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# “I’m the greatest”: Pride, Impression Management, and Denial of Coercive Control And Physical Abuse by Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence

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"I'm the greatest": Pride, Impression Management, and Denial of Coercive Control

And Physical Abuse by Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence

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### **Abstract**

Coercive control and physical abuse are two prominent forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), along with impression management to conceal such behavior. However, intrinsic motives for engaging in impression management by male IPV offenders are not well-known. The present study makes use of archival data from 85 heterosexual men in a batterer treatment program to gauge how pride, shame, and guilt may relate to impression management and reported IPV. Admission to shame and guilt appear to be correlated with and predictive of both forms of reported abuse, along with the absence of impression management. This implies that internalized shame and guilt motivate abusers to report IPV in their relationships. Secondary findings included a positive correlation between higher education and reported coercive control, and lower age or African-American ethnicity positively correlating with reported physical abuse. Implications of these findings are explored.

“I’m the greatest”: Pride, Impression Management, and Denial of Coercive Control  
And Physical Abuse by Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence, or IPV, is prevalent against women, affecting approximately 1 in 4 women in the United States in their lifetimes, and approximately 1 in 3 worldwide (Cunradi et al., 2002; Gortner et al., 1997; Hererro et al., 2017; Resnick & Scott, 1997; CDC 2017; WHO 2013). It is estimated that over one million deaths occur worldwide due to IPV (Gabriel, 2008). Despite decades of research on perpetrators, IPV is still understudied and underreported in part due to denial and concealment of abusive or undesirable behavior – formally known as impression management – by offenders (Clift & Dutton, 2011; Ennis et al., 2017; Hererro et al., 2017). Though there is research on the different tactics and motives for IPV, explanations are limited on what motivates impression management by offenders. In addition, research on impression management in forensic settings has either been in the context of other criminal or violent activities besides IPV, or has only gone as far as to assess instrumental or extrinsic motives for impression management (Ali et al., 2017; Helfritz et al., 2006; Hererro et al., 2017).

Although less researched in the empirical partner violence literature, intrinsic rather than extrinsic motives for impression management have been noted, such as the influence of one’s own emotions and standards including psychological processes related to self-perception and self-esteem (Figueredo et al., 2017). Clinically, self-perception, self-esteem, and self-worth have long been considered as intrinsic motivation for whether one engages in impression management and for whether one denies or reports acts of IPV. Roehl et al. (2005) noted that among male IPV abusers between 20 and 39 years of age, there is a more pronounced prevalence of these intrinsic motives for impression management in general and for the denial of IPV. Such a relationship between self-perception, impression management, and denied IPV was even stronger among

young men who were jobless or had a history of alcohol dependence. It has been theorized that not only are self-perception, self-esteem, and self worth intrinsic motives for impression management, but that they are fueled by a patriarchal society which embeds the idea that men – even those with documented abusive behavior – can do no wrong, and thus there is no harm or malice in impression management (Scott & Straus, 2007).

In the next few sections, I will first discuss IPV, impression management, and self-perception before proposing possible connections.

### **Tactics and Dynamics of Intimate Partner Violence**

Historically, research on IPV primarily focused on physical abuse – including assault, battery, and vandalism – and on male-on-female violence (Cunradi et al., 2002; Ennis et al., 2017; Gortner et al., 1997; Hererro et al., 2017; Resnick & Scott, 1997). Such behavior has been employed both as a reactive means of punishment for behaving against a significant other’s wishes, and as a proactive means of instilling dominance and control over a victim (Baldwin et al., 2014; Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997). However, Baldwin et al. (2014) and Loveland and Raghavan (2017) both note there is another prominent form of IPV with comparable effects in destroying a victim’s sense of autonomy, and is more difficult to detect than physical abuse: coercive control. Coercive control, as the name implies, is the practice of gaining control over a victim through coercive behavior. In IPV, this can be accomplished through acts that individually resemble non-criminal domestic exchanges, such as forbidding a victim to communicate with certain friends or family members, or trivial demands designed to expend a victim’s time and energy. As these acts of domination resemble non-violent domestic affairs when assessed individually, a malicious pattern or grounds for arrest may not appear. However, the systematic debilitation as a result of coercive control may be revealed by assessing the

frequency, duration, and intensity of coercive behavior, the intervals between such incidents, and the relationship’s dynamics (Beck et al., 2009; Ennis et al., 2017; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017).

