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Systematically identifying implicit theories in male and female intimate partner violence perpetrators

Chrisa D. Pornari [a,*], Louise Dixon [a], Glyn W. Humphreys [b]

[a] School of Psychology, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK
[b] Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford, Oxford OX3 9DU, UK

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ABSTRACT

This review systematically examines the empirical literature to determine the support available for seven proposed Implicit Theories (ITs) held by heterosexual male and female perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Based on previous literature that has hypothesized and identified ITs in intimate partner violence (IPV) and other types of offenders, we suggest six potential ITs likely to be held by men and women: "Opposite sex is dangerous", "Relationship entitlement", "General entitlement", "Normalization of relationship violence", "Normalization of violence", and "It's not my fault". We suggest one extra IT held by male perpetrators: "I am the man". Electronic databases were searched from 1980 onwards, using predetermined relevant key words, to identify IPV research that has examined factors associated with each of the proposed seven ITs. Support was found for the existence of all seven ITs, but it differed in terms of strength, mainly due to the dearth or poor quality of empirical research on specific areas, especially in female perpetrated IPV. Implications for treatment and future directions are discussed.

Contents

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has proved a popular research endeavor for academics, practitioners, and activists throughout the past four decades. During this time, there has been much debate over the theoretical underpinnings that explain the nature and etiology of this social problem (e.g., Dasgupta, 2002; Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2011; Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Dutton, 2006; Straus, 2006). Considered together, sound empirical research with student, clinical, and large representative community samples show there is a spectrum of IPV that can involve both men and/or women as perpetrators (Dixon et al., 2011; Dutton, Nicholls, & Spidel, 2005; Straus, 2009). Furthermore, recent research has advanced the popular feminist explanation which suggests heterosexual

Abbreviations: IPV, intimate partner violence; IT, implicit theory.

* Corresponding author at: Division of Psychology, Faculty of Education, Law & Social Sciences, Birmingham City University, City North Campus, Birmingham B42 2SU, UK. Tel.: +44 121 331 6395; fax: +44 121 331 7994.
E-mail address: Chrisa.Pornari@bcu.ac.uk (C.D. Pornari).

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IPV is a consequence of a patriarchal societal system (e.g., Pence & Paymar, 1993). Gender inclusive approaches to understanding IPV (see Dixon and Bowen (2012) for a detailed discussion) have examined its etiology in psycho-social terms. Such research has identified the important role of multiple factors at different levels of an ecological model for both sexes (e.g., Dutton, 2006; O'Leary, Smith Slep, & O'Leary, 2007; Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004), although male offenders have been the primary focus of this research to date. Multiple factors evident in the etiology of IPV offending have also been found to predominate in other types of violent offenses (Hanson, Helmus, & Bourgon, 2007), highlighting that IPV should be examined as another form of interpersonal violence and not one solely determined by societal norms and beliefs about patriarchy (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011; Dixon et al., 2011).

Cognitive distortions and biases have long been recognized as an important factor to the understanding and explanation of aggressive and violent behavior, including IPV, and there is a wealth of research supporting their role in such behavior (for an overview see Eckhardt & Dye, 2000; Gannon, 2009; Gannon, Ward, Beech, & Fisher, 2007). Recently, researchers in other areas of violence, especially sexual aggression (e.g., Beech, Fisher, & Ward, 2005; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004), have developed theories about the organization of offense supportive cognitions and their mental representation, within the theoretical framework of implicit theories (ITs), a concept similar to a schema (Ward, 2000; Ward & Keenan, 1999). ITs are core beliefs comprising coherent, interlocking ideas and concepts that people hold about themselves, others, and the social world. They are the result of life experience and function like scientific theories as people use them to make sense of, explain, and predict the social world and interpersonal situations. Their exploration in the area of violence and aggression is important because ITs can bias the way people interpret the world and interpersonal phenomena, and give rise to individual cognitive distortions. A better understanding of the root of offenders' cognitive bias is necessary so that intervention can be more focused and effective.

Research has identified ITs in various offender populations. For example, Beech et al. (2005) and Polaschek and Gannon (2004) identified five ITs, common in sexual murderers and rapists: "Dangerous world" (a hostile and suspicious view of the world and others); "Male sex drive is uncontrollable"; "Entitlement" (the offender's desires and beliefs are paramount and those of the victim ignored or deemed less significant; therefore, the offender feels entitled to sex); "Women as sex objects"; and "Women are unknowable" (view of women as rejecting, misleading, malevolent, inherently different from men). Similar ITs have been identified in child molesters (Marziano, Ward, Beech, & Pattison, 2006; Ward & Keenan, 1999) and violent offenders (Polaschek, Calvert, & Gannon, 2009). In violent offenders, "Normalization of violence" (the consequences of violence are minimized and it is viewed as an acceptable and effective way to achieve goals) has been found to serve as a background assumption for three common ITs identified in this type of offender.

