlines distinct categories of abuse that are likely to occur in an intimate relationship, with non-physical types of abuse such as emotional, economic or social occurring more frequently than physical or sexual abuse. In keeping with this, Fanslow and Robinson (2011) found that the vast majority of New Zealand women who experienced intimate partner abuse dealt with psychological or emotional abuse, either on its own or in combination with physical or sexual abuse. Moreover, as noted by Começanha et al. (2017),

psychological abuse is likely to start subtly and gradually escalate into controlling, aggressive behaviours, so is not always immediately detected by those involved.

As observed by Kelly (2004), psychological abuse is difficult to define due to its complex and highly personal nature. Fanslow and Robinson (2011) note that this lack of definition is partly to blame for the dearth of research into psychological abuse specifically, with most researchers focusing their attention on physical or sexual intimate partner abuse. Moreover, the personal nature of psychological abuse leads to a high degree of variability, meaning every individual's experience is likely to be different. Because of this, separating psychological abuse into categories, or 'types' of abuse, appears to be a common approach (Kelly, 2004).

1.2.1 Types of psychological abuse. Several attempts have been made to distinguish individual types of psychological abuse, with a great degree of overlap between definitions. For instance, Sackett and Saunders (1999) identified four dimensions of psychological abuse, including ridiculing of traits, criticising behaviour, ignoring, and jealous control. Kelly (2004), meanwhile, separated instances of psychological abuse into two categories, dominance/isolation and emotional/verbal abuse. These then contained six further types of emotional abuse, including threats of abuse, ridicule, jealousy, threats to change the status of the relationship, restriction, and damage to property.

Perhaps the most well-known framework of types of psychological abuse is that developed by Murphy and Hoover (1999). Emotional abuse in dating relationships was separated into four distinct dimensions, known as restrictive engulfment, hostile withdrawal, denigration, and dominance/intimidation. Restrictive engulfment includes controlling and restricting a partner in who they see and what they do, resulting in isolation of the partner. Hostile withdrawal entails physical or emotional withdrawal during or after a conflict, so that the other partner is unable to make amends or seek resolution. Denigration involves

criticising, verbally insulting or humiliating one's partner, attacking their self-esteem. Lastly, dominance/intimidation consists of threatening, verbal aggression or aggressive physical acts that do not physically harm the partner, such as property violence (Murphy & Hoover, 1999).

1.2.1.1 Cyber partner abuse. In the last decade, the use of social media and online platforms has given rise to increasing cyber bullying and cyber abuse. As described by Stephenson et al. (2018), cyber partner abuse involves the use of technology, social media, and online communication channels to perpetrate psychological abuse against a partner. This can include use of existing psychological abuse tactics in an online setting, such as controlling, possessive behaviour, or humiliating one's partner online. However, Stephenson et al. (2018) highlights the unique challenges associated with cyber partner abuse, including vulnerability to online sexual harassment, using a public platform to humiliate one's partner, and the ability to deceive a partner in ways one would not be able to offline.

Emerging research shows that victims of cyber partner abuse are likely to also experience other forms of abuse offline, including traditional psychological abuse and physical forms of abuse (Yahner et al., 2015; Zweig et al., 2013). Moreover, a study by Temple et al. (2016) revealed a positive temporal correlation between cyber dating abuse and traditional dating abuse in terms of both perpetration and victimization in adolescent couples, indicating the two often happen concurrently. As outlined by Stephenson et al. (2018), cyber dating abuse and cyber partner abuse are a significant aspect of modern dating, and comprise a unique form of psychological intimate partner abuse not adequately defined by existing frameworks such as Murphy and Hoover (1999), so must be considered as a separate form of psychological abuse.

1.2.2 Perpetration and victimization. Research into psychological intimate partner abuse can generally be separated into two camps. While some studies choose to focus on what drives perpetration of abuse, others delve further into the variables associated with

victimization. Leisring (2013) noted that the motives for perpetrating psychological abuse have not been well-researched, however found women explained their psychological abuse perpetration as resulting from stress, retaliation for their partner's hurtful actions, anger and jealousy, as well as a desire to win an argument. Meanwhile, victimization is harder to explain, with the outcomes often more easily measurable than predictors. As Começanha et al. (2017) explain, psychological abuse is often a reciprocal, bidirectional process in which victimization cannot be easily viewed in isolation.

1.2.3 Measuring psychological abuse. While a wide variety of measures exist, which measure some aspect of psychological, emotional, verbal or cyber abuse in intimate partnerships, two main tools appear to be used most commonly. Firstly, the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA), designed by Murphy and Hoover (1999), assesses psychological abuse specifically across the four previously mentioned dimensions of abuse: denigration, hostile withdrawal, restrictive engulfment and dominance/intimidation.

Conversely, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) originally developed by Straus (1979) and revised CTS-2 by Straus (1986) is a measure of multiple types of emotional abuse, rather than measuring psychological abuse alone. However, as noted by Começanha et al. (2017), the eight item psychological abuse scale is insufficient to gather significant detail relating to psychological abuse specifically.

1.3 Attachment insecurity and intimate partner abuse

Given its ability to explain interpersonal and relational phenomena, attachment theory is a natural fit for investigating experiences of psychological abuse in committed relationships. As explained by Bartholomew and Allison (2006), attachment theory views intimate partner abuse as a threat response to unmet attachment needs, and therefore an attempt to regain security in the relationship.

A growing body of research explores potential links between an individual's attachment style, and abuse within romantic relationships. For instance, early research by Dutton et al. (1994) found strong correlations between insecure attachment styles and perpetration of abuse, while Mauricio et al. (2007) established personality disorders as a mediator of the relationship between attachment avoidance and psychological abuse. In their endeavour to define distinct types of psychological abuse, Murphy and Hoover (1999) also identified attachment variables that had an effect on the occurrence of abuse. Restrictive Engulfment, in particular, was highly correlated with qualities typically associated with an anxious attachment style. Meanwhile, Wright (2015) identified attachment anxiety as a precursor to cyber partner abuse in adolescents.

Existing literature reviews explore mostly physical and sexual abuse in relation to attachment theory (Finkel & Slotter, 2006; Karantzas et al., 2016), leaving a lack of research centred around psychological abuse specifically. A review by Velotti et al. (2018) investigated attachment in relation to intimate partner abuse of all types, and identified low numbers of studies reporting significant correlations between anxious or avoidant attachment and intimate partner abuse.