Coercive control exemplifies instrumental IPV in that it requires a conscious effort to enact, as opposed to physical abuse, which can also be reactive. The motives of coercive control, along with other forms of IPV such as physical abuse and stalking, vary widely depending on the offender’s gender and the identity of victims (Clift & Dutton, 2011; Ennis et al., 2017). For example, female IPV offenders and abusers of senior citizens are less likely to engage in physical abuse, and are more likely to engage in coercive control, stalking, and other forms of psychological abuse in attempts to gain intimacy with an acquaintance or previous intimate partner (Clift & Dutton, 2011). This differs from the tactics and motives of male IPV offenders, who are known to initially engage in physical abuse either as a reaction or as a means of first instilling fear and dominance over a victim. Following the first physical attack, acts of coercive control often follow in order to exhaust a victim and psychologically control her or his world (Baldwin et al., 2014; Barbaro & Raghavan, 2018; Ennis et al., 2017; Kaplenko et al., 2018). It is important to note that physical abuse may never be employed in such abusive relationships, or only employed infrequently to set the threat. IPV offenders may instead employ surveillance, exhausting demands, financial restrictions and social restrictions without physical abuse to gain control over an intimate partner (Baldwin et al., 2014; Ennis et al., 2017; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017). Such tactics of coercive control appear more common in any relationship where the target of domestic violence is elderly and would typically not have access to social support or a means of escape from an abusive relationship, intimate partner or relative (Burlaka et al., 2017).

Abuse may be most likely to continue unchecked if the abuse is invisible or if the victim’s assertions are not credible. As such, many abusers avoid attention using multiple

methods, including demanding silence from the victims and/or denying the violence outright (cite). Another way in which IPV offenders avoid attention and intervention from third parties in abusive relationships is impression management: the denial or concealment of undesirable behaviors and thoughts in order to maintain a positive public image.

### **Impression Management by Domestic Violence Offenders**

Impression management is frequent among IPV offenders, which is understandable as admission to abusive behavior towards a significant other can have a multitude of negative consequences ranging from social exile for manipulative behavior to arrest for confessed assault and battery (Ali et al., 2017; Clift & Dutton, 2011; Hererro et al., 2017; Mills & Kroner, 2005). Nonetheless, the methods of impression management by IPV offenders are as varied as the possible motives. In criminal justice contexts, Ali et al. (2017) documented that past offenders of any crime or felony, including domestic violence in an unspecified relationship, are likely to respond to direct questions about such incidents with denial or justification; this can occur during any interview, be it clinical (e.g., batterer treatment) or non-clinical (e.g., job applications or police interrogation). I suggest that such acts of desirable responding or deceit to appear socially desirable constitute impression management, based both on prior research related to desirable responding and impression management explored below, and on the design of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1994).

At a more intricate level, impression management itself can function as coercive control when an IPV offender explains his or her abusive acts or constrictions as part of self-defense towards an “out-of-control” partner who is actually the victim (Ennis et al., 2017; Mills & Kroner, 2005). By describing a situation where the victim is supposedly the abuser, friends and other loved ones may cease contact and social support for the true victim in such a relationship.

It is a nefarious tactic that builds on an IPV offender describing himself or herself as the “true” victim. Male IPV offenders have been noted to justify or minimize the severity of their actions, explaining that they were only defending themselves, while their intimate partner (the victim) was acting out and would not respond to logic or nonviolent methods of mollification, and the male IPV offender eventually lost patience and physically lashed out (Barbaro & Raghavan, 2018; Loveland & Raghavan, 2017; Mills & Kroner, 2005). In court and interrogations, male offenders may add it was a “fluke” or one-time occurrence and will never happen again, even if repeated incidents are mentioned (Helfritz et al., 2006). The pretext of “discipline” or “teaching a lesson” to a spouse may double as justification or even a motive for some male IPV offenders who wish to establish an uneven power balance between intimate partners, more common in reactive IPV (Mills & Kroner, 2005).

Finally, outside of forensic settings, including both clinical and social settings, impression management may occur because extrinsic motives exist such as maintaining social standing. Regarding impression management in clinical settings, Figueredo et al. (2017) noted in passing: intrinsic motives for impression management may include an offender’s self-perception, or how he or she views his or her own image and emotions. Just as the expectations and standards which people set for themselves can influence how they will act and respond in certain environments and to certain questions, it is expected that the standards people set for themselves can influence how they will respond and react to controversial topics such as abusive behavior (Ali et al., 2017; Mills & Kroner, 2005). This is where one’s own pride, shame, and guilt can influence the intensity of their impression management and honesty; feelings which are based on comfort with and awareness of one’s own conduct and control, and inform self-

perception, self-esteem, and self-worth. This latter set of feelings (pride, shame, guilt) is the least understood of motivations in IPV contexts and I explore them below.

### **Pride, Shame, and Guilt in the Realm of Intimate Partner Violence**

Self-perception, self-esteem, and self-worth have appeared in research involving both criminal offenders and victims, albeit with limited exploration, with marked trends in findings. Several studies have indicated that criminal offenders typically report themselves with high self-esteem, self-worth, autonomy, and entitlement to material and social success—traits which are all viewed as desirable, positive and have been described as aspects of pride (Ali et al., 2017; Burlaka et al., 2017; Clift & Dutton, 2011; Ennis et al., 2017; Figueredo et al., 2017; Hererro et al., 2017; Marschall et al., 1994). However, there is reason to believe that such reports of high self-esteem and self-worth are not genuine. Ali et al. (2017) reported that when asked about past criminal offenses, many individuals are initially defensive and are quick to deny or justify such acts, and describe themselves as not responsible for their violent or criminal acts towards others, very confident and in control of themselves and proud of themselves on a daily basis. This combination of traits appears paradoxical and indicative of impression management. When engaged in such topics with more rapport and sensitivity in the same study, however, the same individuals dropped their social defenses and tactics of impression management, and revealed a wavering sense of self-confidence, along with varying levels of self-esteem and autonomy.