While the domain of sexual and generally violent offense research has started to develop and understand ITs held by perpetrators, and to promote treatment based on the IT approach (Drake, Ward, Nathan, & Lee, 2001; Polaschek et al., 2009), it is not well advanced in the domain of IPV (Dempsey & Day, 2010; Gilchrist, 2009). Gilchrist (2009) has promoted the need to understand IPV perpetrator cognitions to better inform intervention with this group, and suggests ITs likely to be held by male IPV perpetrators based on a narrative review of contemporary theories, treatment programs of IPV, and attitudinal research. Although one small scale research study has found preliminary support for some of her ITs (Dempsey & Day, 2010), there remains a need to develop ITs in male *and* female offenders, using a systematic search of available evidence. The ITs identified in Gilchrist's review revolve around the intimate relationship and several of them around norms of masculinity dictated by a patriarchal societal system. As much research suggests that partner violence shares common background, personality and cognitive characteristics with other violent and non violent types of crime (Date & Ronan, 2000; Felson & Lane, 2010; Hanson et al., 2007; Moffitt, Krueger, Caspi, & Fagan, 2000; Valliant, De Wit, & Bowes, 2004), it is reasonable to assume that men and women who are violent towards a partner may also hold more general distorted attitudes and beliefs, as found in other violent offenders. Therefore, ITs of this nature should also be explored. Considering the above points, this review aims to provide a systematic exploration of the empirical literature to determine the level of empirical support available for ITs that we propose are held by heterosexual male and female IPV offenders.

2. Hypothesized ITs in IPV perpetrators

We suggest that there are a number of factors associated with male and female IPV perpetration that can be explained by the ITs identified in other types of violent offenders, as mentioned above. From a brief examination of the literature on various forms of violence and aggression, we hypothesize six core ITs likely to be held by both male and female perpetrators of IPV and one by men only. Our initial thinking is justified briefly below. Table 1 defines each IT and Table 2 summarizes the concepts/factors that best describe each one of the seven ITs. We then go onto systematically search the available IPV evidence to determine the existence of each proposed IT.

Male and female IPV perpetrators have been found to hold hostile and negative beliefs about the opposite gender and to attribute blame for their own violence and other negative events to their partner's personality or behavior (e.g., Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000; Parrott & Zeichner, 2003). Hostility has been defined as "a negative attitude toward one or more people that is reflected in a decidedly unfavorable judgment of the target" (Berkowitz, 1993, p. 21). It is a cognitive general trait connoting "a devaluation of the worth and motives of others, an expectation that others are likely sources of wrongdoing, a relational view of being in opposition toward others, and a desire to inflict harm or see others harmed" (Smith, 1994, p. 26), and can motivate aggressive and revengeful behavior (Eckhardt, Barbour, & Stuart, 1997). This could imply the presence of an IT similar to "Women are unknowable" found in rapists and sexual murderers (Beech et al., 2005; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004). Indeed, Gilchrist (2009) identified and coined an IT of "Women are dangerous" to reflect this premise. As the IPV literature shows this hostility to be present for both sexes, we hypothesize this IT to be present in partner abusive men and women, and label it with a gender inclusive term "Opposite sex is dangerous".

Findings from studies on the personality characteristics of IPV offenders show the presence of narcissistic personality traits or narcissistic personality disorder in men and women (e.g., Beasley & Stoltenberg, 1992; Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2003; Simmons, Lehmann, Cobb, & Fowler, 2005). Narcissism is characterized by a "pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy". Narcissists believe that they are special and unique, they expect others to admire them and recognize them as superior, they have a strong sense of *entitlement* (expectations of favorable treatment, or compliance with their expectations), they can be exploitative in order to achieve their own needs, while at the same time they may lack empathy and not recognize or identify with other people's feelings and needs (American Psychiatric Association [DSM-IV], 2000). The concept of entitlement has long been recognized as a factor essential to the understanding of criminality (e.g., Walters & White, 1989) and violent behavior (Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008). We, therefore, suggest that an IT of "General entitlement" could also be present in IPV perpetrators of both sexes (see Table 1). This is very different to the IT of "Entitlement" proposed by Gilchrist (2009) which is explained in terms of male privileges dictated by a patriarchal society. The term "General entitlement" is in keeping with that found in other sexual and violent offenders (Beech et al., 2005; Marziano et al., 2006; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004; Polaschek et al., 2009).

Table 1
Description of the seven implicit theories proposed in the present study.

Implicit theory	Description of the implicit theory
1. Opposite sex is dangerous	Refers to negative emotions and beliefs about the opposite sex. For example, aggressors may see the opposite gender as deceitful, manipulative, selfish, controlling, demanding, and immature, acting with negative intentions and selfish motivations. Consequently, they tend to be suspicious and do not easily trust men/women. Aggressors would most likely attribute the cause of any conflicts or violence to their partner's personality, behavior, or malevolent intentions.
2. General entitlement	People consider themselves to be superior to others. They believe they are entitled to special privileges and that they have the right to behave as they wish and to discipline or punish others when they deem necessary. They view their own wants, needs, desires and beliefs, as of paramount importance. They see violence as a means to gain or maintain social status and reputation, and necessary for survival. They dislike criticism and questioning, demand other's respect, and want to be in control of situations and others.
3. Relationship entitlement	People consider themselves superior to their partner and view their own needs, desires, and beliefs as more important. They expect their partner to behave according to their demands, do not accept criticism or questioning, and perceive opposition as disrespect. They view themselves as more competent, want to be in control of the relationship and their partner's life, and believe they have the right to punish their partner when he/she does not meet their expectations.
4. Normalization of relationship violence	Violence between partners is normal and an effective way of solving problems and dealing with the undesired behavior of a partner. They tend to minimize the severity of the incident and its consequences, and may think it can benefit its receiver. They may believe the battered partner exaggerates the extent of the violence, that she/he should not leave the relationship, and that the perpetrator has reasons to be excused.
5. Normalization of violence	Violence is viewed as acceptable, justifiable and an effective way of solving conflicts, achieving personal goals, controlling others and gaining respect. Men and women who hold this IT tend to minimize the importance and consequences of their violence and may also justify parent to child violence. They would acknowledge responsibility for the violence but attribute blame to the victim.
6. It's not my fault	People deny personal responsibility and attribute the violence to poor self-control and external factors, such as substance abuse, anger, inability to control emotions or stress, and problems at work. They also tend to displace responsibility by blaming the partner's behavior or personality.
7. I am the man	Men believe that they are inherently superior to women in all aspects. They believe there are certain traits and behaviors considered appropriate for men and women and expect their partner to adhere to her role. Men are seen as strong, dominant, authoritative, active, aggressive, assertive, decisive and independent, while women as more dependent, passive, nurturing, emotional, and associated with domestic activities.