Broadly speaking, existing studies generally investigate attachment as either a factor in the perpetration of psychological abuse, the impact of an individual's attachment style on their likelihood or experiences of victimization of psychological abuse, or investigate both victimization and perpetration together in relation to attachment. As explained by Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021), the large majority of research exploring attachment and psychological abuse focuses on actor effects, or factors which explain an individual's perpetration. The impact of this is that the bidirectional nature which contributes to understandings of both perpetration and victimization is under-researched.

1.4 Rationale, aims and research issue

While the majority of literature points to an association between adult attachment and incidence of psychological intimate partner abuse, there is currently a lack of consensus as to what underpins this relationship. Moreover, the differences between the attachment-related mechanisms underlying perpetration and victimization have not been well-established. This research will provide an overview of the current breadth of recent literature exploring the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse using a scoping literature review.

Overall, this review aims to examine how the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse is constructed in the context of intimate partnerships, with a focus on differentiating between factors associated with perpetration of psychological abuse and those associated with victimization. Furthermore, this review seeks to determine whether social and/or psychological mechanisms underpin the relationship between attachment style and psychological intimate partner abuse.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Given the breadth and diversity of research focusing on the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse, as well as the increasing amount of literature on the topic, a scoping review was chosen. According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), scoping reviews are appropriate for use with particularly complex topics, topics lacking existing comprehensive reviews, or when a field of research is relatively new, making the scoping review method a good fit for the current research.

While only quantitative literature was available for inclusion, the existence and acknowledgement of differing and subjective experiences of abuse necessitates a post-positivist approach to research (Panhwar et al., 2017).

2.1 Protocol

The approach for this study was based on the framework by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), following the five recommended stages. Stage 1 consisted of identifying the research question. This involved a preliminary search to determine the scope of existing literature, after which a research aim and question were formulated. To support investigation of the primary research aim and encompass the diverse range of literature available, a number of secondary research aims were also developed. The primary aim of the current research was to provide an overview of the recent literature investigating how the relationship between insecure attachment and psychological intimate partner abuse is constructed. The secondary aims of this research were to establish whether social and/or psychological mechanisms underpinned the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse, and to differentiate between the mechanisms underlying perpetration and victimization respectively.

Following Arksey and O'Malley (2005) guidance, Stage 2 of the research protocol involved identification of potentially relevant studies. A robust and extensive search strategy

was developed in line with research aims, designed to encompass the full breadth of literature on the topic. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed, and relevant databases were identified. The details of the search strategy are discussed in-depth in section 2.1.1.

Stage 3 entailed study selection. Inclusion and exclusion criteria developed at Stage 2 were applied in the selection process, resulting in a final sample of 25 articles for charting and analysis. A flow chart depicting the study selection process is found in Appendix A.

At Stage 4, which involves charting the data, articles were tabulated according to identified themes, and study characteristics were recorded. Information recorded included variables investigated, measures used to assess attachment style and psychological abuse, whether studies investigated perpetration, victimization or both, and key findings. The full table of charted data can be found in Appendix B (please refer to A3 document attached separately).

Stage 5 of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework consisted of collating, summarising, and reporting the results of the review. This involved presenting an overview of the scope of literature reviewed. As outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the purpose of a scoping review is to describe the breadth of evidence surrounding an issue rather than to evaluate the quality of studies in order to produce a synthesised finding. The results of the present research are presented in a narrative format, which presents gaps in the existing literature as well as an overview of the summation of findings from the studies included.

2.1.1 Search strategy. In line with Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, the search strategy adopted for this research was iterative. An initial search was carried out to determine the scope and aim of the project, and to refine the research question. Following this, subsequent searches were needed to refine the search terms and criteria, and identify the databases most suitable with which to carry out the search. Electronic databases were the

main source for the literature search; however, reference lists and in-text references of relevant articles were also searched for potentially relevant studies, as per the guidance of Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The topic was not well suited to the use of grey literature in fulfilling the research aim, as the connection between psychological intimate partner abuse and attachment style has not been officially reported on outside the context of academic literature.

The literature search was conducted using Scopus, Ovid (PsychINFO), Medline, and CINAHL. Search terms were finalised through repeated searches and evaluation of search results. Of the four articles searched, 290 studies were initially identified and screened. After screening titles and then abstracts, full texts were retrieved for 43 potentially relevant studies. The final selection from the database search comprised 23 articles, while a further 2 were identified from reference lists of relevant articles. In total, 25 studies were selected for inclusion.

2.1.2 Study selection. As described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), a scoping review methodology necessitates broader criteria for inclusion than that of a systematic review.

The focus of this research was on adult attachment and relationships, so studies investigating children and adolescents were excluded. Originally, study populations were required to be 18 years or older for inclusion, however the high number of college samples meant that a number of studies included 17-year-olds. The inclusion criteria regarding age was therefore iterated on, with a final lower age limit of 17.

In order to be included, studies needed to have a focus on both attachment insecurity and psychological abuse in intimate relationships. Studies which investigated other, additional variables were excluded. Studies in which attachment or psychological abuse was not a primary focus for investigation were excluded.

Due to the consensus in existing literature that insecure attachment, rather than secure, is likely to be linked to perpetration or victimization of abuse, studies on attachment insecurity were the focus of this review. Studies investigating primarily secure attachment were excluded, however none were identified during the initial search.

Regarding criteria for inclusion surrounding psychological abuse, forms of relationship dysfunction or relational conflict in the absence of abuse were not sufficient for inclusion. Studies that investigated intimate partner abuse in a general sense, without reference to psychological abuse specifically, were excluded. A high number of studies which investigated more than one type of abuse were included, however in order to best meet the research objective, only data concerning psychological abuse was extracted and charted. Moreover, studies investigating psychological abuse in contexts outside committed, romantic or dating relationships were excluded.

Due to the recent expansion in research focusing on attachment and psychological intimate partner abuse, only studies from the past five years, 2016 to 2021, were included. Research up to and including 2015 were excluded from the present study.

Though grey literature was not specifically excluded, none was found relating to the study aims, and therefore was not included. Similarly, qualitative studies were searched for, however none were found which fit other criteria for inclusion. Finally, due to language constraints, only articles written in English were able to be included in the present study.

2.1.3 Data extraction. Full texts of all studies selected were read, and relevant data was tabulated in a spreadsheet. Initially, study characteristics were recorded, including authors, year published, country of origin, research aim, variables investigated, participant details, methods and measures used and key findings. Following this, key concepts and themes were extracted from studies, including the types of variables under investigation, and

any noteworthy attachment-related or psychological abuse-related findings from the broader results. In keeping with Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, quality and rigour of studies was not assessed or extracted for tabulation, as the research aim was primarily to provide an overview of the current literature. The full chart can be found in Appendix B.