Notably, some past offenders instead or additionally report responsibility for their acts towards others, and their own exploitative, violent, or criminal behavior in general, and for the consequences of such behavior; all of which can and have been considered constructs of guilt (Ali et al., 2017; Clift & Dutton, 2011; Figueredo et al., 2017; Marschall et al., 1994).

Furthermore, some past offenders in other studies admitted to low self-esteem, feelings of

powerlessness, humiliation from one’s own actions or reactions, and remorse for undesirable conduct, be it in criminal or non-criminal scenarios; notions of a sense of shame (Burlaka et al., 2017; Clift & Dutton, 2011; Figueredo et al., 2017; Hererro et al., 2017; Marschall et al., 1994).

These concepts of pride, shame, and guilt – all related to self-perception, self-esteem, and self-worth – as they relate to criminal offenders have appeared in prior literature, but not in great detail and with even less in the realm of IPV offenders. The IPV research that has combined these topics has this to share: according to Figueredo et al. (2017), male college students who reported committing regular monthly-or-more-frequent acts of IPV also reported high pride and a strong sense of self worth, with very little shame or guilt regarding such behavior or in general. For the opposite sex, Clift and Dutton (2011) found that for female IPV offenders, engaging in impression management in general was associated with not reporting acts of IPV. Following that, Petit, Knee and Rodriguez (2017) reported a moderate negative correlation between a sense of autonomy and fulfillment and confirmed IPV by male heterosexual offenders. In addition, a negative correlation was detected among female IPV offenders, suggesting that pride is likely linked to less autonomy and fulfillment than those who are not offenders, while the same relationship appeared to a lesser degree for female IPV offenders. Beyond these studies, however, not much is known on how reported pride, shame, and guilt are exhibited by IPV offenders.

No other literature was found documenting how reported pride, shame, and guilt affect reports of acts of IPV or impression management. Thus, while prior research has established important findings in these topics, the relationships have only begun to be explored; relationships which could facilitate an understanding of the personalities of IPV offenders, and of their intrinsic motives for impression management. In addition, better understanding the relationships

between self-esteem in the form of pride, shame, and guilt, and impression management and reported abuse can further the growth of interview techniques with IPV offenders for better rapport-building, honesty, and cooperation during rehabilitation programs and inform future research.

### **Study Overview**

The present study makes use of archival data in an attempt to understand potential motives to impression management, and how self-perception and a tendency to engage in impression management influence reports of abusive behavior by past intimate partner violence offenders, via bivariate correlation analysis and hierarchical regression models.

**Hypothesis 1:** Higher levels of impression management will be related to lower levels of both reported coercive control and physical abuse, ignoring the effects of pride and shame and guilt.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Higher levels of pride will relate to higher levels of impression management.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Higher levels of pride will relate to lower levels of reported abuse; both coercive control and physical abuse.

**Hypothesis 2c:** The relationship between pride and abuse reporting (both physical abuse and coercive control) will be mediated (at least in part) by impression management such that once impression management has been entered into the model, the relationship between pride and abuse will be statistically reduced.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Higher levels of shame/guilt will relate to lower levels of impression management.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Higher levels of shame/guilt will relate to higher levels of reported abuse; both coercive control and physical abuse.

**Hypothesis 3c:** The relationship between shame/guilt and abuse reporting (both physical abuse and coercive control) will be mediated by (at least in part) by impression management such that once impression management has been entered into the model, the relationship between shame/guilt and abuse will be statistically reduced.

**Exploratory Analysis:** Given the diversity of the sample, previously unexplored potential relationships between demographic factors and IPV outcomes are of interest. Hence, associations will be explored between study variables (pride, shame/guilt, impression management, physical abuse, and coercive control) and demographics (age range, educational level, income, and ethnicity). However, no hypotheses were generated for this secondary set of tests.

## Methods

### Participants

Study participants ( $N = 85$ ) were drawn from a larger group of 137 heterosexual men recruited from an East Coast-based batterer treatment program, all of whom were sentenced to treatment due to charges of domestic violence. Inclusion criteria were having been charged with battery and domestic violence within the past 12 months, and having completed at least 80% of each measure to be described in the next section. Participant ages ranged between 19 and 58 years, with a mean of 38 years, median of 39 years, and mode of 42 years. A majority of participants (64%) were aged between 30 and 49 years ( $SD = 9.57$ ). The majority (69%) had a college education or greater, followed by 29% with high school education or a GED, followed by 2% with lower levels of education. The majority (49%) reported annual incomes above \$70,000, 2% earning \$60,001-\$70,000, 9% earning \$50,001-\$60,000, 20% earning \$30,001-\$50,000, 14% earning \$10,001-\$30,000, 2% earning \$10,000 or less per year, and 1 participant without such information. The sample was ethnically diverse: 47% Caucasian, 24% Hispanic, 11% African-

American, 7% Asian or Middle Eastern, 2% Multiracial, and 9% Other/Prefer Not To Say/Missing information.