It is likely that both men and women who perpetrate IPV hold an IT centered on relationship-specific entitlement. An association has been found between IPV perpetration and both control and dominance over the partner and a perceived right to discipline and punish the partner for both men and women (e.g., Follingstad, Bradley, Helff, & Laughlin, 1999; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, & Tolin, 1997; Kernsmith, 2005). Thus, we propose an IT entitled "Relationship entitlement". This IT taps into Gilchrist's (2009) "Women are objects", "Real man", "Need for control" (within the domestic domain), and "Entitlement" (because they are 'men'). Unlike Gilchrist (2009), we treat "Relationship entitlement" as a gender neutral concept since the IPV literature indicates that desire and need to exert control and power over the intimate partner and to punish undesired behavior found in both male and female perpetrators (e.g., Hamberger et al., 1997).

Findings from the IPV literature show that male and female aggressors hold attitudes condoning partner violence and tend to minimize its severity and/or consequences (e.g., Cauffman, Feldman, Jensen, & Arnett, 2000; Henning et al., 2005; Stith et al., 2004). Additionally, many male and female IPV perpetrators have a history of witnessing interparental violence (e.g., Dowd, Leisring, & Rosenbaum, 2005; Henning et al., 2003; Kernsmith, 2005). According to social learning and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1973, 1977), and the intergenerational transmission of violence theory (Stith et al., 2000) such experiences can inform one's beliefs about the acceptability of violence between partners (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996; Stith et al., 2000; Straus & Yodanis, 1996). These findings suggest the presence of an IT that normalizes violence in the relationship. We, therefore, propose the existence of the IT "Normalization of relationship violence", which corresponds to the ITs "Violence is normal" and "Nature of harm"

Table 2
Factors needed to be present in a study to provide support for the implicit theories and specific search key words.

Implicit theory	Factors	Search key words
1. Opposite gender is dangerous	(a) Hostility toward the opposite gender, i.e., negative and hostile beliefs and emotions about the partner and/or the opposite gender in general; (b) Attribution of blame to the partner's character, personality, behavior, or to his/her negative intentions and motivations	Hostility; gender hostility; hostile/negative attitudes; attitudes toward the partner; attitudes towards women/men; hostile/negative intentions/motivation; attribution of blame; victim blame
2. General entitlement	(a) Beliefs of superiority and grandiosity, narcissistic personality disorder or traits; (b) Low empathy	Entitlement; narcissism; narcissistic personality; superiority; grandiosity; empathy
3. Relationship entitlement	(a) Exertion of control, dominance, power over the intimate partner; (b) Reasons/motives for their violence in relation to control, coercion, punishment, retaliation etc.; (c) Perceived right to control and dominate the partner, need to control	Control; controlling behaviors; need for control; dominance; power; entitlement; reasons for violence/abuse/aggression; attributions; motivations
4. Normalization of relationship violence	(a) Attitudes approving/condoning IPV; (b) Denial, justification, minimization of perpetrated IPV; (c) Exposure to interparental violence during childhood; (d) Association with IPV peers	Positive/condoning attitudes; approval of violence/abuse/aggression; normative attitudes/beliefs; justifications; minimization; excuses; interparental violence/abuse/aggression; violence/abuse/aggression between parents/in family of origin; peers
5. Normalization of violence	(a) Attitudes approving/condoning general physical violence; (b) Denial, justification, minimization of physical violence; (c) Exposure to interparental violence during childhood; (d) Experience of physical abuse in the family of origin; (e) Association with delinquent/aggressive peers	Positive/condoning attitudes toward violence/aggression; approval of violence/aggression; normative attitudes; normalization of violence/aggression; justifications; minimization; excuses; violence/abuse/aggression in the family of origin; distal correlates; delinquent/aggressive peers
6. It's not my fault	(a) Locus of control; (b) Displacement of responsibility: partner blame, attribution of blame to other factors (e.g. anger, intoxication, stress, and poor emotional regulation)	Locus of control; self-control/regulation; reasons for violence/abuse/aggression; attributions; motivations; alcohol; drugs; stress; anger
7. I am the man	Stereotypical beliefs and attitudes regarding gender roles in relationships and in society	Traditional; stereotypical; gender/sex roles; beliefs/attitudes; ideology; gender stereotype

(minimization and denial of the violence and its consequences) proposed for male offenders by Gilchrist (2009). Here, the focus is on how exposure to family violence can shape attitudes about violence; it is, however, acknowledged that experience of family violence, both in terms of witnessing and experiencing abuse, does not only lead to internalizing aggressive norms and externalizing behavior, but also to a wide range of other internalizing psychological and behavioral outcomes, like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, post-traumatic stress, and dissociation (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Moylan et al., 2010; Wolfe, Scott, Wekerle, & Pittman, 2001).