2.1.4 Analysis and presentation of results. Initially, characteristics of all relevant studies were collected and analysed, including participant data, measures used, and country of origin. Information on study selection was presented as a flow chart (Appendix A). For synthesis of the primary results, studies were grouped first according to whether they focused on victimization or perpetration of abuse. Studies which investigated both victimization and perpetration were included in both categories, with each topic analysed separately. Within categories of victimization or perpetration, studies were grouped according to themes. For instance, victimization studies which explored the impact of traumatic childhood experiences on the link between attachment insecurity and victimization of psychological abuse were grouped together. Data was initially presented in a table (Appendix B, attached separately), however final results were presented in a narrative format.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS

3.1 Literature search results

The literature search identified an initial 290 articles in four databases. 27 duplicates were excluded. Articles were screened by title initially, at which stage 168 articles were excluded, leaving 128 articles to screen by abstract. After screening abstracts, a further 72 studies did not meet inclusion criteria. Full texts were retrieved for 43 studies which were considered to be potentially suitable. No studies were excluded due to unavailability of full texts. From the four databases originally searched, 23 articles met the inclusion criteria. An additional 2 studies were sourced from searching reference lists of included studies. Overall, 25 articles met all inclusion criteria and were included in the review. Appendix A provides further detail around the study selection process.

3.2 Study characteristics

For the 25 articles included, data was extracted relating to country of origin, populations studied, and measures used to assess attachment and psychological abuse variables. Overall, the majority of studies originated in North America, and the majority of participants were Caucasian and heterosexual. There were more studies investigating individual participants than couples. Studies were fairly homogenous in terms of measures used to assess attachment insecurity, however a wide range of tools were utilised in measuring psychological intimate partner abuse perpetration and victimization.

3.2.1 Populations. Of the 25 articles reviewed, 70% (n = 17) originated in North America, with 14 in the United States of America, and three in Canada. The remaining eight studies originated from Israel, Turkey, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Australia. Notably, no studies were found which originated in New Zealand. All 25 studies employed a survey methodology, with only two using longitudinal, rather than cross-sectional, data. 19 studies

reported ethnicity of participants in their demographic reporting. Of these, one study consisted of 80% native Israeli participants, and one study involved a 100% Native American population. Of the remaining 17 studies, 66.9% of participants were described as 'Caucasian', 'White', or 'European American'. In 12 of the 25 studies, participants were college or university students.

In seven studies, participants were couples, while the remaining 18 studies focused on individual participants. Of the non-couple studies, 66.2% of participants were female. Only one couple study focused specifically on non-heterosexual relationships. In 13 of the total 25 studies, participants were excluded who were not heterosexual, or who were in same-sex relationships. However, one study focused solely on same-sex relationships. A further 6 studies reported participant sexuality without excluding non-heterosexual participants. Of these, an average of 92.6% of participants identified as heterosexual. Due to discrepancies between studies in reporting of participant sexuality, further detail was not obtained. 4 studies did not report data on participant sexuality.

3.2.2 Measures. In measuring attachment styles, 21 studies used a form of the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998). More specifically, five studies utilised the ECR-short form (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007), while nine studies used the ECR-revised (ECR-R; Fraley et al., 2000). Six studies used the original ECR, and one study used the ECR-12 (Lafontaine et al., 2015). Two studies used the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990), and one study used the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney et al., 1994). Finally, one study assessed adult attachment using the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Tools used to assess psychological abuse were more varied. The most commonly used tool, employed by eight studies, was the Conflict Tactics Scales Revised (CTS-2; Straus, 1986), a variation on the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS; Straus, 1979), which was used once.

Second most common was the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA; Murphy & Hoover, 1999), which was used by five studies. A full list of measures used to assess psychological intimate partner abuse can be found in Appendix B (A3 document attached separately).

3.3 Study findings

Studies were grouped according to whether their focus was on victimization or perpetration of psychological intimate partner abuse. Three studies investigated both perpetration and victimization together, so these were separated and included in both groups for the review. In studies investigating victimization, four broad themes were identified: relationship factors; dyadic approaches with couples; early childhood experiences; and biological factors. Similarly, studies focusing on perpetration of psychological abuse were categorised by whether they examined relationship or dyadic variables, childhood experiences, biological factors, or individual psychological or behavioural variables. Overall, studies supported a link between attachment insecurity and victimization or perpetration of psychological abuse, and many highlighted additional factors which underpinned this relationship.

3.3.1 Victimization. Seven studies focused on victimization of psychological abuse in relation to attachment theory. A further three, which investigated both victimization and perpetration, were also included in this group in order to review relevant findings related to victimization specifically. In total, four investigated childhood experiences such as parenting style, maltreatment or trauma. Three studies explored relationship factors, or factors an individual contributes to a relationship. Alongside this, two studies explored a dyadic relationship between couples in mutual perpetration and victimization of abuse. Finally, one

study looked for associations between biological traits, victimization of psychological abuse and attachment insecurity.

3.3.1.1 Childhood experiences. Four studies investigated childhood experiences in relation to the association between attachment and psychological abuse victimization. All four originated in the USA, and used cross-sectional survey data. Two studies investigated attachment as a mediator of the relationship between childhood experiences and psychological abuse victimization, both of which had a significant finding. The other two studies used correlational data, both finding significant correlations between attachment insecurity and victimization of psychological abuse. Two studies had entirely female samples, while the other two had mixed samples which were predominantly female.

In a population of Native American adults, Kong et al. (2018) explored attachment as a mediator of the effect of childhood maltreatment on intimate partner abuse victimization later in life, finding no direct relationship between attachment insecurity and intimate partner abuse, however fearful attachment and depressive symptoms sequentially mediated this relationship. However, separate analyses were not conducted for different types of abuse, so drawing further conclusions about attachment insecurity in relation to psychological abuse specifically is not possible.

Meanwhile, Smagur et al. (2018) also investigated depressive symptoms as a factor, finding that attachment insecurity fully mediated the effects of childhood maltreatment and intimate partner violence on experiences of depressive symptoms.

In a correlational study investigating both perpetration and victimization, McClure and Parmenter (2020) found associations between attachment anxiety and victimization of verbal and emotional abuse, and between childhood abuse and anxious attachment in adulthood.

Finally, Davidson et al. (2017) investigated experiences of intimate partner abuse in combination with parenting experiences, finding that women with a more anxious attachment style, and whose parents had been less loving and more overprotective in childhood, were more likely to experience psychological intimate partner abuse as adults.