### Measures

Participants completed surveys on their self-perceptions, impression management, sexist beliefs, their relationships’ dynamics, various forms of intimate partner violence, rape beliefs, and their demographic backgrounds as part of a broader assessment. Only instruments of interest in the current study are discussed below.

*Pride, Shame, and Guilt.* Pride, shame, and guilt and were assessed with the Shame and Guilt Scale (SSGS; Marschall et al., 1994). Five items assessed each trait on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 – 5, with an answer of 1 indicating a test item was not at all accurate for the participant’s self-perception, while 5 indicated a very strong accuracy. Example items included, “You feel very worthwhile”; “You feel small”; “You cannot stop thinking about something bad you have done.” Reliabilities for shame/guilt and pride were acceptable; ranging between .75 and .84. However, shame and guilt scores were averaged for analyses, given their strong correlation ( $r = .53$ ), with an acceptable combined reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Impression Management.* The overall tendency to engage in impression management (IM) was assessed with the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1994), which included a 20-item IM subscale. Items were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 – 7, with 1 indicating that a survey item was not true of the participant, 4 indicating it was somewhat true, and 7 indicating said item was very true. An example item from this subscale was, “I never cover up my mistakes.” The reliability of this inventory was acceptable ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

*Intimate Partner Violence.* The Interpersonal Relationship Rating Scale (IRRS; Beck et al., 2009) was employed to assess two tactics of IPV: coercive control (11 items,  $\alpha = .64$ ) and

physical abuse (5 items,  $a = .62$ ). Participants ranked the frequency of certain abusive acts within the last 12 months in their latest relationship on a 6-point scale (0 = never occurred, 1 = one incident, 2 = six incidents, 3 = 12 incidents, 4 = weekly occurrence, 5 = daily occurrence). Examples items for each respective subscale included, “I did not want my partner to have male friends,” and, “I hit or punched my partner.”

*Demographics.* The following demographic information was collected: age, education, ethnicity, income level, week in treatment, and sexual orientation. Given the diversity of the sample, potential associations between these demographic factors and IPV outcomes were explored.

### **Procedure**

Graduate-level research assistants conducted the assessments. All researchers had extensive experience in conducting clinical interviews and had taken necessary coursework in research and clinical interviewing as part of their training. Approximately two 75-minute interviews were conducted with informed consent obtained from participants at the beginning of the first interview. Participants then completed, among other instruments, SSGS (Marschall et al., 1994), BIDR (Paulhus, 1994), and IRRS (Beck et al., 2009), and a demographics questionnaire. The order of the SSGS, BIDR, and IRRS were counterbalanced.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were cleaned and analyzed via IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 23, except in the following steps: tests of the significance of mediation effects were performed with an online calculator for Sobel tests (Preacher, 2010), after data were bootstrapped in R v3.4.

*Correlations.* Because shame and guilt were linked phenomena with a strong positive correlation ( $r = .53$ ), scores for these subscales were averaged for data analysis to increase reliability. Pearson’s correlations were calculated among mean scores of pride, shame/guilt, impression management, and mean scores for the reported frequency of coercive control and physical abuse, with statistical significance level set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . In addition, Spearman’s correlations were calculated between all aforementioned variables and most demographic variables in order to reveal any potential relationships ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

*Hierarchical Regressions.* Following correlations, four hierarchical regression models were generated in order to test whether pride or shame/guilt, followed by impression management, could predict reported mean scores of coercive control and physical abuse at a statistically significant level. IM was tested as possible mediator in these relationships.

*Analyses of Variance.* Because ethnicity was treated as a nominal factor, the effect on study variable scores by ethnicity, alone and interacting with other demographic variables, was explored with analyses of variance (ANOVAs).

## **Results**

### **Participants’ Reports of IPV and Distributions**

Of the 85 men who completed all subscales of interest, 38 (44.70%) reported they committed both some form of coercive control and physical abuse during the last relationship, while 35 (41.17%) only reported coercive control and 2 (2.35%) only reported physical abuse. The remaining 10 participants (11.76%) denied any acts associated with coercive control or physical abuse, as indicated by scores of 0 on both survey subscales.

Overall, participant scores in pride were high with little variability ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), which was somewhat reflected in impression management scores ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), and negatively mirrored in shame/guilt scores ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ).