Research with violent offenders has found a link between attitudes supportive of physical aggression and its perpetration in men (Archer & Haigh, 1997; Polaschek, Collie, & Walkey, 2004; Turner & Ireland, 2010) and women (Archer & Haigh, 1997). Considering that IPV shares many common risk factors with other types of violent crimes (Felson & Lane, 2010; Moffitt et al., 2000), it is likely that for some IPV perpetrators their violence stems from a broader belief that violence in general is acceptable. A history of experiencing or witnessing abuse in the family of origin, and associating with delinquent or aggressive peers has been found in many male and female IPV perpetrators (e.g., Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998; Silverman & Williamson, 1997; Stith et al., 2000). As previously discussed, for some individuals, such early experiences can shape attitudes regarding the acceptability of violence (Bandura, 1973; Stith et al., 2000). It is, therefore, proposed that the IT "Normalization of Violence" (Polaschek et al., 2009) is likely to be held by partner aggressors. Preliminary support for the existence of this IT in IPV men was found by Dempsey and Day (2010). A "Violence is normal" IT was also suggested by Gilchrist (2009), but it was explained predominantly in terms of attitudes condoning physical aggression between partners. The "Normalization of Violence" IT proposed here refers to beliefs about physical aggression in general, not restricted to intimate relationships.

Male and female IPV perpetrators tend to externalize blame and often attribute the cause of their violence to poor self or emotional control, or other factors beyond their control such as stress, anger, or their partner's characteristics (e.g., Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Hamberger et al., 1997; Henning et al., 2005; Stuart, Moore, Hellmuth, Ramsey, & Kahler, 2006). This externalization maps onto the "Uncontrollability" IT found in sexual and violent offenders (Beech et al., 2005; Marziano et al., 2006; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004; Polaschek et al., 2009). Gilchrist (2009) proposed an "Uncontrollability" IT for male IPV perpetrators to capture their tendency to blame outside stressors, alcohol or other unknown forces for their IPV. We propose a broader IT, that we coin "It's not my fault", in order to capture the perpetrators' tendency to externalize accountability in general, that is they not only blame perceived uncontrollable factors, but also the victim.

Finally, based on research on the association between traditional gender role beliefs and stereotypes mainly guided by feminist scholars (see Stith et al., 2004; Sugarman & Frankel, 1996) it is possible that an IT around issues of patriarchy and appropriate male and female roles and behavior will be present in some male perpetrators, and we therefore suggest an IT coined "I am the man". This IT taps, to some extent, into Gilchrist's (2009) "Women are objects", "Real man", "Need for control", and "Entitlement", as all revolve around the concept of masculinity, and beliefs about how men and women should, and are expected to behave. Currently, there is a lack of published evidence showing the existence of an IT based on gender roles for female perpetrators; therefore, it is not investigated further in this review.

3. Objectives of the review

This review aims to systematically investigate empirical support for the existence of the above proposed ITs in heterosexual male and female perpetrators of physical IPV. Although it is recognized that IPV comprises more than one form of aggression, physical violence is investigated as research has consistently examined this form, making it possible to identify and consider aggregate evidence.

4. Method

4.1. Search strategy

The concepts/factors that best describe each one of the seven ITs (see Table 2) guided the subsequent literature search. Due to limited methodological rigor in the area of IPV research, studies of varying empirical quality were included, although the level of empirical rigor is differentiated to enable the reader to discern the quality of supporting findings for each proposed IT. Due to the limited empirical studies available for some ITs, qualitative studies were also included. An electronic literature search was performed between April 2010 and February 2011 on the following databases: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Journals@Ovid, Medline, PsycArticles, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. Evidence was reviewed from 1980 (or each database's start date if this was after 1980) to end of February 2011. A separate search was performed for each IT using a combination of the following key words: (partner or spouse or marital or intimate or dating or courtship or interpersonal or relationship or domestic) and (violence or abuse or aggression or beating or battering). In addition, specific key words were also used for each IT's search (see Table 2).

4.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies were included in the review if they were published in peer-reviewed journals. Only studies that examined the direct link between the factors listed in Table 2 and physical IPV, independently from other forms of IPV (psychological, verbal, and sexual), were considered. Studies were included if they measured the presence and levels of violence using a structured measure (except for studies which involved convicted IPV offenders or perpetrators referred to IPV treatment) based on self or self *and* partner report. Studies based solely on partner reports were excluded. Studies had to include adult samples (over 17 years old), and in the case of longitudinal studies where the sample was initially assessed during childhood or adolescence, IPV should have been assessed in adulthood. Studies of same-sex couples and non-Western countries were excluded, as well as studies which used the same sample and data from a previously published study.

The initial on-line search yielded over 1000 articles. The abstract and method section of these articles were examined to identify those relevant to the purpose of this review. The selected articles were examined in more detail, applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria stated above. Table 3 shows how many papers were identified for each IT, and of those how many met the inclusion criteria stipulated above, in total and for men and women separately.

5. Results

5.1. Studies generated and categorization criteria

The Table presented in the on-line Supplementary material lists each of the 130 studies generated by this search that did or did not find support for each IT proposed (see on-line Supplementary reference list for a list of the studies reviewed). Including detailed information of such a large number of studies was beyond the scope of the main text of this review. Table 4 provides a summary of the statistical analyses for the studies retained for each IT, which found support, partial support, or no support for each IT, along with the quality of the evidence and the sample type this evidence was derived

from, separately for men and women. Studies were categorized as: (a) case–control A (CCA) when the target IPV group comprised men and women whose IPV status was a priori established, that is, IPV offenders, incarcerated or from IPV treatment programs, (b) case–control B (CCB) when the target IPV group was identified a posteriori based on the presence of IPV assessed with an appropriate measure (predominantly community and student samples), (c) groups comparison (GC) when IPV groups with different levels/frequency of violence were compared, (d) multivariate (M) for cross-sectional studies which employed multivariate methods of statistical analysis providing results about the unique contribution of the variable of interest to the explanation of IPV, (e) correlational (C) for cross-sectional studies which provided simple correlational statistics between IPV and the variable of interest, (f) descriptive (D) for studies which provide prevalence of the variable of interest within IPV samples or across IPV and non-violent samples, and (g) qualitative (Q) for data from interviews. The letter 'm' next to CCA, CCB, or GC indicates that the analysis involved covariates. A study was assigned to two or more categories if it provided more than one type of data, for example, a study which compared IPV and nonviolent groups, and also compared its IPV groups with different levels of violence was assigned to the CC (A or B) *and* the GC category.

The most methodologically sound studies (of those identified) were arguably the case–control studies, which, compared to cross-sectional designs, are more able to indicate causality (Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement [ICSI], 2003; Stephenson & Babiker, 2000). Evidence from CCA/CCA-m studies is considered stronger than the CCB/CCB-m because it comes from offender/in treatment samples where violence is normally more serious and frequent, and allows for more valid conclusions (i.e., more consistent results across studies and stronger relationships among variables) regarding a possible link between IPV and the variable(s) of interest. The second best empirical evidence is considered that from CCB/CCB-m studies because it comes from samples with normally lower levels of IPV where the variable of interest in relation to IPV may not be that prominent. Next, we consider the GC studies as the vast majority of them include offender samples. Empirical evidence from studies correlational in nature is considered to be of weaker quality. Descriptive and qualitative data provide the least quality evidence, but they have informative value because they involve men and women arrested for IPV or referred to IPV intervention programs. The quality of the evidence is, therefore, ranked from A to D respectively for the purpose of this study. Data from studies involving samples with higher levels of IPV, that is, men and women convicted for IPV or referred to IPV treatment, are considered to provide stronger evidence compared to data from student or community samples where levels of violence are normally lower.

5.2. Summary of results

"Opposite sex is dangerous" was well supported in men, both in terms of hostile and negative attitudes and in terms of partner blame. This IT was fairly well supported in women, but only with regards to partner blame. Only one study was identified which assessed attitudes in women (and did not find support) but the scale employed was not appropriate for use with a female sample.

There was good support for the existence of "Relationship entitlement" in both men and women. Quantitative data showed a positive link between IPV and the use of controlling and domineering behaviors inside the relationship. In men, these data came from both offender and student/community samples, while in women only from the latter. Descriptive and qualitative data from both types of samples indicated an association between IPV and the perpetrator's perceived right to control and dominate the partner, and additionally showed that commonly endorsed reasons, given by IPV men and women for their violence, revolve around coercion, control and entitlement over the partner.

Table 3
Number of studies identified and retained for inclusion in the review.

Implicit theory	Studies identified	Met the inclusion criteria	Retained for men	Retained for women
1. Opposite sex is dangerous	38	18	17	6
2. General entitlement	32	22	19	7
3. Relationship entitlement	55	24	14	17
4. Normalization of relationship violence	144	82	75	37
5. Normalization of violence	126	103	90	53
6. It's not my fault	47	41	33	19
7. I am the man	36	17	17	n/a

Note. The number of the studies for men and women does not add up to the total number of the studies retained for each implicit theory because some of those studies examined both men and women. Some of these studies provided support for more than one factor in a given IT and/or for more than one ITs.

"General entitlement" was moderately supported in men. Quantitative data which, although came mainly from offender samples, were mixed and inconclusive. Although batterers were found to score consistently higher in Narcissism than nonviolent men this difference was not always statistically significant. However, descriptive data from offender samples showed a moderate frequency of presence of narcissistic personality traits and a lower frequency of narcissistic personality disorder, which in some cases was the most elevated personality disorder of several tested. Although such studies do not allow us to conclude that batterers differ from non abusive men, they suggest, that some exhibit narcissistic personality traits which in some cases reach the clinical levels of a personality disorder. Research on the role of empathy is scarce and, therefore, inconclusive, but this does not mean that there is no relationship with IPV perpetration. In women, the very small number of empirical studies, especially in relation to empathy, do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about the existence of this IT, but the available data provide some preliminary evidence worthy of further empirical investigation.

"Normalization of relationship violence" found good support in men, including a plethora of good quality evidence. The majority of the quantitative studies reviewed revealed a positive link between IPV and influence from IPV peers who perpetrate or provide informational support for IPV, and show that IPV men tend to hold more condoning attitudes toward partner violence and to justify or approve its use under specific circumstances. Evidence for the above comes almost exclusively from student and community samples. Descriptive and qualitative data, however, provide support for this IT in offender samples as well, where a high frequency of justifications, denial, and minimization of their violence was observed. Regarding the factor of interparental violence, although it received or not support by approximately the same number of studies, it found support by studies of high quality which involved mainly offenders or men in treatment. On the other hand, the findings from lower quality evidence, which were mixed, came predominantly from student/community samples.

Additionally, GC studies found only severely (and not the moderately) abusive men to differ from the nonviolent in the amount of interparental violence witnessed (Hanson, Cadsky, Harris, & Lalonde, 1997; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989), and higher levels of violence were associated with more severe violence between parents (e.g., Eckhardt, Samper, & Murphy, 2008; Lawson, Brossart, & Shefferman, 2010). Therefore, it could be concluded that interparental violence is a fairly consistent factor in the explanation of severe IPV, and to a lesser extent in lower levels of IPV. In women, this IT found moderate support. Less evidence was provided from studies which explored the association between IPV and attitudes condoning IPV, as these studies were fewer in number compared to studies with male samples, of lower mean quality, and came from student/community samples only. Despite this, they found support for this factor. Descriptive data added support to this IT as offenders and students were found to engage in high and moderate

Table 4
Summary table of the reviewed research for men and women, with number of statistical analyses across the studies retained for each implicit theory which found full, partial, or no support for each it, quality of the evidence, and sample type.

Implicit theory	Support *n*	Evidence quality	Sample type	Partial support *n*	Data quality	Sample type	No support *n*	Data quality	Sample type
Men									
1. Opposite sex is dangerous	16	2 A	2 A				4	1 A	1 A
		1 B	1 B					2 D	2 B
		1 C	1 B					1 E	1 B
		6 D	6 B						
		6 E	6 A						
2. General entitlement	13	2 A	2 A	6	1 A	1 A	4	3 A	3 A
		1 B	1 B[a]		2 B	2 B		1 D	1 B
		2 C	1 A, 1 B		3 D	2 A, 1 B			
		8 E	8 A						
3. Relationship entitlement	10	1 A	1 A	3	1 B	1 B	3	1 A	1 A
		2 C	2 A		1 D	1 B		2 D	1 A, 1 B
		3 D	1 A, 2 B		1 E	1 B			
		4 E	4 A						
4. Normalization of relationship violence	55	3 A	3 A	19	3 A	3 A	30	9 B	9 B
		9 B	9 B		6 B	6 B		1 C	1 B
		7 C	3 A, 4 B		1 C	1 B		20 D	5 A, 15 B
		26 D	3 A, 23 B		9 D	3 A, 6 B			
		10 E	9 A, 1 B[a]						
5. Normalization of violence[b]	53	8 A	8 A	27	4 A	4 A	40	10 B	10 B
		10 B	10 B		8 B	8 B		3 C	1 A, 2 B
		8 C	5 A, 3 B		2 C	2 B		27 D	5 A, 22 B
		18 D	5 A, 13 B		13 D	5 A, 8 B			
		9 E	9 A						
6. It's not my fault	28	2 A	2 A	1	1 A	1 A	6	1 A	1 A
		4 B	4 B					1 B	1 B
		3 D	3 B					3 D	1 A, 2 B
		19 E	15 A, 4 B					1 E	1 B
7. I am the man	10	1 A	1 A	1	1 B	1 B	9	2 B	2 B
		1 B	1 B					7 D	1 A, 6 B
		1 C	1 A						
		4 D	3 A, 1 B						
		3 E	3 A						
Women									
1. Opposite sex is dangerous	5	1 B	1 B				2	1 D	1 B
		1 C	1 B					1 E	1 B
		2 D	2 B						
		1 E	1 A						
2. General entitlement	3	1 D	1 B	1	1 A	1 A	3	1 B	1 B
		2 E	2 A					2 D	2 B
3. Relationship entitlement	16	1 B	1 B	3	1 B	1 B	1	1 E	1 A
		2 C	1 A, 1 B		1 D	1 B			
		5 D	5 B		1 E	1 A			
		8 E	4 A, 4 B						
4. Normalization of relationship violence[c]	21	3 B	3 B	7	2 B	2 B	20	7 B	7 B
		1 C	1 B		1 C	1 A		13 D	1 A, 12 B
		9 D	9 B		4 D	4 B			
		8 E	7 A, 1 B						
5. Normalization of violence[d]	33	6 B	6 B	8	3 B	3 B	25	7 B	7 B
		1 C	1 B		1 C	1 A		1 C	1 A
		13 D	13 B		4 D	4 B		17 D	2 A, 15 B
		13 E	13 A						
6. It's not my fault	19	2 B	2 B				2	1 D	1 B
		4 C	2 A, 2 B					1 E	1 B
		2 D	2 B						
		11 E	6 A, 5 B						

Note. In the Evidence quality column: A = CCA/CCA-m studies; B = CCB/CCB-m; C = GC; D = M or C; E = D or Q. In Sample type column: A = Convicted IPV offenders or referred to IPV intervention programs; B = non-offender samples (i.e., student, community, and mixed offender and non-offender samples). The number in front of each letter indicates the number of the studies, e.g., 2 A means that 2 studies with A evidence quality were found. The sample type corresponds to its adjacent data quality. Empty cells indicate that there were no studies providing (or not) support.

[a] Incarcerated self-identified batterers, IPV not the index offense.

[b] No studies were identified for the factor 'Attitudes'.

[c] No studies identified for the 'Peer influence' factor.

[d] No studies identified for the factors: 'Attitudes', 'Denial, justification or minimization', and 'Peer influence'.

levels of denial and minimization of their violence, respectively. Regarding exposure to interparental violence, the quantitative findings came predominantly from student and community samples, and were mixed and inconclusive. Moreover, almost all the multivariate studies did *not* provide support for this factor, while most of the correlational studies did. From the above, it can be inferred that, although there is an association between IPV and history of interparental violence this factor is not among the most significant to the explanation of lower levels of violence. It might be that it facilitates more severe IPV, and the finding that significantly more of the students who had witnessed

interparental violence reported IPV, compared to students who had not (Tontodonato & Crew, 1992), along with the studies with female offenders which provided frequency data of observation of violence between parents, support such an assumption.

"Normalization of violence" in men was well supported, but only by studies which examined the distal correlates of partner violence, namely exposure to interparental violence, physical abuse by parents, and association with aggressive/delinquent peers, because research on attitudes and justifications/minimization is almost non-existent. An abundance of good quality evidence provides support for the existence of this IT in men. Evidence for exposure to interparental violence was discussed in the previous paragraph. Strong support was found for childhood physical abuse, where, compared to the studies which did not provide support, those studies which did where more in number, and most of them of high quality. Additionally, half of them involved offenders or men in treatment, while all but one of the studies which do not support this factor involved students and community samples. Similarly to interparental violence, it seems that abuse by parents is a factor consistent in the explanation of higher levels of IPV and less consistent in explaining lower IPV levels. Although there was only one study included in this review which examined association with aggressive/delinquent peers it revealed an association only with high levels of IPV. In women, "Normalization of violence" received moderate support and only from evidence about exposure to interparental violence and childhood abuse, as no studies were included in this review for the other three factors of this IT. Observation of interparental violence was discussed in the previous paragraph, and regarding childhood abuse, the same pattern with exposure to interparental violence was observed, suggesting that, similarly to interparental violence, childhood abuse may facilitate perpetration of more severe or frequent IPV.

"It's not my fault" was well supported in men by good quality quantitative and additional non-quantitative data, especially in terms of low self-control and external LOC orientation, and partner blame. Quantitative data was, however, almost exclusively from student/community samples, while partner blame found good additional support from descriptive and qualitative data from offender samples. Displacement of responsibility to other factors (outside the self and the partner) was supported only by descriptive and qualitative data. In women, this IT was moderately supported by displacement of responsibility (to the partner and other factors), by both quantitative (student/community) and descriptive (mainly offender) data. Regarding locus of control only one study was identified therefore, it is not possible to make any conclusions.

"I am the man" found moderate support. The findings from the quantitative studies reviewed were mixed and inconclusive as the number of studies which did and did not provide support for this IT was approximately the same, and the studies were of equal quality. However, a closer examination reveals that more than half of the studies which found an association between gender-role stereotype and IPV perpetration included offender samples or men in IPV treatment, while all but one of the studies which did not find a significant association involved student and community samples. Qualitative research with incarcerated IPV offenders and men in IPV treatment provide more consistent support for the relationship between gender-role stereotype and IPV. Therefore, a strong gender-role stereotype is associated with IPV in men from these selected samples and it may be assumed that this IT is associated with more severe levels of IPV. Such an assumption is supported by Saunders's (1992) study where higher levels of endorsement of this stereotype were associated with IPV severity levels in a sample of male batterers entering an IPV intervention program.

6. Discussion

Based on previous research on the ITs of sexual and violent offenders, and considering that male and female perpetrators of IPV share common risk factors with other types of violent crimes (Date & Ronan, 2000; Felson & Lane, 2010; Moffitt et al., 2000; Valliant et al., 2004), we hypothesized six core ITs could be present in male and female perpetrators of heterosexual physical IPV, and one IT specifically in men. A systematic review of the empirical IPV literature found varying quality and levels of support for each IT and for each sex. In order to reach a conclusion about the extent to which each IT was supported by the existing literature, the number of studies that provided support, the quality of empirical evidence and the sample type this evidence came from (see Results section for details on how quality was rated) were considered (see Table 4).

In men, "Opposite sex is dangerous", "Normalization of relationship violence", "Normalization of violence", and "It's not my fault" had the most positive results from high quality empirical evidence (CCA/CCB), providing good support for their existence. "Relationship entitlement" was also well supported, though from less methodologically rigorous studies, that is, not case–control studies. Moderate support was found for "General entitlement" and "I am the man" mainly because quantitative data were mixed, although descriptive and qualitative data coming from offender samples provided more consistent support. Another reason in the case of "General entitlement" was the dearth of research on the association between empathy and IPV.

In women, only "Relationship entitlement" was well supported, although predominantly by student/community samples', as very few (descriptive only) studies included offender samples. "Normalization of relationship violence" and "Normalization of violence" had a larger number of case–control studies compared to the other ITs, but, in general, the results were mixed, and no studies were identified for some of their factors. Similarly, moderate support was found for "Opposite sex is dangerous" because the majority of the data were of medium quality and because for some factors research was scarce or non-existent. Weak support was found for "General entitlement" due to the dearth of empirical research.

It is clear from this review that research on female IPV is limited compared to the amount of research on male perpetrators (see Table 3) which indicates that female perpetrated IPV is still not being given the same attention and priority as male IPV, despite a plethora of research evidence about the bi-directionality of partner violence (see Dixon & Bowen, 2012). Additionally, the majority of the studies with women come from student/community samples (73% vs. 53.5% for men), and very little research has focused on offenders or women referred to treatment (25.4% vs. 46.5% for men), where the levels of violence are normally higher, and, therefore, allow for more valid conclusions. Despite this lack of research, the studies reviewed show evidence of female perpetration for reasons other than self-defense (e.g., relationship entitlement). Furthermore, the present results show that gender role stereotype is not consistently linked to male perpetration and is predominantly evidenced in selected samples. This finding does not support the position of a gendered approach to understanding IPV, which views patriarchal attitudes as central to the explanation of male to female IPV. Further exploration of the etiology of female IPV is therefore warranted to inform practice with this group. Research has begun to suggest that chivalrous normative beliefs prevail in Western nations (opposed to patriarchy) and that this norm increases the likelihood of female to male physical IPV due to it being seen as trivial and inconsequential (see Archer, 2000; Felson, 2006). Therefore, it is likely that an "I am the woman" IT could be present in some female IPV perpetrators. However, as empirical research investigating this idea is scarce it was beyond the scope of this review to investigate the existence of a related IT, but future research should consider this.

It was also evident that observation and experience of violence in the family of origin were consistently associated with more severe and frequent perpetration of IPV in both men and women suggesting that such negative early life experiences should always be given the appropriate attention during risk assessments.

Although it was possible to devise (some) ITs based on the empirical IPV literature, this approach is not sufficient on its own. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that IPV research has not yet systematically examined the role of many risk factors associated with general violence and aggression, despite evidence which suggests that violence toward intimates has similar etiology with other types of violence (see Felson & Lane, 2010; Hanson et al., 2007; Moffitt et al., 2000; Valliant et al., 2004). This review showed that research on attitudes toward general violence/aggression, psychological entitlement, empathy, and locus of control in IPV populations is sparse. However, various non offense-specific ITs have been identified in sexual and violent offenders, demonstrating that these types of offenders hold cognitions which facilitate violence in general (e.g., Dangerous world and Uncontrollability) (Beech et al., 2005; Marziano et al., 2006; Polaschek et al., 2009). This lack of empirical research examining the direct link between such factors and IPV stunts understanding of how non-offense specific ITs are related to IPV and therefore assessment and intervention with this form of violence. The second reason is that female perpetrated IPV is still under-researched and data on this issue is predominantly generated from student/community samples. This may explain why the ITs in this review were less well supported for female perpetrators. Therefore, there is a need for future research to examine the existence of additional ITs related to factors associated with general violence and crime and for more focused research on female IPV.

One of the factors considered when conceptualizing the IT "It's not my fault" was the tendency of some IPV perpetrators to attribute their violence to their inability to control their negative emotions (e.g., anger, jealousy and hostile feelings). It is, therefore, likely that an affect-related IT surrounding ideas and perceptions about experienced feelings and emotions, is also present in IPV perpetrators. Negative affect is recognized as an important route to aggression, interacting with cognition and arousal (see Berkowitz (1990) for the Cognitive Neoassociation Model for aggression and Anderson and Bushman (2002) for the General Aggression Model), and preliminary empirical research has found that inability to regulate negative emotions is a risk factor for IPV in men (McNulty & Hellmuth, 2008). The exploration of how IPV perpetrators experience and interpret their negative emotions and feelings during interactions with their partner could form part of intervention programs with this type of offender. Perpetrators would be taught how to recognize, interpret, and reflect upon their currently experienced emotions and understand how acting on their feelings can result in aggressive behavior. The therapist could then provide training on how to exercise self-control to reduce negative affect and to act based on a thoughtful and rational appraisal of the immediate situation. The present review devised ITs from a cognitive perspective, but it is suggested that the presence of an emotional IT in IPV perpetrators is also worth exploring.

6.1. Implications for practice

It is not expected that all IPV perpetrators will hold all the ITs described in this paper, or endorse them at the same strength. Differential developmental pathways and early and later learning life experiences play an important role in their development and content (Ward, 2000). Additionally, these ITs are not mutually exclusive and some of them may overlap. For example, for some male perpetrators, the belief that they are superior to their partner and should be in control may stem from patriarchal and stereotypical gender roles beliefs. In this case, it is expected that "Relationship entitlement" and "I am the man" will co-exist. For others, including female perpetrators, the same belief may be part of a general sense of entitlement and superiority. In this case, "Relationship entitlement" and "General entitlement" will overlap.

An IT approach to IPV treatment can provide a framework where individual, yet interconnected, distorted cognitions can be organized in a structured and consistent way, similar to the schema-focused therapy approach (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). The aim would be to bring these ITs to the surface and work on their modification or substitution with other more functional and adaptive ITs. At present, IPV intervention programs that focus on the identification, understanding, and change/substitution of cognitive distortions, do this in a largely unstructured way by tackling individual and unconnected cognitions verbally expressed by the offenders (RRPG, 2010). The findings about the effectiveness of current standard IPV intervention programs on post-treatment recidivism show that this is small (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004), and the available research indicates that IPV offenders show little change in attitudes and personality after treatment (Gondolf, 2000; Hamberger & Hastings, 1988). It is, therefore, evident that there is room for improvement. We suggest that a data-driven IT approach, which also takes into account the heterogeneity that exists among male and female batterers, could prove more effective in both the assessment and treatment of male and female offenders and lead to long-term change.

6.2. Conclusion

This review provides good evidence for the existence of "Relationship entitlement" in both male and female perpetrators. Good evidence was found for "Opposite sex is dangerous", "Normalization of relationship violence", "Normalization of violence", and "It's not my fault" in men and moderate evidence in women. "I am the man" and "General entitlement" were moderately supported in men, while the latter was weakly supported in women. More research is needed before reaching further conclusions about its existence in female IPV perpetrators. In general, all ITs were less strongly supported in women, not because the majority of the evidence rejected their existence, but because of the limited research on female IPV. However, it is important to note that we do not suggest those ITs proposed here provide an exhaustive list of ITs. More themes may be identified by examining the actual accounts generated by the offenders themselves, highlighting the need for future qualitative research to confirm the existence of the ITs proposed here in addition to looking for evidence for additional ITs in both male and female perpetrators. Simply, this review warrants support for the empirical investigation of the proposed ITs in an IPV population, as we suggest that an IT empirically driven approach to IPV intervention has the potential to improve the effectiveness of current treatment programs.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2013.07.005.

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