3.3.1.2 Relationship factors. Three studies investigated relationship variables, or variables associated with an individual's behaviour in relationships. One study originated in Spain, one in Canada and one in the USA. All three studies used cross-sectional data from online surveys. Participants in all three studies were university students who were mostly female, and on average were aged in their early twenties.

Two studies, by Bonache et al. (2019) and Lafontaine et al. (2021), investigated attachment style as a predictor in a mediation model, finding that the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse victimization was mediated by conflict in relationships. More specifically, Bonache et al. (2019) explored the role of destructive conflict resolution strategies in the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse victimization, finding that anxious attachment indirectly predicted abuse victimization through destructive conflict engagement. Notably, no direct paths were found for avoidant attachment.

Meanwhile, Lafontaine et al. (2021) found that socially prescribed romantic perfectionism, as well as perceived conflict in a romantic relationship, mediated the relationship between attachment insecurity and victimization of psychological intimate partner abuse.

Lastly, a study by Lancaster et al. (2020) investigated attachment insecurity as a moderator between relationship quality and cyber abuse victimization, however found no models of significance with either anxious or avoidant attachment.

3.3.1.3 Dyads. Two studies explored psychological abuse and attachment as a dyadic relationship, investigating both victimization and perpetration simultaneously. Karakurt et al.

(2019) found female attachment insecurity to be significantly negatively associated with victimization of emotional abuse. Specifically, female attachment security had a direct actor effect on female abuse victimization, but no partner effect on male emotional abuse victimization. No significant male actor or partner effects were found.

On the other hand, Oka et al. (2016) incorporated relational aggression and relational power into their dyadic analysis. In terms of victimization specifically, they found that one's own attachment insecurity was linked with less relational power, and higher levels of partner relational aggression. Overall, relationship power mediated the relationship between attachment insecurity and relational aggression.

Neither dyadic study reported findings on attachment avoidance or anxiety specifically, preferring to investigate attachment insecurity as a single variable. Overall, however, dyadic analyses indicated that one's own level of insecurity predicts the likelihood of being a victim of psychological abuse.

3.3.1.4 Biological factors. One study, by Barbaro et al. (2019) investigated genetic covariation as a factor in the relationship between attachment anxiety and both victimization and perpetration of intimate partner abuse. Overall, they found that phenotypic associations between attachment anxiety and psychological abuse victimization could be explained in large part by genetic covariation, in combination with environmental influences.

3.3.2 Perpetration. Fifteen studies were found which specifically investigated perpetration of psychological abuse in relation to attachment insecurity in committed relationships. As previously mentioned, a further three studies which investigated victimization and perpetration together were included in both groups, so are reviewed in this section in their exploration of perpetration specifically. Overall, 18 studies were reviewed in relation to perpetration of psychological abuse. Two studies explored childhood experiences

in relation to attachment and psychological abuse perpetration. Two studies investigated factors related to relationship functioning, while a further seven took a dyadic approach. Six studies explored individual factors in their capacity to explain psychological abuse perpetration in combination with attachment. Finally, one study drew on biological and genetic factors.

3.3.2.1 Childhood experiences. Two studies investigated childhood experiences in relation to attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse perpetration. Both were from the USA, and used survey methodologies. One study, by Barbaro and Shackelford (2019), looked specifically at emotional unpredictability in childhood, finding that, in men, attachment anxiety mediated the relationship between emotional unpredictability in childhood and perpetration of intimate partner abuse. No such association was present for women, and no significant associations were found relating to avoidant attachment.

As previously mentioned, McClure and Parmenter (2020) investigated both perpetration and victimization of abuse in relation to childhood trauma and attachment insecurity. In terms of perpetration, verbal and emotional abuse were found to be correlated with experiences of childhood emotional abuse as well as high trait anxiety. Attachment anxiety was also correlated with childhood emotional abuse.

Though both studies took a different approach to their analyses, overall findings suggested a significant role of childhood experiences in relation to one's attachment style and perpetration of psychological abuse in adulthood.

3.3.2.2 Relationship factors. Two studies explored various facets of relationship functioning in relation to psychological abuse and attachment. One study originated in Turkey, while the other was from the USA. There were few similarities between studies, in terms of sample populations, variables investigated and study aims.

Looking specifically at restrictive engulfment as a form of psychological abuse, Toplu-Demirtaş et al. (2019) found a direct association between anxious attachment and perpetration, but no direct association for avoidant attachment. Relationship satisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between both attachment anxiety and avoidance and restrictive engulfment perpetration.

A study by Sonkin et al. (2019) investigated variables associated with relationship functioning – namely anger management, communication, and conflict resolution – in participants of a court-mandated domestic violence programme. For male participants, anxiety was significantly correlated with three forms of psychological abuse, while women's attachment anxiety correlated significantly with two forms of psychological abuse. On the whole, attachment anxiety was a strong predictor of psychological abuse perpetration in both male and female perpetrators of domestic violence.

Overall, both studies found stronger effects for attachment anxiety than avoidance in relation to relationship factors and perpetration of psychological abuse.

3.3.2.3 Dyads. Making up a large portion of research into perpetration of psychological abuse, seven studies investigated dyadic effects in couples. Overall, studies were from a diverse range of locations, including Canada (n = 2), Israel (n = 1), Turkey (n = 1), and the USA (n = 3). Overall, attachment anxiety was more strongly linked to perpetration of psychological abuse than attachment avoidance in dyadic studies.

Two studies, by Gou and Woodin (2017) and Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021), investigated relationship satisfaction in relation to attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration. Gou and Woodin (2017) incorporated relationship dissatisfaction into their longitudinal study focusing on couples making the transition to parenthood. In women, relationship dissatisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and perpetration of psychological abuse. In men, both anxious

and avoidant attachment were predictors of psychological abuse perpetration with relationship dissatisfaction as a mediator.

Meanwhile, Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021) also investigated relationship satisfaction as a factor. For both men and women, an actor effect of anxious attachment on psychological abuse perpetration was established. Additionally, a partner effect was observed in which women's attachment anxiety predicted partner perpetration of psychological abuse, which in turn predicted low relationship satisfaction in men.

Overall, relationship satisfaction was found to be a significant factor in relation to attachment and psychological abuse perpetration. While Gou and Woodin (2017) found it to be significant as a mediator, Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021) produced evidence for lower relationship satisfaction in men as an outcome of women's anxious attachment, and men's subsequent perpetration of psychological abuse.

Toplu-Demirtaş et al. (2020) explored the effects of distrust, suspicion of infidelity, and jealous on the relationship between attachment insecurity and cyber dating abuse perpetration. Dyadic distrust, anticipation of infidelity in a partner, and jealousy all moderated the relationship between attachment anxiety and perpetration of cyber dating abuse.

A study by Goncy and van Dulmen (2016) incorporated not only self-report survey methodology, but also videotaped couple interactions which were viewed and rated by independent observers. Overall, the study found that attachment anxiety for both males and females predicted higher female abuse perpetration. Interestingly, survey data differed from observed data in terms of predictors of male abuse, in that survey data revealed an actor effect of male anxiety predicting male abuse, while observed interactions supported the finding of a partner effect of female anxiety relating to male abuse perpetration. No significant

correlations were found for avoidant attachment in relation to psychological abuse perpetration.

Meanwhile, Oka et al. (2016) incorporated relational power dynamics into their exploration of attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration. In line with previously stated findings regarding victimization, attachment insecurity was associated with less relational power, and higher levels of partner relational aggression. More specifically, relationship power mediated the association between attachment insecurity and relational aggression.

Notably, a study by Sommer et al. (2017) had significant findings regarding avoidant attachment. Using a community sample, the authors found that one's own attachment avoidance was predictive of psychological aggression perpetration, while anxious attachment did not predict own perpetration. In addition, a partner's avoidance or anxiety both predicted one's own perpetration of psychological aggression. Overall, significant actor and partner effects were found for both anxious and avoidant attachment in relation to perpetration of psychological abuse.

Tougas et al. (2016) integrated perception of partner support into a dyadic understanding of the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse. While individuals with avoidant attachment styles were more likely to perceive themselves as receiving less support from their partner, this did not in turn predict their perpetration of psychological aggression. Meanwhile, attachment anxiety was not predictive of either prediction of partner support or psychological aggression. Overall, no significant relationships were found between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration.

3.3.2.4 Individual factors. Six studies explored individual factors explaining the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration. These

studies were diverse in terms of country of origin, sexuality of participants, and sample type. Notably, all studies approached attachment style as a predictor, incorporating individual psychological or behavioural processes as mediators in relation to psychological abuse perpetration.

Three studies, by Aracı-İyiyaydın et al. (2020), Jackson (2018) and Wright (2017), investigated the role of jealousy in relation to attachment and psychological abuse. Aracı-İyiyaydın et al. (2020) conducted research around the role of different types of rumination and jealousy, finding that high levels of brooding and cognitive jealousy mediated the association between attachment anxiety and psychological abuse perpetration, and more specifically between anxious attachment and cyber abuse perpetration.

Similarly, a thesis by Jackson (2018) examined the contribution of jealousy and forgiveness to the link between attachment and psychological abuse. Differentiating between different types of jealousy, cognitive jealousy and behavioural jealousy were both found to partially mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and perpetration of psychological abuse. Meanwhile, cognitive jealousy also partially mediated the relationship between attachment avoidance and psychological abuse perpetration.

A third study involving jealousy was conducted by Wright (2017), who investigated jealousy and anger as mediators in the relationship between insecure attachment and perpetration of intimate partner abuse. It was found that jealousy mediated the relationship between anxious attachment and privacy invasion both online and in-person. Anger mediated the relationship between anxious attachment and in-person relational aggression. Avoidant attachment was not found to have any significant effects. Overall, these studies established a significant mediating role of jealousy, of various types, in the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse perpetration. In addition, brooding, anger and forgiveness were also significantly related to attachment insecurity and perpetration.

Two studies investigated personality traits in relation to attachment and psychological abuse. A study by Bui and Pasalich (2021) investigated both face-to-face and cyber psychological abuse, and the role borderline and psychopathic personality traits might have in explaining perpetration. It was identified that the relationship between attachment anxiety and both online and in-person psychological abuse perpetration was mediated by borderline and psychopathic traits. Conversely, the relationship between avoidant attachment and online or in-person abuse was mediated by psychopathic traits, but not borderline traits.

Also focusing on personality, McDermott et al. (2017) focused on dominance orientation and its role in the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse perpetration. Differentiating between types of psychological abuse in line with Murphy and Hoover (1999) framework, attachment anxiety was found to be positively associated with all four types of psychological aggression in females, but in males was only significantly correlated with restrictive engulfment. Attachment avoidance was positively associated with hostile withdrawal in men and women, while an association was also found for males between avoidant attachment and use of denigration. For both males and females, dominance orientations mediated the relationship between attachment insecurity and perpetration of all four types of psychological intimate partner abuse. Across both studies, personality variables were found to significantly mediate the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration.

Lastly, a study by Longares et al. (2020) on individuals in same-sex relationships found that an individual's level of 'outness' about their sexuality or relationship was found to moderate the association between attachment insecurity and perpetration of psychological abuse. More specifically, attachment insecurity was predictive of perpetration of psychological abuse, and this effect was moderated by outness. Moreover, higher levels of outness had a stronger moderating effect compared to low levels of outness.

3.3.2.5 Biological factors. One study, by Barbaro et al. (2019), investigated genetic factors alongside attachment anxiety and intimate partner violence. Strong correlations were shown between anxious attachment and perpetration. Furthermore, consistent with the results for victimization from the same study, phenotypic associations between anxious attachment and psychological intimate partner abuse perpetration were explainable by genetic covariation as well as environmental factors.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

The aim of this scoping review was to provide an overview of the recent literature exploring how the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse is constructed. While existing research has focused more broadly on insecure attachment in relation to intimate partner violence, psychological abuse specifically has been under-researched.

The literature search identified 25 relevant studies which were found and reviewed, both in terms of their characteristics and their findings relating to attachment theory and psychological abuse. In terms of populations investigated, studies were mostly from North America, and conducted research involving mostly Caucasian participants. Participants were also mostly women, and in large part heterosexual.

To measure attachment insecurity, the majority of studies used a form of the Experiences in Close Relationships scales (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley et al., 2000). Meanwhile, measurement of psychological abuse perpetration and victimization was more varied, with the most commonly used tools being the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979; Straus, 1986) and the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA; Murphy & Hoover, 1999).

Studies were grouped according to whether they explored victimization or perpetration of psychological abuse in committed relationships. In terms of victimization, four broad themes were identified: relationship factors; dyadic approaches with couples; early childhood experiences; and biological factors. Similarly, studies focusing on perpetration of psychological abuse could be categorised according to whether they investigated relationship or dyadic variables, childhood experiences, biological factors, or individual psychological or behavioural variables. Overall, the majority of studies supported a link between attachment

insecurity and victimization or perpetration of psychological abuse, and many highlighted additional factors which were shown to influence how this association was constructed.