It should be noted that while a majority of the men in this analysis admitted to some form of IPV during the last relationship, the range was extremely limited, with a maximum mean score of 2.54 for coercive control ( $M = 0.62$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) and 1.6 for physical abuse ( $M = 0.25$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ), and a minimum of 0 for both. For context, a mean score of 1 for either instrument would be on par with admitting to committing one of every relevant act of IPV over the past 12 months, and a mean score of 3 would indicate 12 acts for every test item in one year. See Tables 1 through 4 for more details.

### **Correlations Among Self-Perceptions, Impression Management and IPV**

As a first step to conducting regressions, bivariate correlations were calculated among pride, shame/guilt, and impression management scores and rates of reported IPV (see Table 5). As was hypothesized, higher levels of pride were associated with higher levels of impression management, and higher levels of pride were associated with lower levels of reported coercive control. However, contrary to what was predicted, pride was not significantly related to reported physical abuse. As was hypothesized, higher levels of shame/guilt were significantly related to lower levels of impression management. Similarly, as predicted, higher levels of shame/guilt were significantly positively correlated with reporting both coercive control and physical abuse. Thus, higher guilt and shame scores were associated with higher levels of reported coercive control and physical abuse. Finally, as was hypothesized, higher scores on impression management were significantly correlated with lower levels of both coercive control and physical abuse.

### **Hierarchical Regressions Predict Reported IPV Scores**

Hierarchical regression models were used to test whether the relations between self-perceptions and IPV were mediated by impression management. In each model, pride or shame/guilt were entered first to predict coercive control or physical abuse (shame/guilt only), followed by the addition of impression management. As pride was not significantly correlated with physical abuse at the bivariate level, this hypothesis was not further explored. With regard to pride and coercive control, the hierarchical analysis excluded pride when attempting the mediational test predicting coercive control. Hence, this hypothesis was not supported.

Next, I examined IM as a mediator between shame/guilt and IPV. Shame/guilt was significantly associated with coercive control both alone and with the inclusion of impression management. However, impression management had a partial mediational effect such that, once entered into the regression, shame/guilt was more weakly related to coercive control. However, the Sobel test of the mediational effect was not significant ( $Z = -1.36, p = 0.17$ ) (see Table 6).

In regards to physical abuse, shame/guilt was a weaker predictor to such a degree that without impression management, the adjusted R-squared value of the hierarchical regression model of shame/guilt alone to physical abuse had the least statistical significance of all models detailed. Nevertheless, when using a Sobel test, the mediational effect was again not significant ( $Z = -1.47, p = 0.14$ ) (See Table 7).

### **Exploratory Analyses of Demographic Variables**

Finally, I explored potential differences among participants on variables of interest. All measured scores were grouped by participant demographics for exploratory purposes (see Tables 1-4). Bivariate correlations were calculated between rates of reported IPV and participant age range, education and income level (see Table 8). Ethnicity was examined separately, and many

of the bivariate distributions between demographic conditions and dependent variables appeared largely random as indicated by low correlational values. However, there was a significant positive correlation between a participant’s education tier and their reported frequency of coercive control. There was also a significant negative association between the maximum score for reported physical abuse and participant ages.

A series of one-way ANOVAs and Tukey HSD posthoc tests indicated that ethnicity was only significantly related to reporting physical abuse  $F(3, 81) = 3.007, p < 0.04$ . However, a series of posthoc analyses were not conducted. Although the participant sample was diverse in comparison to previous participant samples regarding male IPV offenders (REF), the sample size was not large nor balanced enough between ethnicities for any conclusions regarding ethnicity and reported physical abuse to be drawn in confidence (see Table 9).

### **Discussion**

The current study was an attempt to assess and interpret motives for impression management by male IPV offenders. Specifically, it examined relations among alleged IPV perpetrators’ feelings of pride or shame/guilt, the tendency to engage in impression management, and their reports of two forms of IPV – coercive control and physical abuse. In particular, the possibility that impression management mediates the relation between emotions and IPV was explored.

Findings were largely in line with what was predicted. As expected, a greater tendency to engage in impression management was associated with lower rates of reporting coercive control and physical abuse. Pride had a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation with impression management and correlated negatively with reporting of IPV – but only for coercive control. Contrary to part of our hypotheses regarding pride, this trait was not correlated with

reporting physical abuse. In addition, while IM did seem to partly mediate the relation between pride and coercive control, the effect was not significant. These findings suggest that while pride may contribute to impression management and to a smaller extent to coercive control, pride might not play a direct or consistent role in the reporting of different forms of IPV.

Looking past mediational effects, there is a scattered distribution of the participant sample’s pride scores when compared to the negatively skewed distribution of physical abuse scores. Most participants scored in ways which equated to reporting no acts of physical abuse whatsoever, regardless of their reported pride, and just one act of coercive control within the past 12 months. This was not expected after reviewing previous literature with similar topics, which either indicated or implied that the majority of IPV offenders describe themselves in a highly prideful fashion (Burlaka et al., 2017; Figueredo et al., 2017; Herrero et al., 2017; Marschall et al., 1994). It is possible that the tendency to report no IPV (despite being in treatment for IPV), which reduced outcome variability, suppressed the true association between IPV and pride. Perhaps another reason for these findings is that participants were still in court mandated treatment and were therefore having difficulty experiencing pride, whether defensive or real, because their abusive behaviors had been detected. Another reason might be that while pride is important in constructing a defensive impression, it may not affect whether or not one reports IPV.

As hypothesized, shame/guilt was negatively correlated with impression management and positively correlated with both coercive control and physical abuse reports. However, it was not expected that such relationships would appear overall stronger than those associated with pride. Perhaps, as expected, those expressing shame/guilt are less likely to describe themselves in an unrealistically positive and non-violent manner, and more likely to admit to their own abusive

behavior. These results suggest that embarrassment and remorse are more indicative of honesty and self-awareness than reports of low pride and self-esteem alone, particularly in the context of undesirable and abusive behavior which could harm a person’s public image and social standing (Cunradi et al., 2002; Hererro et al., 2017). Without admission to the presence of these negative feelings towards one’s self, both impression management and denial of abusive behavior in relationships may increase. However, when one is able to admit insecurities, lower impression management and reports of one’s own abusive behavior may increase. In addition, the less-than-perfect negative correlation between pride and shame/guilt is consistent with the possibility that individuals experience mixed feelings simultaneously during emotional experiences and stimulation. Just as pride and shame are not complete opposites and do not entirely negate each other, the presence of pride does not adequately replace a lack of shame in predicting impression management or the denial of abusive behavior (Ali et al., 2017; Clift & Dutton, 2011).

Perhaps it is not whether or not an IPV abuser holds himself in high pride and great self-esteem that contributes to impression management or the denial or minimization of one’s own acts of IPV; or a lack of such pride that prompts one to report his own abusive acts when asked. Rather, perhaps it is the readiness to admit that one has shame, guilt, and imperfections – things indicating less-than-great self-esteem – that allow a man to describe himself as abusive at all.

This sample was diverse and there were interesting observations across age. The positive correlation between age range and impression management implied that male IPV offenders were more likely to engage in impression management at increasing ages and respond more desirably in regards to lawful and kind behavior. Combined with the linear negative relationships between age and reported coercive control and physical abuse, it would appear that with age came more efforts to appear pure and model. Such a scenario would coincide with findings by

Burlaka et al. (2017) and Hererro et al. (2017) that older men and family men – especially those in communities that praise patriarchy and dominance – go to greater lengths to present themselves as model citizens despite evidence of abusive or violent behavior.

An alternate explanation is that it may not be that older men deny coercive control or physical abuse, but that they truly do engage in it less often than their younger counterparts. The maximum participant score for physical abuse steadily dropped with age, with a few outliers, so there may be truth to this even if some participants denied that they engaged in any physical abuse in the past 12 months. Given that every participant had at least one charge of domestic violence and likely earned that through physical violence or arrestable threats to harm, it is more likely that younger participants were simply more honest about their own toxic behavior. However, there were many more participants aged over 30 than under, so conclusions about such differences in IPV through the generations are not definite.

A similar trend for increasing reports of IPV was found with higher education among participants. At first this seemed counterintuitive, as those with a lower education are expected to be less concerned with maintaining social desirability and may even come from cultures which value machismo, power, and dominance over intimate partners (Burlaka et al., 2017; Helfritz et al., 2006; Hererro et al., 2017). However, it may be that those from lower educational backgrounds – something associated with communities with a strong honor culture – actually care about public appearances enough that they do not wish to admit that they even need or want to engage in violence at all; especially not for relationships where one intimate partner is not subservient and instead “needs to be disciplined” (Lachs & Pillemer, 2015; Mills & Kroner, 2005).

As most previous literature on IPV offenders has been on particular ethnic groups or communities of lower socioeconomic status (possibly due to participant availability), any trends in relation to these demographic conditions are intriguing, especially in this time of awareness of IPV, concealed violence, and efforts of impression management and denial by men of power (Cunradi et al., 2002; Pepin, 2016; Stith, 2016). In addition, the participant distribution itself in these demographics – ethnic diversity and high education and income for most participants – provokes new questions: Why might a well-educated sample feel so inclined to manage impressions? Might the participants, many of whom came from high-income households with higher socioeconomic status, have felt an intrinsic need to manage impressions and “prove” they were as good as they claim to be and expect themselves to be? Was there a need for impression management comparable to that of lower-SES “honor communities” which value public image and one’s honor after all (Burlaka et al., 2017)? Could the ethnic diversity affect response distribution? Such phenomena may be of interest in future studies for exploration.

### **Limitations**

This study was an attempt to assess and interpret motives for impression management by male IPV offenders – an untouched topic of which past literature has only investigated parts. While the results are interesting, the study has several limitations. First, although 85 participants is a decent sample size for correlations, larger samples would be preferable for conducting two-way ANOVAs and for constructing hierarchical regression models.