Several important findings emerged. Firstly, studies were largely based in North America and focused on heterosexual, Western populations. The implications of this are discussed in terms of the reliability of conclusions that can be drawn based on the current scope of existing literature. Second, the link between having an insecure attachment style, and likelihood or experience of experiencing psychological abuse from a partner, is discussed in relation to social and psychological processes at play. Third, the likelihood of perpetrating psychological abuse against a partner based on attachment insecurity is reviewed in light of the social and psychological mechanisms identified in the literature.

4.1 Study populations

4.1.1 Country of origin and ethnicity. This review identified that a considerable majority of studies focusing on experiences of psychological intimate partner abuse through the lens of attachment theory were from North America, and consisted of largely Caucasian sample populations. The high portion of US- and Canada-based research highlights a Western-centric perspective on both attachment and experiences of psychological abuse in romantic relationships.

As outlined by Keller (2016), attachment theory relies on a one-to-one relationship between parent and child in explaining the formation of a child's interpersonal relationships, which carries on into adulthood. However, many non-Western cultures do not parent one-to-one; rather, multiple caregivers may fill parenting roles in a community setting. For example, a study by Neckoway et al. (2007) highlights the collectivist approach taken to parenting by indigenous and non-Western cultures, observing that parenting is often shared between families in a way not traditionally practiced in Western culture. As Neckoway et al. (2007)

explain, this way of parenting in no way inhibits closeness between parent and child, but does not fit into the dyadic parenting style attachment theory is based on, and the original investigative approach relied on by Ainsworth (1979) is not easily translatable to indigenous cultures which share parenting.

Moreover, research on psychological intimate partner abuse in non-Western cultures reveals cultural differences not well-accounted for in Western research. For instance, a study by Tiwari et al. (2009) highlighted the unique challenges faced by Chinese women experiencing psychological abuse in intimate relationships, and the culturally-driven shame experienced by these women. Furthermore, a review by White and Satyen (2015) exploring cross-cultural differences in experiences of intimate partner violence highlighted race as a key factor in mediating the impacts of abuse on victims.

4.1.2 Heteronormative sampling. Thirteen of the 15 studies reviewed only included data from heterosexual participants in their analyses in order to report data separately for male and female participants. Furthermore, of the six studies which included non-heterosexual participants and reported data on participant sexuality, on average 92.6% of participants identified as heterosexual. One study by Longares et al. (2020) focused solely on same-sex couples.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, LGBTQIA+ individuals are more than twice as likely to experience a form of intimate partner abuse in their lives compared to the New Zealand average (Ministry of Justice, 2019). The paucity of research constructing the relationship between psychological abuse and attachment in LGBTQIA+ populations means that the full experience of abuse from an attachment perspective is not being captured, and that any consensus formed in the existing literature will reflect this.

4.2 Victimization

Overall, ten studies were reviewed which explored the relationship between attachment insecurity and victimization of psychological abuse. Most, but not all, had findings which supported hypotheses relating to the link between attachment insecurity and victimization of psychological abuse, and most found support for additional variables underpinning this relationship. Four of these investigated childhood experiences in association with this relationship, while a further three explored factors within a relationship which may underpin the link between attachment insecurity and victimization of psychological abuse. Two studies took a dyadic approach, investigating couples together in order to identify actor or partner effects which might be at play. Finally, one study investigated a biological basis behind associations between attachment and victimization of abuse.

4.2.1 Childhood experiences. Given the origins of attachment theory in infants and children (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969), it is logical to explore childhood experiences as a factor relating to attachment-related phenomena later in life. Indeed, attachment insecurity was linked to maltreatment in childhood by both Kong et al. (2018) and Smagur et al. (2018), as well as depressive symptoms and victimization of psychological abuse. Strong links were also found between childhood trauma and later victimization of intimate partner violence by McClure and Parmenter (2020), while Davidson et al. (2017) found correlations between experiences of overprotective, unloving parenting, attachment insecurity, and victimization of non-physical intimate partner abuse. The finding that childhood experiences are correlated with attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse victimization is consistent with findings that adverse or traumatic childhood events can have life-long effects (Fulu et al., 2017; Machisa et al., 2016), as well as the premise in attachment theory that

childhood attachment experiences inform interpersonal experiences throughout life (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

4.2.2 Relationship factors. While the impact of childhood factors is consistent from a developmental perspective, the role of conflict and dysfunction in relationships in the link between attachment and psychological abuse victimization is also logical. The finding by Bonache et al. (2019) that a partner's use of destructive conflict resolution strategies mediated the association between attachment anxiety and victimization is consistent with Lafontaine et al. (2021) finding that romantic perfectionism as well as perceived levels of conflict mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and abuse victimization. As noted by Lafontaine et al. (2021), anxiously attached individuals may become hyperactivated in conflict situations, which in turn may cause them or their partners to engage in the destructive conflict resolution strategies described in Bonache et al. (2019) study. Interestingly, Lancaster et al. (2020) did not find attachment insecurity to moderate the relationship between relationship quality and cyber dating abuse. Avoidantly attached individuals were less likely to report positive traits associated with relationship quality, however this did not in turn predict abuse perpetration. This finding is at odds with existing literature linking relationship quality with abuse (Li et al., 2021).

4. 2.3 Dyads. In a similar vein to studies investigating relationship factors, two studies adopted a dyadic approach to their investigations of attachment and psychological abuse. The mutuality of the dyadic approach is beneficial in understanding the bidirectional nature of psychological abuse described by Começanha et al. (2017). Overall, studies by Karakurt et al. (2019) and Oka et al. (2016) which investigated mutual perpetration and victimization of abuse reported that one's own insecure attachment style increased the likelihood of experiencing psychological abuse from a partner. In particular, Oka et al. (2016) finding that one's own attachment insecurity was linked to less power in the relationship, and

more relational aggression from the partner, is consistent with the findings described above that insecure attachment led to partner engagement in maladaptive conflict strategies, predicting one's partner's use of psychological abuse.

4.2.4 Biological factors. While it was originally expected that social and psychological processes would be the main factors underpinning the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse, one study met inclusion criteria which provided a biological basis to the relationship. Barbaro et al. (2019) found that genetic covariation between attachment anxiety and intimate partner abuse explained a significant amount of the phenotypic associations between the two. As described by the authors, genetic studies relating to attachment and intimate partner abuse are rare. However, the significant portion of association between attachment and abuse explained by genetic factors in this study meant that it provides a unique perspective to the research aim of examining how the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse is constructed.

4.2.5 Summary. Overall, the studies investigating victimization in this review provide perspectives based on childhood experiences, bidirectional and unidirectional relationship factors, and biological influences in explaining how the relationship between insecure attachment and psychological abuse victimization is constructed in the context of committed relationships. Interestingly, no studies focused on individual factors in relation to victimization, beyond the role of an individual's attachment style and how it manifests in a relationship. Logically, it is explicable that perpetrators of abuse are more likely than victims to be influenced by psychological or personality-based factors. However, given that dyadic studies are able to explore bidirectionality in intimate partner abuse, it would be expected that individual factors were at play on both sides.

4.3 Perpetration

Eighteen studies were reviewed in relation to perpetration of psychological abuse. Themes explored were similar to those relating to victimization, with the addition of individual traits as factors in the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse. More specifically, two studies looked at childhood experiences in relation to perpetration. A further two investigated relationship factors, with seven studies taking a dyadic approach to their investigations. Six studies looked at individual factors influencing the perpetration of psychological abuse through an attachment lens. Again, one study contributed a biological perspective to the understanding of how the attachment-abuse relationship is constructed. As with victimization, studies generally found support for their hypothesised interactions between attachment, psychological abuse perpetration and other variables.

4.3.1 Childhood experiences. Again, the finding that childhood experiences were related to both attachment insecurity and perpetration of intimate partner abuse later in life is consistent with current understandings of the developmental factors associated with abuse. In actuality, the body of research surrounding developmental explanations for perpetration is perhaps larger than that for victimization. For instance, Dutton (1995) found post-traumatic stress disorder relating from childhood trauma to be a precursor to violence in relationships in adulthood. Specifically relating to psychological abuse perpetration, Dugal et al. (2018) found that individuals who are exposed to maltreatment, abuse or neglect in childhood are significantly more likely to perpetrate psychological intimate partner violence in adulthood. In the current study, Barbaro and Shackelford (2019) established that, for men, childhood emotional unpredictability was predictive of adult attachment anxiety and subsequent perpetration of intimate partner abuse. Meanwhile, McClure and Parmenter (2020) established links between perpetration of verbal and emotional abuse and experiences of

childhood abuse, while childhood abuse was also linked to having an anxious attachment style.

4.3.2 Relationship factors. In terms of non-dyadic relationship factors, Toplu-Demirtaş et al. (2019) found direct links between attachment anxiety and perpetration of restrictive engulfment, while both avoidance and anxiety were linked to restrictive engulfment perpetration when low relationship satisfaction was also present. Meanwhile, Sonkin et al. (2019), established significant correlations between attachment anxiety and derogatory and controlling forms of abuse in female and male perpetrators of domestic violence, with men also using threats and control of space. As described by Mikulincer and Shaver (2012), individuals high in attachment anxiety are more likely to seek closeness to their romantic partners, especially when a threat to the relationship is perceived. The finding that anxiously attached individuals are more likely to become controlling or restrictive of their partners, especially when unsatisfied in their relationships, is therefore consistent with theoretical understandings.

4.3.3 Dyads. A large portion of studies exploring perpetration of abuse used a dyadic approach. As identified by Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021), existing research tends to explore actor effects in isolation, investigating the traits an individual has which may make them more likely to perpetrate abuse. However, dyadic research into couples may help to fill the need for a bidirectional understanding of psychological intimate partner abuse. In the current review, seven studies incorporated couple dyads into understandings of the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration. Consistent with other domains of research into the abuse-attachment relationship, attachment anxiety was a stronger predictor of perpetration than avoidance. Overall, Gou and Woodin (2017) and Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021) linked relationship satisfaction into understandings of perpetration of psychological abuse in couple dyads. Taking both studies together,

relationship satisfaction both mediated the relationship between attachment insecurity and perpetration, but also an outcome of both high partner attachment insecurity and one's own psychological abuse perpetration. Together, these findings provide an outline for a cyclical nature of abuse which is self-perpetuating, with low relationship satisfaction both driving and resulting from psychological abuse.

Meanwhile, jealousy, lack of trust from both partners, as well as suspicion of infidelity were also found to amplify the relationship between anxious attachment and perpetration of abuse in a cyber context by Toplu-Demirtaş et al. (2020), with relational power dynamics also underpinning the relationship between attachment insecurity and relational aggression in research by Oka et al. (2016). Only one study, by Tougas et al. (2016), found no significant relationships between attachment insecurity and perpetration of psychological abuse.

Interestingly, the use of videotaped interactions in combination with self-report surveys by Goncy and van Dulmen (2016) provided evidence that self- and partner-reports may differ from an objective observer's perception of psychological abuse perpetration in a relationship. While surveys highlighted men's anxiety as predicting male abuse perpetration, observers identified female anxiety as also predictive of male perpetration. Again, this highlights the bidirectional and complex nature of psychological abuse perpetration in relationships.

While the majority of studies found significant results with attachment anxiety, Sommer et al. (2017) found that having an avoidant attachment style predicted perpetration of psychological abuse, whereas anxious attachment styles did not predict one's own perpetration. This is at odds with other findings that, largely, anxiously attached individuals are more likely to act abusively when a threat to their relationship is perceived (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Sonkin et al., 2019; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2019). However, either type of

insecure attachment in a partner predicted an individual's perpetration, again highlighting the bidirectional nature of psychological abuse in relation to attachment.

4.3.4 Individual factors. While no studies which fit the inclusion criteria for this review associated individual traits or factors with attachment insecurity and psychological abuse victimization, research on individual factors in relation to perpetration was well-represented. Six studies linked individual factors to both attachment insecurity and psychological abuse in romantic relationships, all of which positioned insecure attachment as a predictor of abuse-related outcomes.

The role of jealousy, in particular, was well-researched, with three studies establishing its role as a mediator of the relationship between attachment insecurity and perpetration of psychological abuse (Aracı-İyiyaydın et al., 2020; Jackson, 2018; Wright, 2017). Again, this is consistent with the theoretical position that perceived threat to one's relationship is a key driving factor for perpetration of psychological abuse in those who are insecurely attached (Deans & Bhogal, 2019; Dutton et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012).

Meanwhile, two studies effectively linked personality variables to both attachment and perpetration of psychological abuse. Bui and Pasalich (2021) established the role of borderline and psychopathic traits in mediating the relationship between attachment anxiety and psychological abuse perpetration, while avoidance was also linked to trait psychopathy. Additionally, McDermott et al. (2017) integrated dominance orientation into understandings of the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse, finding that anxiously attached individuals who subscribed to a more authoritarian approach to intimate relationships were more likely to perpetrate psychological abuse against their partners. Borderline and psychopathic traits have been linked to dominance orientations in the literature (Fisher, 2018; Skeem et al., 2007), suggesting an overall role for personality

mediating the association between attachment insecurity and use of psychological abuse tactics in romantic relationships.

In contrast to other studies investigating individual traits into a conceptualisation of the relationship between attachment insecurity and perpetration of psychological abuse, Longares et al. (2020) found that, in same-sex relationships, 'outness' to others amplified the effect of attachment insecurity on perpetration of psychological abuse. Given the underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ participants in attachment and psychological abuse research, the findings of this study are noteworthy. The authors observe that an individual's degree of outness may influence relationship quality, which, as previously discussed, has been established to impact the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse perpetration.

4.2.5 Biological factors. Lastly, Barbaro et al. (2019) incorporated genetic understandings of the relationship between attachment anxiety and psychological abuse perpetration into the current literature. As previously discussed, this finding stands alone in its biological focus, but lends an important perspective to the endeavour to build a multidimensional understanding of the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse. More specifically, a significant portion of the degree to which attachment anxiety and perpetration of psychological abuse were related phenotypically was explained by genetic covariation, in combination with environmental factors.

4.2.6 Summary. Regarding perpetration, the results of the studies reviewed build a comprehensive picture. Incorporating all perspectives, the literature suggests that a combination of genetics, adverse childhood experiences, personality traits and relational dynamics influence the relationship between attachment insecurity and perpetration of psychological abuse. Anxious attachment was much more strongly linked than avoidance, which is logical given that individuals with avoidant attachment styles are less likely to

respond to relational insecurity with coercive, controlling or overwhelming behaviours (McDermott et al., 2017). Dyadic perspectives are particularly useful in understanding how relationship dynamics can influence an insecurely attached individual's likelihood of perpetrating psychological abuse, in that more complex interactions between variables can be observed. Meanwhile, while the majority of research centres heterosexual experiences, it appears that insecurely attached individuals in same-sex relationships face a unique challenge in navigating the effect of overall 'outness' on relationships.

4.4 Limitations

Several limitations can be identified which should be considered alongside the conclusions drawn in this review. First, as noted by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the purpose of a scoping review is to provide an overview of the breadth of the literature on a given topic. While this framework has been useful in reviewing the full scope of research concerning attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse from the previous five years, breadth of material has been prioritised over an in-depth exploration of findings subjected to quality appraisal, which in turn may form the basis for clinical recommendations. All studies which were consistent with inclusion criteria were reviewed and synthesised, meaning that while some articles did not go into as much depth as would be ideal regarding attachment insecurity, types of psychological abuse and how these are linked, these less detailed articles were still reviewed and weighted equally alongside more scientifically rigorous studies.

Another key limitation to acknowledge is that the vast majority of studies relied on cross-sectional survey data, which limits the inferences that can be made, and does not allow causal conclusions to be drawn. Moreover, the current study was limited to reviewing studies in the English language only. While consideration has been given to the fact that most studies were based on Western cultural norms with Caucasian samples, it is possible that non-

Western studies in other languages could have met inclusion criteria which would have broadened the perspectives available in the present study.

Across studies, measures assessing key variables were used imperfectly and inconsistently. It was not feasible, nor within the scope of the present study, to perform an in-depth comparison between tools with which to interpret and compare results, or to review the literature through the lens of the assessment tools used. In a similar vein, inconsistent use of terms between studies is a barrier to in-depth interpretation. For instance, while some articles explored attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety as separate concepts, others reported on attachment insecurity as a single variable. Similarly, while some studies differentiated between types of psychological abuse, others simply reported that psychological abuse was included in analyses without providing further detail. Thus, key concepts were required to be discussed in broad umbrella terms which limited the specificity of conclusions which could be drawn.

4.5 Implications and future research

Some implications of the current findings have been discussed throughout. In terms of current research, non-Western, non-heterosexual perspectives are largely unresearched, which limits the universality or generalisability of any findings. Moreover, if interventions were to be informed based on current research, these would largely cater to straight, Caucasian populations and may be less effective in others. Indeed, Neckoway et al. (2007) encountered barriers in attempting to translate traditional attachment research to indigenous populations.

Furthermore, no studies originating in Aotearoa New Zealand were identified within the scope of this review. As identified by Mikahere-Hall (2020), a Māori perspective on attachment incorporates larger whānau groups incorporating extended family, as well as concepts of wairua and whenua (Fleming, 2016). However, Māori are overrepresented in

family violence statistics in Aotearoa, and are twice as likely to experience coercion or controlling behaviours from a partner (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2017) highlighting a need for more culturally appropriate interventions. Moreover, Park (2016) highlights the disproportionate effects of abuse on women in low socioeconomic circumstances, recommending that future research consider the impact of poverty on experiences of intimate partner abuse through an attachment lens. Overall, there is room for more intersectional research regarding attachment and psychological intimate partner abuse which should be prioritised in future research in order to capture the full diversity of experiences.

A second area for improvement in future research is in consistent use of terms. Existing research is varied in terms of terms used to describe attachment styles and types of psychological abuse, while some studies did not differentiate at all between insecure attachment types, or different forms of intimate partner abuse. This had the effect of limiting the specificity of conclusions that could be drawn. It would be useful for future research projects to define terms to be used going forward by researchers in this area.

Lastly, there is room for growth in investigating dyadic, multi-perspective explanations for the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse. As described by Gewirtz-Meydan and Finzi-Dottan (2021), most research to date focuses either the perspective of victim or perpetrator, while the occurrence of psychological abuse in committed relationships is much more complex than that (Começanha et al., 2017). While this review identified a number of articles which added to the bidirectional perspective of psychological intimate partner abuse, it would be useful for future research to acknowledge the usefulness of a dyadic approach in integrating social and psychological factors into theoretical understandings of the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse.

4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provided an overview of the recent literature investigating how the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological intimate partner abuse is constructed. A scoping literature methodology was used, which identified 25 relevant studies. Studies were grouped according to whether they investigated perpetration or victimization of psychological abuse, then were synthesised using a narrative format.

Findings identified a wide range of factors which were found to underpin the relationship between attachment and psychological abuse. Adverse or traumatic childhood experiences, relationship quality regarding conflict, satisfaction, jealousy and genetic factors were all found to underpin the relationship between attachment insecurity and psychological abuse for both victims and perpetrators, while perpetration was all strongly linked to individual traits such as personality. Overall, this review highlighted the utility of a dyadic approach to research in highlighting the complex, cyclical and bidirectional nature of psychological abuse in romantic relationships. Future research should continue to explore this interaction in its full complexity while using an intersectional approach to incorporate more diverse perspectives and experiences of both attachment and psychological intimate partner abuse.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Flow chart