Second, because all constructs were assessed in the same sample and very close to one another, the items that explicitly gauged undesirable and violent behavior may have incited defensiveness and denial, which could have affected responses to subsequent questionnaires. Perhaps if pride, shame, and guilt were assessed outside of the context of batterer treatment and

violent behavior,, then the responses on these subscales could have been different due to environmental effects.

Third and related to the above challenge is the issue of high face validity on all questionnaires involved, including the IRRS (Beck, 2009), which gauges a participant’s reported frequency of abusive acts, some controlling and some criminal. Though honest and accurate responses are ideal, they are not always expected in forensic contexts or when assessing undesirable or criminal behavior (Ali et al., 2017; Helfritz et al., 2006). Denial and impression management likely obscured some responses.

Finally, there was no offender group that was not in treatment whose scores could be compared to offenders’ scores in pride, shame, guilt, impression management, and even reported abuse. Because the participants were required to complete treatment and display improved understanding of their own actions, these requirements likely affected responding. A control group would address this taint.

### **Future Directions**

Progress has been made in uncharted territory regarding intrinsic motives for impression management by male IPV offenders, yet this should be far from the final project dedicated to its exploration. Future studies should explore how shame, guilt, and impression management can, within a window, effectively predict of abusive acts by male IPV offenders. These findings can lead to the development of offender personality types, which may be critical during clinical interviewing if certain techniques must be employed for optimal rapport, honesty, cooperation, and efficacy during batterer treatment programs and other clinical or forensic settings. By gauging how readily an offender initially reports his own abusive behavior, it’s possible to

develop a plan and tempo for building rapport and fostering honesty and cooperation with different IPV offenders in batterer treatment programs.

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### Tables

Table 1.

*Mean, (Range), and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variable Scores by Age Range*

	<u>19-28</u>	<u>29-38</u>	<u>39-48</u>	<u>49-58</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pr	3.96, (2.20 – 5.00), 0.85	4.33, (2.20 – 5.00), 0.64	3.89, (2.20 – 5.00), 0.82	4.4, (3.00 - 5.00), 0.65	4.12, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.77
SG	1.87, (1.00 - 3.9), 0.86	1.65, (1.00 - 3.3), 0.70	1.86, (1.00 - 3.8), 0.82	1.55, (1.00 - 3.10), 0.63	1.75, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77
IM	3.98, (2.25 - 5.65), 0.87	4.25, (3.35 - 5.35), 0.54	4.26, (2.85 - 5.70), 0.77	4.76, (3.53 - 6.20), 0.76	4.28, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.76
CC	0.72, (0.00 - 2.00), 0.74	0.69, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.66	0.59, (0.00 - 1.91), 0.50	0.44, (0.00 - 1.64), 0.52	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.60
PA	0.43, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.45	0.27, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.39	0.21, (0.00 - 0.80), 0.29	0.07, (0.00 - 0.40), 0.13	0.25, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.35

*Note.* Pr = Pride, SG = Shame/guilt, IM = Impression Management, CC = Coercive Control, PA = Physical Abuse

Table 2.

*Mean, (Range), and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variable Scores by Education Tier*

	<u>College</u>	<u>High School / GED</u>	<u>Middle - Lower</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pr	4.08, (2.20 – 5.00), 0.77	4.12, (2.20 – 5.00), 0.77	4.27, (3.00 – 5.00), 1.10	4.12, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.77
SG	1.80, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.81	1.75, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77	1.43, (1.00 - 2.10), 0.59	1.75, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77
IM	4.39, (2.85 - 5.70), 0.71	4.28, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.76	4.48, (2.85 - 6.20), 1.68	4.28, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.76
CC	0.74, (0.00 - 2.54), 0.61	0.622, (0.00 - 2.54), 0.60	0.33, (0.00 - 0.91), 0.50	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.60
PA	0.27, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.344	0.25, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.35	0.2, (0.00 - 0.60), 0.35	0.25 , (0.00 - 1.60), 0.35

*Note.* Pr = Pride, SG = Shame/guilt, IM = Impression Management, CC = Coercive Control, PA = Physical Abuse

Table 3.

*Mean, (Range), and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variable Scores by Annual Income Level*

	<u>71k+</u>	<u>51k – 70k</u>	<u>31k – 50k</u>	<u>11k – 30k</u>	<u>10k-</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pr	4.20, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.76	4.12, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.77	4.11, (2.40 - 5.00), 0.59	4.12, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.77	3.30, (3.00 - 3.60), 0.42	4.12, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.77
SG	1.70, (1.00 - 3.80), 0.77	1.75, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77	1.72, (1.00 - 3.30), 0.76	1.753, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77	1.85, (1.60 - 2.10), 0.35	1.75, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77
IM	4.31, (2.85 - 5.70), 0.70	4.28, (2.25 - 6.2), 0.76	4.27, (2.25 - 5.70), 0.89	4.28, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.76	3.68, (2.85 - 4.50), 1.17	4.28, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.76
CC	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.56	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.60	0.66, (0.00 - 2.00), 0.70	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.60	0.68, (0.45 - 0.91), 0.32	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.60
PA	0.20, (0.00 - 1.6), 0.3169	0.25, (0.00 - 1.6), 0.35	0.31, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.44	0.25, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.35	0.50, (0.40 - 0.60), 0.14	0.25, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.35

*Notes.* Pr = Pride, SG = Shame/guilt, IM = Impression Management, CC = Coercive Control, PA = Physical Abuse, 71k+ = \$71,000 or greater earned per year, 10k- = \$10,000 or less earned per year.

Table 4.

*Mean, (Range), and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variable Scores by Ethnicity*

	<u>White</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>African-</u> <u>American</u>	<u>Other/PNTS/</u> <u>Missing</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pr	4.14, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.840	4.23, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.71	3.91, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.83	4.01, (2.80 - 5.00), 0.68	4.12, (2.20 - 5.00), 0.77
SG	1.73, (1.00 - 3.30), 0.72	1.54, (1.00 - 3.30), 0.70	2.08, (1.00 - 3.90), 1.07	1.87, (1.00 - 3.80), 0.7541	1.75, (1.00 - 3.90), 0.77
IM	4.271, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.82	4.287, (2.85 - 5.65), 0.69	4.12, (3.35 - 5.50), 0.67	4.37, (2.85 - 5.50), 0.84	4.28, (2.25 - 6.20), 0.76
CC	0.56, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.56	0.53, (0.00 - 2.00), 0.577	0.75, (0.00 - 2.00), 0.74	0.77, (0.00 - 1.73), 0.61	0.62, (0.00 - 2.55), 0.60
PA	0.24, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.36	0.24, (0.00 - 0.80), 0.30	0.56, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.49	0.14, (0.00 - 0.60), 0.24	0.25, (0.00 - 1.60), 0.35

*Notes.* Pr = Pride, SG = Shame/guilt, IM = Impression Management, CC = Coercive Control, PA = Physical Abuse, PNTS = Prefer Not To Say.

Table 5.

*Pearson’s Correlations (N = 85) Among Pride, Shame/Guilt, Impression Management, Coercive Control and Physical Abuse*

	<u>Pride</u>	<u>SG</u>	<u>IM</u>	<u>CC</u>
Shame & Guilt	-.41***			
Impression Management	.21*	-.24*		
Coercive Control	-.11*	.37***	-.31***	.
Physical Abuse	-.04	.28***	-.37***	.57***

*Notes.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 6.

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Coercive Control as a Function of Shame/Guilt Alone and Followed by Impression Management*

	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> adj</i>
<i>Model 1</i>					.162
Constant	.051		0.342	.733	
SG	.326	.415	4.152	< .001***	
<i>Model 2</i>					.205
Constant	.922		2.308	.024*	
SG	.282	.359	3.583	.001**	
IM	-.185	-.236	-2.342	.022*	

*Notes.* Model 1 predictors: Shame/guilt. Model 2 predictors: Shame/guilt, followed by

Impression Management. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 7.

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Physical Abuse as a Function of Shame/Guilt  
Followed by Impression Management*

	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> adj</i>
<i>Model 1</i>					.073
Constant	.017		0.183	.855	
SG	.134	.290	2.763	.006**	
	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R<sup>2</sup> adj</i>
<i>Model 2</i>					.162
Constant	.718		2.978	.004**	
SG	.099	.214	2.077	.041*	
IM	-.149	-.321	-3.124	.002**	

*Notes.* Model 1 predictors: Shame/guilt. Model 2 predictors: Shame/guilt, followed by Impression Management. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 8.

*Spearman’s Correlations (N = 85) Between Demographic Factors and Study Variables*

	<u>Pr</u>	<u>SG</u>	<u>IM</u>	<u>CC</u>	<u>PA</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Ed</u>	<u>In</u>
Age	.05	-.07	.32**	-.11	-.31**			
Education	-.11	.06	.17	.35***	.09	.27*		
Income Level	.16	-.10	.08	.03	-.19	.30**	.34**	

*Notes.* Pr = Pride, SG = Shame/guilt, IM = Impression Management, CC = Coercive Control, PA = Physical Abuse. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

Table 9.

*One-way ANOVAs on Study Variables as a Function of Participant Ethnicity*

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>p</i>
Pride	3, 81	0.806 49.17	0.473	0.29, 0.61	0.70
Shame/guilt	3, 81	2.50, 47.13,	1.434	0.83, 0.58	0.24
Impression Management	3, 81	0.40, 48.49	0.224	0.13, 0.60	0.88
Coercive Control	3, 81	1.20, 29.38	1.10	0.24, 0.35	0.36
Physical Abuse	3, 81	1.01, 9.51	3.01	0.35, 0.12	0.04*

*Notes.* For degrees of freedom, Sum Squares, and Mean Squares, the series of number indicate results as “between groups, within groups”. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .