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**INTIMATE PARTNER AGGRESSION DURING THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD:  
THE ROLE OF DIVISION OF LABOR DISSATISFACTION**

A Thesis in

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Rates of intimate partner aggression (IPA) increase for new parent couples. This increase may be due to changes in couples' division of household labor and childcare, which may especially impact women, who typically report more division of labor (DoL) dissatisfaction than men. This study is the first to directly examine: the association between DoL dissatisfaction and perpetration of IPA, gender differences in this association, and whether this association differs according to conflict topic (i.e., whether aggressive conflicts were about DoL or non-DoL topics). Traditional IPA measures have precluded assessment of what conflict topics precipitate IPA incidents, and how the predictors of IPA may differ depending on conflict topic.

At 4 time points over 1 year, 203 partners from 111 couples with a first-born child aged 2-3 years were interviewed. Participants described the conflict topic and number of aggressive acts in each incident of IPA over the prior 13 weeks. Conflict topics were qualitatively coded. The number of IPA acts perpetrated during DoL conflicts were aggregated to yield a total DoL IPA score; acts of IPA during the remaining conflicts were aggregated to yield a total IPA score for conflicts about topics other than DoL.

Multilevel models indicated that higher DoL dissatisfaction was associated with use of more acts of IPA ( $B = 0.24, t = 2.00, p = .050$ ). Multivariate multilevel models indicated that the association between DoL dissatisfaction and IPA was specific to women's IPA in conflicts about topics other than DoL ( $B = 0.27, t = 2.88, p = .005$ ). Results generalized to the examination of division of childcare dissatisfaction and conflicts about childcare vs. other topics ( $B = 0.74, t = 4.13, p < .001$ ).

The discovery that DoL dissatisfaction and IPA are not directly linked through similar conflict context may contradict common assumptions of researchers and practitioners. Dissatisfied women may engage in better communication skills during DoL conflicts compared to less anticipated conflicts. Couples therapists may benefit from targeting women's global DoL and childcare dissatisfaction to prevent IPA, rather than focusing on specific conflict content.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| LIST OF FIGURES .....  | v   |
| LIST OF TABLES.....  | vi  |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....   | vii |
| Chapter 1 Introduction .....   | 1   |
| Current Study.....   | 5   |
| Chapter 2 Methods.....   | 6   |
| Participants .....   | 6   |
| Procedures .....   | 7   |
| Measures.....  | 9   |
| Statistical Analyses .....   | 14  |
| Chapter 3 Results.....   | 19  |
| Multilevel regression of division of labor dissatisfaction on IPA.....                     | 22  |
| Multilevel regression of division of labor dissatisfaction and gender on IPA.....          | 23  |
| Multilevel regression of division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA.....                 | 25  |
| Multilevel regression of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender on IPA.....      | 26  |
| Chapter 4 Discussion .....   | 29  |
| Limitations.....   | 31  |
| Clinical Implications .....  | 33  |
| Summary .....  | 33  |
| References.....  | 35  |
| Appendix Multilevel regression results of childcare role dissatisfaction and gender on IPA | 42  |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Frequencies of conflict topic categories..... | 19 |
|---|----|

## LIST OF TABLES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Descriptive information.....  | 21 |
| Table 2: Multivariate multilevel model including division of labor dissatisfaction to predict IPA in conflicts regarding division of labor and conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor. .... | 23 |
| Table 3: Multilevel regression of division of labor dissatisfaction and gender on IPA.....   | 24 |
| Table 4: Multivariate multilevel regression of women and men's division of labor dissatisfaction on IPA in division of labor conflicts and non-division of labor conflicts. ....                             | 25 |
| Table 5: Multivariate multilevel of division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA in division of childcare conflicts and non-division of childcare conflicts. ....  | 26 |
| Table 6: Multilevel regression of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender on IPA....  | 27 |
| Table 7: Multivariate multilevel regression of women and men's division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA in division of childcare conflicts and non-division of childcare conflicts. ....                 | 28 |

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The birth of a first child marks a life-changing event for couples. Although the transition to parenthood is often considered a joyous event, couples in the midst of such a transition also experience decreased relationship quality and satisfaction (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003) and increased stress (Cowan & Cowan, 2000), conflict (Crohan, 1996; Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009), and intimate partner aggression (IPA; Charles & Perreira, 2007). The negative impact of the transition to parenthood on relationships appears to be a growing problem as parents from recent generations show greater marital dissatisfaction during the transition to parenthood than parents from earlier generations (Twenge et al., 2003).

The elevated rates of IPA among couples experiencing the transition to parenthood is particularly concerning, as IPA is associated with a host of negative outcomes for partners, couples, and children. Specifically, experiencing both psychological IPA (e.g., yelling, insulting, threatening one's partner) and physical IPA (e.g., pushing, punching, using a weapon on one's partner) are each independently associated with adverse mental and physical health outcomes in both men and women, including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance use, and chronic illness (e.g., hypertension, asthma, osteoarthritis; Anderson, 2002; Coker et al., 2002; Lawrence, Orengo-Aguayo, Langer, & Brock, 2012). Couples who engage in IPA are at increased risk for relationship distress and dissolution (Lawrence, Ro, Barry, & Bunde, 2005; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999). Further, children who are exposed to IPA are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms, behavior problems, psychopathology (e.g., depression), lower academic achievement, and future violence perpetration, and children's psychological IPA exposure predicts their adverse outcomes beyond the effect of physical IPA exposure (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; El-Sheikh, Cummings, Kouros, Elmore-Staton, & Buckhalt, 2008; English et al., 2009; Jouriles, Norwood,



McDonald, Vincent, & Mahoney, 1996; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Luster, Small, & Lower, 2002; Whitfield, Anda, Dube, & Felitti, 2003). As rates of IPA peak during the early years of parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Gustafsson, Cox, & the Family Life Project Key Investigators, 2015), IPA may be a mechanism through which other negative marital outcomes develop during these years. Thus, it is critical to examine factors that contribute to IPA during the transition to parenthood and early years of parenthood.

While rates of IPA increase during the transition to parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Gustafsson et al., 2016), the reasons for this increase are unclear. It may be that the increased stress that occurs during the transition to parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009) sets the stage for conflicts about a variety of topics to readily intensify into aggressive behavior. Alternatively, because the transition to parenthood is marked by couples' renegotiation of prior "rules" regarding household chores, as well as incorporation of childcare responsibilities into daily functioning (Koivunen, Rothaupt, & Wolfgram, 2009), increased aggression at the transition to parenthood may be specifically due to couples' renegotiation of their division of labor within the family. Knowledge of the nature of couples' aggressive conflicts is essential to our understanding of the conditions that precede aggressive behavior. Extant literature does not address the content of conflicts that couples transitioning to parenthood engage in, or how situational factors can contribute to IPA. With the exception of one study in which couples reported that they generally have more conflicts resembling a vignette about household chores than vignettes about paid work or childcare (Kluwer et al., 2000), researchers have yet to examine the extent to which couples experiencing the transition to parenthood have conflict about division of labor compared to other topics. Nor have researchers examined the role of division of labor conflicts in IPA.

Women and men typically exhibit unequal performance in quantity and type of childcare and household labor (Craig, 2006; Koivunen et al., 2009), which may result in differences in satisfaction with division of labor and motivation for conflict and IPA. Despite recent increases in men's involvement with childcare and housework, women continue to have greater responsibility for childcare and spend two-to-

three times more time with children and on housework than men (Craig, 2006; Sayer, 2005; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015). Women usually perform the majority of routine and time critical household and childcare duties (e.g., cooking, feeding and dressing children) while men typically perform time flexible tasks (e.g., car maintenance, household repairs, playing with children; Craig, 2006; Coltraine & Shih, 2010). Consistent with gender differences in performance of household and childcare labor, women report more division of labor dissatisfaction than men during the transition to parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Twenge et al., 2003). As women experience greater division of labor dissatisfaction and they spend more time performing childcare than men, women's division of labor dissatisfaction may increase the frequency with which couples in the early years of parenthood experience conflicts that escalate into aggression. This may be particularly true if such conflicts are more often about division of labor issues.

Women's division of labor dissatisfaction may more strongly influence detrimental relationship outcomes than men's division of labor dissatisfaction. Women, but not men, who perceive that division of housework is unfair are two times more likely to divorce than those who perceive fairness in division of housework (Frisco & Williams, 2003). Additionally, women's division of household labor dissatisfaction, but not that of men, has been associated with increased couple conflict (Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 1996). These gender differences appear to be due to women's experience of unmet expectations (i.e., men do less than women expect; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Grote & Clark, 2001). The gender discrepancy in expectation violation may explain why women's division of household labor dissatisfaction has been associated with increased couple conflict, perhaps as attempts to change the status quo (Grote & Clark, 2001; Kluwer et al., 1996). Women also experience a greater degree of variability in level of division of labor dissatisfaction than men (Kluwer et al., 2000), thus contributing more statistical power to predict couple conflict and aggression. Based on this literature, women's division of labor dissatisfaction likely predicts IPA perpetration more strongly than does men's division of labor dissatisfaction. However, I recognize that, if substantial variability is exhibited in men's division of labor

dissatisfaction (which may be the case at the transition to parenthood when household labor responsibilities are renegotiated), men's dissatisfaction may predict IPA perpetration more strongly than women's as men confront gender role stress related to violated gendered status quo household labor expectations (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002).

IPA during conflicts regarding division of labor dissatisfaction may be the mechanism through which negative outcomes (e.g., relationship dissatisfaction, dissolution) develop for couples during the early years of parenthood. However, thus far, researchers have not empirically examined whether increased division of labor dissatisfaction and conflicts regarding division of labor directly contribute to increased IPA behaviors. We know that division of labor dissatisfaction is predictive of conflicts about division of labor (Kluwer et al., 2000; Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 1996), but we do not yet know if partners who express higher levels of division of labor dissatisfaction are more likely to engage in a greater number of IPA acts within those conflicts than partners who express lower levels of division of labor dissatisfaction. Additionally, although in one study couples reported experiencing more conflicts resembling a vignette about household chores than vignettes about paid work or childcare (Kluwer et al., 2000), we do not know if particular aspects of division of labor that change during the transition to parenthood (i.e., the addition of childcare versus renegotiation of household chores) are especially likely to result in more acts of IPA. To date, methodological challenges inherent in the measurement of IPA have prevented investigation of this issue. That is, the most commonly used measure of IPA, the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), does not include assessment of distinct aggressive incidents, which precludes assessment of the context or topic of such incidents. Consequently, it has been nearly impossible to know what conflict topics precipitate IPA incidents, and further, how the number of acts of IPA may differ depending upon the topic of conflicts.

### **Current Study**

The current study alleviates some of the methodological limitations of previous studies by using the recently developed Children, Intimate Relationships, and Conflictual Life Events (CIRCLE) interview (Marshall, Feinberg, Jones, & Chote, 2017), a calendar-based assessment of IPA that includes measurement of the context and topics of aggressive and nonaggressive conflicts, as well as the IPA behaviors that occur during distinct conflicts. Using this interview among couples who recently transitioned to parenthood, I examined whether partners engage in more IPA behaviors during aggressive conflicts about division of labor compared to aggressive conflicts about other topics, and whether this was especially the case among those who express greater division of labor dissatisfaction. I additionally examined gender differences in these processes.

Consistent with existing literature, I hypothesized that 1) division of labor dissatisfaction would be positively associated with the number of IPA behaviors perpetrated across all aggressive conflicts, 2) division of labor dissatisfaction would be more strongly associated with the amount of IPA perpetration in aggressive division of labor conflicts than in conflicts about other topics, and 3) gender would moderate the relationship between division of labor dissatisfaction and the number of IPA behaviors in aggressive division of labor conflicts, such that the relationship would be stronger for women than men. Additionally, I explored whether the effects observed when testing hypotheses 1-3 remained when specifically examining division of childcare dissatisfaction and IPA behaviors in conflicts about division of childcare.

## Chapter 2

### Methods

#### Participants

Participants include 203 individuals (109 women, 94 men) from 111 heterosexual couples whose first-born child was approximately 32 months old at the beginning of the study (in 19 families only one parent participated). Most participants were married (87% of women, 84% of men) and self-identified as non-Hispanic, White (90.8% of women, 92.6% of men). On average, women were 31.02 years of age ( $SD = 3.81$ , range = 23 - 45), with 15.78 years of education ( $SD = 1.38$ , range = 12 - 17), an annual family income of \$85,500 ( $SD = \$34,429$ , range = \$7,500 - \$162,500), and worked 28.07 hours per week ( $SD = 19.17$ , range = 0 - 80). On average, men were 32.56 years of age ( $SD = 5.12$ , range = 25 - 50), with 15.43 years of education ( $SD = 1.75$ , range = 11 - 17), an annual family income of \$85,698 ( $SD = \$34,564$ , range = \$22,500 - \$162,500), and worked 43.44 hours per week ( $SD = 14.17$ , range = 0 - 80).

Four subsamples were used to test the primary study hypotheses. These analytic subsamples were comprised of individuals from couples that had data from both partners on the focal predictor variables and had both partners endorse IPA perpetration in the type of conflict under analysis. That is, 27 couples were included in analyses focused on IPA in division of labor conflicts, 51 couples were included in analyses focused on IPA in non-division of labor conflicts, 19 couples were included in analyses focused on IPA in division of childcare conflicts, and 58 couples were included in analyses focused on IPA in non-division of childcare conflicts. Analyses that simultaneously examined division of labor and non-division of labor conflicts and analyses that simultaneously examined division of childcare and non-division of childcare conflicts both included 97 couples. None of the analytic subsamples differed significantly from the full sample in terms of race/ethnicity, age, years of education, annual family income, hours worked per week, or intervention group status (details available upon request).

## Procedures

Participants were originally recruited to take part in a randomized controlled trial of Family Foundations, a psychosocial prevention program for first-time expectant parents (Feinberg et al., 2016; Feinberg & Kan, 2008). To participate, couples had to be expecting a first child and cohabitating or married, with each partner over 18 years of age. Participants were primarily recruited from childbirth education programs and Ob/Gyn clinics in two mid-Atlantic states. As part of the Family Foundations study, participants completed assessments in their homes at pretest (during pregnancy), child age 10 months, and child age 24 months.

After completion of the Family Foundations 24-month follow-up assessment, participants were recruited into the Children, Intimate Relationships, and Conflictual Life Events (CIRCLE) study. To be eligible, participants needed to be in a cohabitating intimate relationship, but not necessarily with their original Family Foundations study partner. Because CIRCLE study recruitment overlapped with completion of Family Foundations, only Family Foundations participants who recently completed the 24-month follow-up assessment were recruited into the CIRCLE study. To capture a family developmental period when rates of IPA remain high (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012; Quigley & Leonard, 1996; Straus & Stewart, 1999), attempts were made to recruit participants into the CIRCLE study at approximately child age 30 months, thus measuring family aggression when children were approximately 2.5 to 3.5 years of age. With the exception of one participant who completed the first interview when his child was 47 months of age, the average child age at initiation of the CIRCLE study was 31.86 months ( $SD = 2.70$ , range = 25 - 38).

Participants who accepted the invitation to complete the CIRCLE study and completed at least one interview ( $n = 203$ ) did not differ from those who declined the invitation or never completed the first interview in terms of race/ethnicity, age, education, number hours worked per week, family income, or intervention group status. Based on data gathered at the child age 24-month follow-up assessment, participants who accepted versus declined participation did not differ in terms of perpetration of

psychological IPA or physical IPA.

Participants were asked to individually complete four telephone interviews during which the CIRCLE interview was administered. Because aggression that occurred during the prior 13 weeks was assessed, interviews could not be scheduled less than 13 weeks (91 days) apart. Time lags naturally occurred between each interview such that the four interviews covered 52 non-consecutive weeks. The median time between interviews ranged from 112 to 115 days. Participants were paid \$40 for each interview, plus a \$40 bonus for completion of all four interviews.

Following completion of all participants' CIRCLE interviews, participants' descriptions of the topics of IPA conflicts were coded by trained undergraduate research assistants.

**Non-identifiable data collection.** Because interviews assessed parent-to-child aggression (PCA) and severe physical IPA, both of which might necessitate reports to child protection services, a system was utilized for non-identifiable data collection. In brief, at the beginning of each interview, interviewers were given a piece of paper that included the participant's phone number and gender. As soon as the interview began (using a telephone that did not store numbers of placed calls), the paper was shredded. The interviewer manager immediately recorded completion of the interview (using a two-week interval rather than a date), deleted a 20-digit participant ID number from the calendar of scheduled interviews, and mailed the participant's payment without observation of the participant's name or address. During the interviews, participants answered three personal, but non-identifying, questions used to merge their data across the four interviews. No redundancies were obtained across participants, thus allowing each interview to be linked within each participant. Participants answered the same three questions about their partners, which allowed partners to be linked within couples. Participants were informed of the conditions under which they might be identified (e.g., the first participants to complete the study). When abusive behaviors were reported, interviewers urged participants to seek services and offered to assist in the process. Participants were reminded of available services after each interview, both during the telephone calls and in the form of local resource lists included with payments.

**Attrition.** Most participants (65%;  $n = 132$ ) completed all four interviews, while 14% ( $n = 28$ ) completed three interviews, 10% ( $n = 21$ ) completed two interviews, and 11% ( $n = 22$ ) completed only one interview. Only three participants (two from the same couple) actively withdrew from the study; the remaining cases of attrition were a function of repeatedly not being able to contact participants to schedule or complete interviews. In total, 677 interviews were completed.

Participants who completed all four CIRCLE interviews did not differ from those who did not in terms of race/ethnicity, age, education, income, number hours worked per week, or intervention group status. Based on the child age 24-month assessment, these groups also did not differ in terms of perpetration of psychological or physical IPA (details available upon request).

## Measures

**Demographic characteristics.** During the first Family Foundations study assessment (i.e., during pregnancy), participants reported on personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and years of education. During the child age 24 months assessment of the Family Foundations study, participants again reported on their age, average hours spent working outside the home, and family income.

**Division of Labor Dissatisfaction and Division of Childcare Dissatisfaction.** Participants' division of labor dissatisfaction and division of childcare dissatisfaction were assessed during the Family Foundations study when the child was approximately 24 months of age using items from the Who Does What scales developed by Cowan and Cowan (1988). This measure was designed to assess partners' division of labor involving household tasks and childcare, and their satisfaction with the way tasks are divided.

*Division of labor dissatisfaction* was assessed using a single item that asked, "In general, how satisfied are you with the way you and your partner divide the family tasks?" The item is rated on a 1-5 Likert scale with 1 indicating very dissatisfied and 5 indicating very satisfied. This item was then reverse scored so that higher scores represented greater dissatisfaction.



*Division of childcare dissatisfaction* was assessed using a 15-item subscale that lists tasks such as, “preparing meals for our child,” “deciding whether or how to respond to our child’s crying,” and “playing with our child.” For each task, participants rate items on a 1-7 Likert scale, with 1 indicating the mother does all of the task, 4 indicating the members of the couple do the task equally, and 7 indicating that the father does all of the task. Each participant rates how the tasks are currently divided within the household (i.e., “how it is now”), as well as how they would like tasks to be divided within the household (i.e., “how I would like it to be”). A scale for partners’ division of childcare dissatisfaction is computed by subtracting the participants’ “how I would like it to be” (ideal) score from their “how it is now” (actual) score. This creates a difference score with positive scores indicating that the partner wants the female partner to do more and negative scores indicating that the partner wants the male partner to do more. Traditionally, the absolute value of the difference score is used to represent role satisfaction (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). However, the role satisfaction score does not account for whether dissatisfaction is due to a desire for one’s partner to engage in more childcare tasks or a desire to engage in more childcare tasks oneself. For the current study, scores were recoded so the values are relative to partners’ own desire to do more or less. Thus, positive scores indicate that one wants their partner to do more and negative scores indicate that one wants their partner to do less (or wants to do more themselves). More positive scores on this scale represent more division of childcare dissatisfaction. In this sample, division of childcare dissatisfaction scores yielded  $\alpha = .76$  and  $\alpha = .85$  for women and men, respectively. The correlation between division of labor dissatisfaction and division of childcare dissatisfaction was significant for women ( $r = 0.46, p < .001$ ), but was not significant for men ( $r = -.03, p = .805$ ).

**Intimate Partner Aggression.** Couple conflict topics and IPA were assessed using the Children, Intimate Relationships, and Conflictual Life Events (CIRCLE) interview (Marshall et al., 2017). The CIRCLE interview uses an event history calendar methodology to measure incidents of psychological and physical IPA and psychological and physical PCA, though the current study focuses only on data

regarding IPA. Data derived from the CIRCLE interview has been shown to exhibit a relatively high degree of inter-partner concordance of reports of IPA, good structural and predictive validity, and convergent validity with, as well as incremental validity over, traditionally measured self-report aggression estimates (Marshall et al., 2017). Further, Marshall and colleagues found that aggression reports via repeated testing were not influenced by time (i.e., wave of interview), social desirability, or attempts to avoid aggression because of study participation. Participants who perceived enhanced memory for aggression as a function of study participation reported increasing aggression frequencies over time (Marshall et al., 2017).

During Part I of each telephone-administered interview, participants note on a provided calendar the dates being assessed (the prior 13 weeks), days of personal significance (e.g., holidays, illnesses, work stressors), and days of no face-to-face contact with their partners and children. Interviewers record the same days and events to help administer the interviews. Using these events to aid memory, participants work backwards in time to review all incidents of self- and partner-perpetrated psychological and/or physical aggression that occurred during the prior 13 weeks. For incidents of IPA, participants are provided a list of aggressive behaviors from the CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996) and are urged to consider additional aggressive acts not listed. For each aggressive incident, they report the topic of the conflict as well as each type of aggressive behavior, and the order, victim, and perpetrator of each aggressive behavior. Incidents are defined as terminated if emotional arousal and conflict behaviors returned near to baseline for one hour. Participants also identify “regular patterns” of aggression and, if present, report the usual conflict topic, order and perpetrator/victim of each aggressive behavior, and frequency of the pattern (with start and end dates if it did not occur continuously). When a regular pattern is reported, each incident within the regular pattern is not probed separately, rather the IPA and conflict topic information for the incidents within the regular pattern are summed, multiplied by the frequency of the regular pattern, and added to their IPA perpetration score from non-regular pattern IPA conflicts to create their total IPA perpetration score.

For Part II of the interview, three incidents are selected for review of the immediate context, antecedents, and consequences of aggression. Participants who identify at least three aggressive incidents also identify their most stressful or upsetting nonaggressive conflict. Participants who do not identify three incidents of aggression identify their most stressful or upsetting nonaggressive conflicts such that all participants review four incidents, at least one of which was nonaggressive. For the current study, only conflicts involving IPA were examined using information from Part I of the interview.

Administration of both parts of the interview and debriefing takes approximately 45 minutes. Interviewers (clinical psychology graduate students) were trained to administer the interview and respond to participant distress and disclosures using a behaviorally-based manual and interview protocol, role plays, group discussions, and live interviews with pilot participants.

**Topics of IPA Conflicts.** A coding system was developed to categorize the topics of IPA conflicts reported during the CIRCLE interview. Because this is the first study of its kind, a data-driven open coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to determine if constructs other than those theorized emerged from the data. The open coding procedure began by examining 10 percent of the data to determine what themes emerged to characterize the types of conflicts participants reported experiencing. Once the themes were established, they were organized into categories. The category constructs were then incorporated into a theoretically driven coding approach, including issues of interparental division of labor, specifically division of household chores and childcare, as well as issues not specifically related to division of labor, which are further described below.

Once the final set of coding categories was developed, a manual with descriptions of all of the codes was created and used to train undergraduate research assistants as coders. Coders were blind to whether or not the conflict led to IPA or the number of IPA behaviors that occurred. Coders were

instructed to code each conflict topic into a primary category, but they were allowed to assign up to four additional category codes if deemed applicable.

Division of labor and division of childcare constructs are broadly divided into conflicts regarding decisions of partners' responsibility for tasks versus partners' performance of tasks. *Division of labor conflicts* are comprised of code categories: 1) Household Labor Decisions, which includes conflicts about decisions regarding partners' responsibility for household chores and delegation of tasks that involved taking care of the home that do not involve childcare (e.g., cleaning, cooking, laundry, repairs, paying bills), and 2) Household Labor Performance, which includes conflicts about partners' performance of household chores and dissatisfaction with partners' participation in chores. *Division of childcare conflicts* are comprised of code categories: 3) Coparenting (i.e., the process through which partners negotiate their respective roles, responsibilities, and contributions to their children; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001), which includes conflicts regarding decisions about how to administer discipline, delegation of responsibilities to the child, and negotiation of which partner will take responsibility for certain aspects of childcare, and 4) Childcare Performance, which includes conflicts about partners' performance of childcare tasks, discipline, taking time off from work to care for the child or take child to appointments, etc. Conflict topics were additionally coded for issues regarding: whole family decisions that were not related to parenting; vacations, parties, and activities; finances; in-laws and extended family; child misbehavior when the child's actions are not reported to be related to parents' behavior; child aggression when the child's actions are not reported to be related to parents' behavior; family prioritization of time for non-childcare activities; accidents; partner jealousy; couples' sexual relationship; couples' relationship support; partners' self-care; partners' inconsideration; partners' beliefs; illness; and work stress. For the purpose of the current project, these latter conflict topics will be grouped together into a category of "non-division of labor or childcare conflicts."

The same three coders categorized each conflict topic. A conflict was designated into a category when at least two raters coded it into the same category. Conflicts that were not coded into the same

category by two or more raters were coded as having “not enough information” and were not included in the main analyses (6.85% of conflicts). Intraclass correlations for each conflict category ranged from .92 to .93.

### **Statistical Analyses**

A series of analyses were used to test the impact of division of household labor and division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA perpetration across all IPA conflicts, IPA conflicts specifically regarding division of household labor, and IPA conflicts specifically regarding division of childcare, as well as the effect of gender on these associations. First, total IPA perpetration scores for each partner were computed using the sum of participants' reports of their own IPA across conflict incidents, such that each act of IPA was added to compute a total IPA perpetration score (e.g., two yells, one insult, and one slap equals a IPA score of four). These scores were adjusted to account for the number of interviews completed, such that the total number of IPA acts reported were divided by the number of interviews completed, then multiplied by four to create the final total IPA perpetration score. Next, IPA perpetration scores were computed separately for conflicts regarding division of household labor, conflicts regarding division of childcare, non-division of household labor conflicts, and non-division of childcare conflicts. IPA scores from division of labor conflicts were aggregated to compute the total division of labor IPA score; the IPA scores for the remaining conflicts were then aggregated to compute the total non-division of labor IPA score. The process was repeated for division of childcare such that IPA scores from division of childcare conflicts were aggregated to compute the total division of childcare IPA score, then the IPA scores for the remaining conflicts were aggregated to compute the total non-division of childcare IPA score. If a conflict was coded as not having enough information, the IPA score from that incident was not included for the separate types of conflicts. Three to five outliers were winsorized for each IPA perpetration outcome variable.

Descriptive analyses were computed to determine the frequencies of each type of conflict category and average number of aggressive behaviors perpetrated during each type of conflict. Bivariate

correlations were computed to examine simple relationships among division of labor dissatisfaction, division of childcare dissatisfaction, and IPA severity across division of labor conflicts, division of childcare conflicts, non-division of labor conflicts, and non-division of childcare conflicts. In order to avoid issues of dependency within couples, all descriptive and correlational analyses were run separately for women and men.

Due to the hierarchical structure of the data (partners nested within couples), multilevel regression analyses were conducted using the hierarchical linear modeling program HLM 7.01 (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2013) to examine the four primary study hypotheses. Because the IPA variables were positively skewed behavior counts, a Poisson distribution with a correction for overdispersion was used.

A two level model was used to test the hypothesis (1) that division of labor dissatisfaction would be positively associated with the number of IPA behaviors perpetrated across all aggressive conflicts, using the following equations:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + r_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{division of labor dissatisfaction}) + r_{ij} \quad (2)$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

In the above equations,  $Y_{ij}$  represents the dependent variable of partners' total IPA during all conflicts, and  $j$  represents the couple to which the partner  $i$  belongs. First, a variance decomposition null model (1) was created with no predictors at Level 1 or Level 2 to establish the amount of variance that resides within-couples, at the person-level (Level 1) and the amount of variance that resides between-couples (Level 2).  $\beta_{0j}$  represented whether the intercepts differed across the  $j$  couples enough for significant variance to be predicted across the couples. Next, a model (2) was created with a Level 1

predictor,  $\beta_{1j}$  that represents whether the slopes differ across  $i$  partners. In other words, do partners differ in overall IPA perpetration (i.e., differences in intercepts), and does division of labor dissatisfaction predict IPA perpetration differently across partners (i.e., differences in slopes)? Two models were additionally created to test whether the effect of division of labor dissatisfaction on IPA varied depending on the type of conflict. In one model,  $Y_{ij}$  was replaced by IPA in division of labor conflicts and in the other model  $Y_{ij}$  was replaced by IPA in conflicts not involving division of labor. In all models, the Level 2 model accounted for systematic variability due to partners being nested within couples.

To test the hypothesis (2) that greater division of labor dissatisfaction would be associated with a greater amount of IPA perpetration in aggressive conflicts about division of labor than in conflicts about other topics, a multivariate multilevel regression model was used to model both dependent variables simultaneously, while imposing equality constraints to control for associations between each dependent variable (Hox, 2010). The following equation was used:

$$Y_{hij} = \beta_{0j} + d_{0ij}\beta_{1j} \text{ (division of labor dissatisfaction)} + \quad (3)$$

$$d_{1ij}\beta_{1j} \text{ (division of labor dissatisfaction)} + r_{ij}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$Y_{hij}$  represented the two dependent variables of IPA perpetration severity during  $h$  type of conflicts for partner  $i$  in couple  $j$ . The model included two intercept dummies ( $d_{0ij}$  and  $d_{1ij}$ ), one for each dependent variable. The dummy variables allowed one dependent variable (i.e., the mean score of IPA perpetration severity during conflicts regarding division of labor  $d_{0ij}$ ) to be estimated with a value of one while the other (i.e., the mean score of IPA perpetration severity during conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor,  $d_{1ij}$ ) equaled zero, and vice versa. To determine whether the association between division of labor dissatisfaction and number of IPA behaviors is greater during conflicts about division of labor compared to conflicts about other topics, the strength of the predictor  $d_{0ij}\beta_{1j}$  was compared with  $d_{1ij}\beta_{1j}$ .

A two level model was used to test the hypothesis (3) that the association between division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA perpetration would be stronger for women than men during division of labor conflicts, using the following equations:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{division of labor dissatisfaction}) + \beta_{2j} (\text{gender}) + r_{ij} \quad (4)$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{division of labor dissatisfaction}) + \beta_{2j} (\text{gender}) + \beta_{3j} (\text{division of labor dissatisfaction X gender}) + r_{ij} \quad (5)$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

$$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30}$$

In the above models,  $Y_{ij}$  represented the number of IPA behaviors during division of labor conflicts. First, a model (4) was created with  $\beta_{1j}$  representing individuals' division of labor dissatisfaction and  $\beta_{2j}$  representing gender. Next, a model (5) was created with the cross-product  $\beta_{3j}$  of division of labor dissatisfaction and gender added into the model. For both models, the Level 2 model accounted for systematic variability due to partners being nested within couples.

Exploratory analyses were conducted to examine whether the above pattern of results remained when specifically focusing on IPA in conflicts regarding division of childcare versus IPA in non-division of childcare conflicts, and division of childcare dissatisfaction, gender, and the interaction of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender. To conduct the exploratory analyses, the division of labor dissatisfaction predictor was replaced with division of childcare dissatisfaction and  $Y_{ij}$  representing IPA in division of labor conflicts was replaced with the dependent variable of IPA in conflicts regarding



childcare and  $Y_{ij}$  representing IPA in conflicts about topics other than division of labor was replaced with the dependent variable of IPA in conflicts about topics other than childcare in the above models (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

## Chapter 3

### Results

Examination of aggressive conflict incidents revealed that 10% of conflicts pertained to division of labor issues, 16% pertained to division of childcare issues, and 74% pertained to non-division of labor or childcare issues. The most frequent specific conflict topics were: vacations, parties, and activities (19%), in-laws and extended family (9%), coparenting (8%), childcare performance (7%), and work stress (7%). The frequencies of the full set of conflict topic categories can be seen in Figure 1.

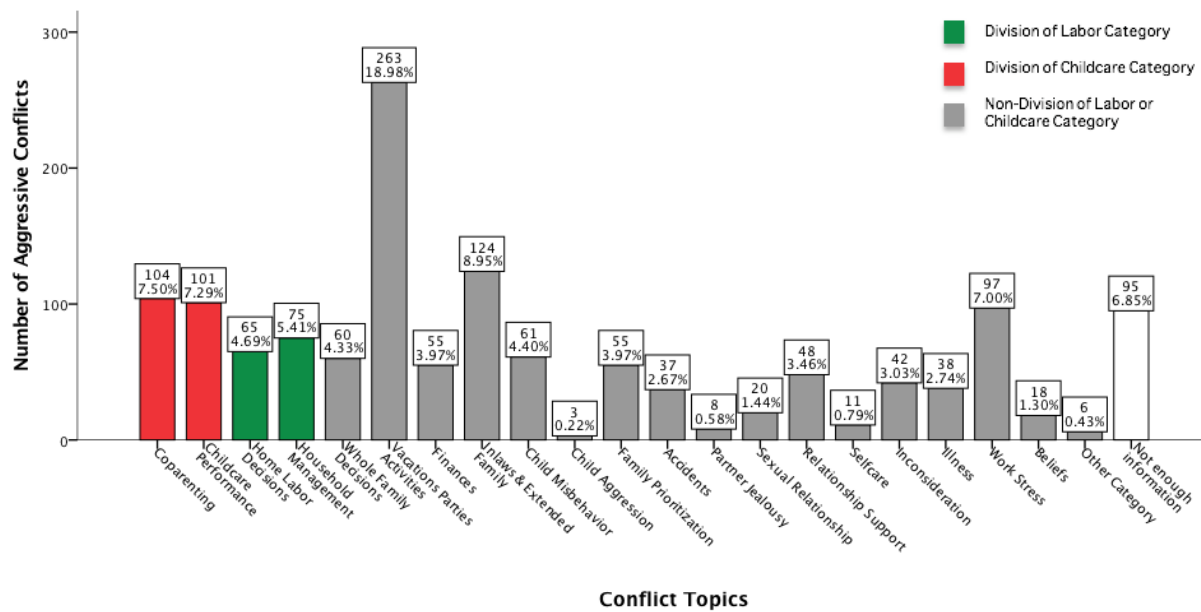


Figure 1. Frequencies of conflict topic categories.

Table 1 includes the means and standard deviations for the variables used in the main analyses. Women reported engaging more IPA acts ( $M = 40.02$ ,  $SD = 41.80$ ) than men reported ( $M = 23.12$ ,  $SD = 33.13$ ) across all conflict topics,  $t = -2.86$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $d = 0.43$ . Similarly, in non-division of labor conflicts, women reported engaging in more IPA acts ( $M = 24.04$ ,  $SD = 23.02$ ) than men reported engaging in ( $M =$

14.32,  $SD = 17.60$ ),  $t = -2.84$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.48$ . This was also the case for non-division of childcare conflicts, such that women reported engaging more IPA acts ( $M = 27.53$ ,  $SD = 28.15$ ) than men reported ( $M = 16.61$ ,  $SD = 21.32$ ),  $t = -2.70$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.44$ . In contrast, the number of IPA acts that men and women reported engaging in during division of labor conflicts and division of childcare conflicts was not significantly different. In division of labor conflicts, women reported engaging in an average of 18 IPA acts ( $M = 17.74$ ,  $SD = 23.40$ ) and men reported engaging in an average of 11 IPA acts ( $M = 11.39$ ,  $SD = 19.12$ ),  $t = -1.48$ ,  $p = .115$ ,  $d = 0.30$ . In division of childcare conflicts, women reported engaging in an average of 14 IPA acts ( $M = 14.00$ ,  $SD = 21.26$ ) and men reported engaging in an average of 10 IPA acts ( $M = 9.70$ ,  $SD = 16.34$ ),  $t = -0.99$ ,  $p = .319$ ,  $d = 0.23$ . Women reported experiencing similar levels of division of labor dissatisfaction ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) as men ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ),  $t = -1.31$ ,  $p = .192$ ,  $d = 0.19$ . Women's average division of childcare dissatisfaction difference score ( $M = 0.50$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) indicated that on average women wanted their partners to do more (as indicated by 87% of women), while men's average division of childcare dissatisfaction score ( $M = -0.34$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) indicated that they typically wanted their partners to do less (as indicated by 75% of men),  $t = -10.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.58$ .

Table 1. Descriptive information.

|  | Women    |           |          |                        | Men      |           |          |                        |
|--|----------|-----------|----------|------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|------------------------|
|  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>Total Incidents</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>Total Incidents</i> |
| Total number of IPA acts                     | 40.02    | 41.80     | 87       | 689                    | 23.12    | 33.13     | 74       | 449                    |
| Total number of IPA acts in DoL conflicts    | 17.74    | 23.40     | 58       | 181                    | 11.39    | 19.12     | 41       | 118                    |
| Total number of IPA acts in DoC conflicts    | 14.00    | 21.26     | 46       | 122                    | 9.70     | 16.34     | 30       | 69                     |
| Total number of IPA acts in NonDoL conflicts | 24.04    | 23.02     | 75       | 424                    | 14.32    | 17.60     | 66       | 282                    |
| Total number of IPA acts in NonDoC conflicts | 27.53    | 28.15     | 80       | 483                    | 16.61    | 21.32     | 71       | 331                    |
| Division of labor dissatisfaction            | 2.24     | 0.97      | --       | --                     | 2.06     | 0.90      | --       | --                     |
| Actual division of childcare                 | 3.05     | 0.76      | --       | --                     | 3.32     | 0.67      | --       | --                     |
| Ideal division of childcare                  | 3.54     | 0.50      | --       | --                     | 3.66     | 0.45      | --       | --                     |
| Division of childcare dissatisfaction        | 0.50     | 0.53      | --       | --                     | -0.34    | 0.53      | --       | --                     |

*Notes.* DoL = division of labor, NonDoL = non-division of labor, DoC = division of childcare, NonDoC = non-division of childcare.

Actual and Ideal division of childcare = scores below 4 equal women do more, scores above 4 equal men do more. Division of childcare dissatisfaction: + scores = individual wants their partner to do more, - scores = individual wants their partner to do less.

Sample includes 109 women and 94 men.

Bivariate correlations were conducted separately for women and men using the same analytic subgroups as the multilevel regression models (i.e., only among partners from couples in which both partners reported on predictor variables and endorsed the indicated aggression outcome variables). Among couples in which both partners reported IPA in division of labor conflicts ( $n = 27$ ), women's division of labor dissatisfaction was marginally positively associated with their own IPA perpetration in division of labor conflicts ( $r = .37, p = .067$ ) and men's division of labor dissatisfaction was positively associated with their own IPA perpetration in division of labor conflicts ( $r = .39, p = .049$ ). Among couples in which both partners reported IPA in non-division of labor conflicts ( $n = 51$ ), women's division of labor dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with their own IPA perpetration in non-division of labor conflicts ( $r = .15, p = .304$ ) and men's division of labor dissatisfaction was negatively associated with their own IPA perpetration non-division of labor conflicts ( $r = -.29, p = .039$ ). Among couples in which both partners reported IPA in division of childcare conflicts ( $n = 19$ ), women's division of childcare dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with their own IPA perpetration in division of childcare conflicts ( $r = .23, p = .359$ ) and men's division of childcare dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with their own IPA perpetration in division of childcare conflicts ( $r = -.11, p = .672$ ). Among couples in which both partners reported IPA in non-division of childcare conflicts ( $n = 58$ ), women's division of childcare dissatisfaction was positively associated with their own IPA perpetration non-division of childcare conflicts ( $r = .27, p = .041$ ) and men's division of childcare dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with their own IPA perpetration non-division of childcare conflicts ( $r = .10, p = .461$ ).

### **Multilevel regression of division of labor dissatisfaction on IPA**

Examination of the variance components in the variance decomposition null model indicated that there was significant variability to be predicted across couples ( $\chi^2(97) = 490.45, p = .001$ ). Thus, a multilevel model was created to examine whether division of labor dissatisfaction predicted IPA across all conflict topics. There was a positive association between division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA ( $B = 0.24, t = 2.00, p = .050$ ), such that higher division of labor dissatisfaction was associated with a greater

number of IPA behaviors. When IPA was examined in separate analyses by type of conflict topic, division of labor dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with IPA in conflicts regarding division of labor, ( $B = 0.16, t = 0.78, p = .444$ ) or conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor ( $B = 0.22, t = 1.45, p = .154$ ). As seen in Table 2, when both outcome variables were included in the model at the same time to simultaneously compare the strength of the predictor variable on each outcome using a multivariate multilevel analysis, division of labor dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with IPA in conflicts regarding division of labor ( $B = 0.08, t = 0.53, p = .595$ ). However, there was a trend toward a positive association between division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA in conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor ( $B = 0.25, t = 1.95, p = .054$ ).

Table 2. Multivariate multilevel model including division of labor dissatisfaction to predict IPA in conflicts regarding division of labor and conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor.

| Outcome variables       |                     | B    | SE   | t                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------|------|-------------------|
| Intercept               |                     | 2.81 | 0.10 | 28.84***          |
| IPA in DoL conflicts    | DoL dissatisfaction | 0.08 | 0.15 | 0.53              |
| IPA in NonDoL conflicts | DoL dissatisfaction | 0.25 | 0.13 | 1.95 <sup>†</sup> |

*Notes.* DoL = Division of labor, NonDoL = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor. Both outcomes were included in the model at the same time. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. t = t-statistic.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Multilevel regression of division of labor dissatisfaction and gender on IPA

Table 3 contains the results of separate multilevel analyses that examined how division of labor dissatisfaction, gender, and the interaction between division of labor dissatisfaction and gender predict IPA in division of labor conflicts and how they predict IPA in non-division of labor conflicts. Division of

labor dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with IPA in division of labor conflicts, nor was gender or the interaction between division of labor dissatisfaction and gender. In contrast, gender as well as the interaction between division of labor dissatisfaction and gender both emerged as significant predictors of IPA in non-division of labor conflicts. This showed that women engaged in a greater number of IPA acts during non-division of labor conflicts than men, and higher division of labor dissatisfaction was associated with a greater number of IPA behaviors among women compared to men. This pattern of results was also supported in a multivariate multilevel analysis that was used to simultaneously examine the prediction of IPA in division of labor and non-division of labor conflicts by men's and women's division of labor dissatisfaction. As displayed in Table 4, division of labor dissatisfaction significantly predicted IPA in non-division of labor conflicts for women, but not for men. There was not a significant relationship between women's or men's division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA in division of labor conflicts.

Table 3. Multilevel regression of division of labor dissatisfaction and gender on IPA.

| Outcome variable     | Predictor variable           | B    | SE   | t        |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------|------|----------|
| IPA DoL conflicts    | Intercept                    | 2.60 | 0.18 | 14.68*** |
|                      | DoL dissatisfaction          | 0.14 | 0.15 | 0.93     |
|                      | Gender                       | 0.17 | 0.17 | 1.02     |
|                      | DoL dissatisfaction X Gender | 0.11 | 0.21 | 0.52     |
| IPA NonDoL conflicts | Intercept                    | 2.91 | 0.10 | 29.02*** |
|                      | DoL dissatisfaction          | 0.04 | 0.11 | 0.33     |
|                      | Gender                       | 0.63 | 0.14 | 4.61***  |
|                      | DoL dissatisfaction X Gender | 0.22 | 0.09 | 2.47*    |

*Notes.* DoL = Division of labor, NonDoL = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. t = t-statistic. Gender coded as Women = 2, Men = 1.

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

Table 4. Multivariate multilevel regression of women and men's division of labor dissatisfaction on IPA in division of labor conflicts and non-division of labor conflicts.

| Outcome variables       |                             | B     | SE   | t        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|----------|
| Intercept               |                             | 2.79  | 0.10 | 28.10*** |
| IPA in DoL conflicts    | Women's DoL dissatisfaction | 0.04  | 0.15 | 0.24     |
| IPA in DoL conflicts    | Men's DoL dissatisfaction   | -0.07 | 0.14 | -0.47    |
| IPA in NonDoL conflicts | Women's DoL dissatisfaction | 0.27  | 0.09 | 2.88**   |
| IPA in NonDoL conflicts | Men's DoL dissatisfaction   | 0.01  | 0.09 | 0.14     |

*Notes.* DoL = Division of labor, NonDoL = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of labor. Both outcomes were included in the model at the same time. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. t = t-statistic.

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

### Multilevel regression of division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA

Division of childcare dissatisfaction was significantly positively associated with IPA in all conflict topics ( $B = 0.36$ ,  $t = 3.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ), such that desire for more partner engagement in childcare was associated with use of more acts of IPA when examined across all types of conflict. In division of childcare conflicts, desire for more partner engagement in childcare was associated with use of somewhat more acts of IPA, although the size of this effect did not reach a traditional threshold of statistical significance ( $B = 0.28$ ,  $t = 1.96$ ,  $p = .067$ ). In conflicts about topics other than childcare, desire for more partner engagement in childcare was associated with use of more acts of IPA ( $B = 0.55$ ,  $t = 4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As displayed in Table 5, when both outcome variables were included in the model at the same time using a multivariate multilevel analysis, division of childcare dissatisfaction was not significantly associated with IPA in conflicts regarding division of childcare. However, in conflicts regarding topics other than division of childcare, there was a significant positive association between division of childcare dissatisfaction and IPA, such that desire for more partner engagement in childcare was associated with more acts of IPA.



Table 5. Multivariate multilevel of division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA in division of childcare conflicts and non-division of childcare conflicts.

| Outcome variables       |                     | B    | SE   | t        |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------|------|----------|
| Intercept               |                     | 2.89 | 0.09 | 30.56*** |
| IPA in DoC conflicts    | DoC dissatisfaction | 0.09 | 0.17 | 0.53     |
| IPA in NonDoC conflicts | DoC dissatisfaction | 0.56 | 0.12 | 4.76***  |

*Notes.* DoC = Division of childcare, NonDoC = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of childcare. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. DoC dissatisfaction: + scores = individual wants their partner to do more, - scores = individual wants their partner to do less.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Multilevel regression of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender on IPA

Table 6 contains the results of separate multilevel analyses examining how division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender predict IPA in division of childcare conflicts and IPA in non-division of childcare conflicts. In conflicts about division of childcare, division of childcare dissatisfaction was marginally associated with IPA and gender was not significantly associated with IPA. In conflicts about non-division of childcare topics, division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender were both significant predictors of IPA, such that women engaged in more IPA during non-division of childcare conflicts than men and higher desire for partner engagement in childcare was associated with a greater number of IPA behaviors. In both sets of analyses that examined IPA in division of childcare and IPA in non-division of childcare conflicts, the interaction of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender was not significantly associated with IPA ( $p = .889$  and  $p = .528$ , respectively), so it was removed from the models. As displayed in Table 7, when examining the impact of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender on IPA in division of childcare conflicts and non-division of childcare conflicts at the same time, only

women's desire for more partner engagement in childcare predicted women's engagement in a greater number of acts of IPA in non-division of labor conflicts. There was not a significant relationship between women's division of childcare dissatisfaction and IPA in conflicts regarding division of childcare, nor was there a significant relationship between men's division of childcare dissatisfaction and IPA in either type of conflict. Notably, this pattern of results remained when division of childcare dissatisfaction was calculated from Cowan and Cowan's traditional role satisfaction score, where higher discrepancies between partners' actual and ideal division of childcare tasks represent less role satisfaction (1988). These results are included in Appendix A.

Table 6. Multilevel regression of division of childcare dissatisfaction and gender on IPA.

| Outcome variable     | Predictor variable  | B     | SE   | t                 |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|------|-------------------|
| IPA DoC conflicts    | Intercept           | 2.45  | 0.22 | 10.94***          |
|                      | DoC dissatisfaction | 0.45  | 0.23 | 1.93 <sup>†</sup> |
|                      | Gender              | -0.27 | 0.21 | -1.30             |
| IPA NonDoC conflicts | Intercept           | 3.06  | 0.10 | 29.49***          |
|                      | DoC dissatisfaction | 0.37  | 0.14 | 2.60*             |
|                      | Gender              | 0.30  | 0.15 | 2.01*             |

*Notes.* DoC = Division of childcare, NonDoC = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of childcare. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. Gender coded as Women = 2, Men = 1. DoC dissatisfaction: + scores = individual wants their partner to do more, - scores = individual wants their partner to do less.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 7. Multivariate multilevel regression of women and men's division of childcare dissatisfaction on IPA in division of childcare conflicts and non-division of childcare conflicts.

| Outcome variables       |                             | B     | SE   | t        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|----------|
| Intercept               |                             | 2.88  | 0.09 | 30.35*** |
| IPA in DoC conflicts    | Women's DoC dissatisfaction | -0.07 | 0.44 | 0.17     |
| IPA in DoC conflicts    | Men's DoC dissatisfaction   | 0.68  | 0.54 | 1.27     |
| IPA in NonDoC conflicts | Women's DoC dissatisfaction | 0.74  | 0.18 | 4.13***  |
| IPA in NonDoC conflicts | Men's DoC dissatisfaction   | 0.24  | 0.22 | 1.09     |

*Notes.* DoC = Division of childcare, NonDoC = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of childcare. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. + scores = individual wants their partner to do more, - scores = individual wants their partner to do less.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Chapter 4

### Discussion

Existing literature suggests that dissatisfaction with the way partners divide household labor is related to negative relationship outcomes (e.g., couple conflict, divorce; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Kluwer, Heesink, & Vliert, 1996), and that mothers typically experience greater division of labor dissatisfaction than fathers, both in general during their relationships and specifically during the transition to parenthood (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Twenge et al., 2003). Women's division of labor dissatisfaction has been associated with a variety of negative outcomes (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Kluwer et al., 1996), but it is unclear whether men's division of labor dissatisfaction contributes to negative outcomes. Previous research also has not explored whether division of labor dissatisfaction is associated with severity of IPA perpetration. The current study is the first to directly examine the relationship between women's and men's division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA severity, and the first to test whether this relationship differs according to the content of the conflict (i.e., whether the conflict was about division of labor issues or issues other than division of labor). Understanding of whether division of labor dissatisfaction is associated with the use of IPA only within conflicts specifically about division of labor topics or regardless of conflict topic is necessary to determine the causal process through which division of labor dissatisfaction may result in IPA. These questions were addressed among a sample of couples who recently transitioned to parenthood, which facilitated examination of whether the associations between division of labor dissatisfaction, gender, and IPA generalize to division of childcare dissatisfaction.

Division of labor dissatisfaction and division of childcare dissatisfaction were found to be positively associated with the number of IPA acts perpetrated. However, this result was specific to women's IPA in conflicts about topics other than division of household labor or childcare. In contrast, although men reported similar variability in division of labor and division of childcare dissatisfaction as

women and similar levels of division of labor dissatisfaction as women, men's dissatisfaction levels were not significantly associated with their IPA perpetration. The gendered pattern of results is consistent with literature suggesting that women's relationship behaviors are more strongly affected by division of labor dissatisfaction during the transition to parenthood than men's relationship behaviors (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Kluwer et al., 1996). Mothers typically engage in disproportionate amount of cognitive and emotional labor compared to fathers (Craig, 2006; Walzer, 1996). Thus, mothers may engage in more IPA due to having less cognitive capacity to engage in relationship- and self-regulation strategies (Halford, Farrugia, Lizzio, & Wilson, 2010). This finding extends literature suggesting that the transition to parenthood and division of labor issues more strongly affect women than men (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Twenge et al., 2003), and gives support to the idea that women's division of labor and division of childcare dissatisfaction may partly underlie the increase in couple conflict, relationship dissatisfaction, and IPA during the transition to parenthood.

Contrary to expectations, results suggest that division of labor and division of childcare dissatisfaction are more strongly associated with women's IPA in non-division of labor or childcare conflicts than in conflicts about division of labor or childcare. Although this result is unexpected and counterintuitive, the effect may be due to dissatisfied women engaging in better communication and problem-solving skills during conflicts about division of household labor and childcare, but using worse communication and problem-solving skills in conflicts about non-division of labor topics. Previous research has suggested that partners' communication quality can vary depending on the topic of discussion and that some topics (e.g., couple closeness, personality, friends) are more difficult for partners to discuss than others (e.g., planning and decision making, children; Williamson, Hanna, Lavner, Bradbury, & Karney, 2013). Given that the women who participated in the current study were relatively high functioning (i.e., relatively high income and education levels) and participated in a study for first-time parents for the prior four years, they may have been better prepared to discuss their division of labor dissatisfaction and attempt to resolve division of household labor and childcare issues than issues about other topics that were less anticipated. If these women had difficulty effectively communicating and

resolving non-division of labor/childcare conflicts, frustration from lack of conflict resolution may have led to women's engagement in IPA (Berkowitz, 1989). Alternatively, IPA in non-division of household labor and childcare conflicts may have resulted from spillover of family tensions and emotions related to division of household labor and childcare dissatisfaction (Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996). For example, women may drain their cognitive resources while engaging in emotional labor in attempt to actively work with their partners to resolve tangible division of household labor and childcare issues, but this emotional labor may leave women depleted and more prone to IPA when discussing less-expected non-division of labor/childcare issues (Grandey & Melloy, 2017).

Division of childcare dissatisfaction may function differently than division of household labor dissatisfaction, as division of childcare dissatisfaction generally predicted IPA across all conflict topics regardless of gender (while division of labor dissatisfaction did not) and tended to have stronger effects among separate types of division of labor and childcare conflicts, compared to division of labor dissatisfaction. Division of childcare among new parents is a highly salient and stressful issue, and is potentially more difficult to negotiate than division of household labor (Craig, 2006). Related, the novel demands of childcare must be repeatedly renegotiated between parents as the child develops, requiring parents to continually take on new and changing roles (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Frequent exposure to stress can result in deficits in cognitive processing, which has been found to decrease likelihood of helping and problem solving behaviors, while increasing likelihood of aggression (Christensen & Pasch, 1993). Alternatively, in the current study, division of childcare dissatisfaction was assessed with a more nuanced measure than that of division of labor dissatisfaction (which was assessed with only a 1-item question). The difference in assessment may have allowed for division of childcare dissatisfaction to have more precision to predict IPA, thus yielding stronger prediction of IPA than division of labor dissatisfaction.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides a first step in understanding how IPA may be influenced by division of childcare and labor dissatisfaction in the context of changing roles of new parents, replication is necessary

before strong conclusions can be made. It is important to note that the CIRCLE interview was not designed to assess all conflicts (aggressive and non-aggressive), so conclusions cannot be drawn about the process that occurred during non-aggressive conflicts. As such, the current study could not determine what factors prevented some couples from engaging in IPA during conflicts about division of labor and childcare. Additionally, the CIRCLE interview methodology resulted in unequal numbers of incidents and participants per type of conflict. Participants reported fewer division of labor and childcare conflicts than non-division of labor or non-division of childcare conflicts. Although this was accounted for by the multivariate multilevel regression analyses, there may have been low power to detect significant results in the division of labor and childcare conflicts. Additionally, assessment of conflict topics allowed for open ended responses from participants, which likely resulted in random measurement error due to participants' difficulty with reporting on sensitive topics, along with lack of insight into the main issues preceding their aggressive responses. As such, it was not possible to reliably code some of the conflict topics when the topics reported were unclear or vague, and these incidents were not included in the analyses. As described, another limitation is that general division of household labor was assessed by one question, which did not allow for the precision of assessment that the division of childcare measure provided. Future studies should use division of household labor assessments that contain more items and allow participants to consider multiple aspects of division of labor in order to fully capture the construct of division of household labor dissatisfaction. Finally, as participants in the current study were relatively high functioning (i.e., high income, high SES) new parents in heterosexual relationships, who perpetrated low levels of physical IPA, results of the study may only generalize to similar populations. Further replication with more diverse and more violent samples is necessary. Given that the status quo is changing and couples are redefining gendered roles of parenthood, it would additionally be useful to examine whether the pattern of results changes depending on which parent is primary caregiver. It would be helpful to also investigate whether these division of labor processes occur among couples without children to learn whether this phenomenon is specific to parents or can generalize to all intimate couples.

## **Clinical Implications**

Despite these limitations, this study provides a number of important contributions for clinical practice and development of new interventions. Currently, a variety of prevention and intervention programs exist for new couples and expecting parents (e.g., PREP, Family Foundations; Feinberg & Kan, 2008; Markman & Floyd, 1980), but these programs do not specifically target IPA and have limited impact on reducing IPA (Kan & Feinberg, 2015; Whitaker, Murphy, Eckhardt, Hodges, & Cowart, 2013). Given that IPA that occurs during the early years of marriage tends to be persistent and contributes to other negative outcomes (O’Leary, 1999; Rogge & Bradbury, 1999), it is important to target IPA before couples develop patterns of aggressive conflict. Results of this study suggest that a focus on how to address division of household labor and childcare dissatisfaction would benefit couples, and new mothers in particular. It may be important for interventions to include psychoeducation on differences in gendered expectations for mothers and fathers and strategies for coping with and reconciling differences early in their coparenting relationship. It will be especially important for these programs to provide psychoeducation for couples on how consequences of division of household labor and childcare dissatisfaction can spillover to other areas of conflict, and how to effectively and nonaggressively resolve issues that arise in their relationship beyond issues of division of labor and childcare. Additionally, interventions can highlight how new mothers are particularly at risk for negative consequences from division of labor dissatisfaction and parenting stress, and researchers and practitioners can work to develop methods for reducing mothers’ stress, including how fathers can help with this process before conflicts escalate to IPA.

## **Summary**

This is the first study to link division of labor and division of childcare dissatisfaction to IPA severity. Given that rates of IPA peak during the transition to parenthood (Charles &



Perreira, 2007), examination of how division of labor and childcare dissatisfaction contribute to increased IPA can help explain why this peak occurs. Women's IPA behaviors were most impacted by division of labor and childcare dissatisfaction, which is consistent with previous literature on how women's relationship behaviors are negatively impacted by division of labor dissatisfaction, while men's relationship behaviors are not. Further, the investigation of how the relationships between division of labor and childcare dissatisfaction and IPA can vary depending on the topic of conflict sheds light on the indirect processes between division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA (i.e., division of labor and childhood dissatisfaction are more likely to predict IPA in non-division of labor conflicts than division of labor conflicts). The discovery that division of labor dissatisfaction and IPA are not directly linked through similar conflict context contradicts common assumptions that researchers and practitioners may hold. It is important that this information be spread to those working with couples, particularly couple therapists and interventionists, who may benefit from targeting treatment on resolving global issues of division of labor and childcare dissatisfaction rather than more narrow issues of specific conflicts about division of labor and childcare, which are likely less effective in preventing IPA.

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### Appendix

#### Multilevel regression results of childcare role dissatisfaction and gender on IPA.

| Outcome variable        | Predictor variable                     | B     | SE   | t        |
|-------------------------|--|-------|------|----------|
| IPA DoC conflicts       | Intercept                              | 2.46  | 0.22 | 11.14*** |
|                         | Childcare role dissatisfaction         | 0.24  | 0.34 | 0.71     |
|                         | Gender                                 | 0.23  | 0.19 | 1.17     |
| IPA NonDoC conflicts    | Intercept                              | 3.07  | 0.10 | 30.12*** |
|                         | Childcare role dissatisfaction         | 0.16  | 0.28 | 0.56     |
|                         | Gender                                 | 0.56  | 0.14 | 3.92***  |
|                         | Intercept                              | 2.88  | 0.09 | 30.52*** |
| IPA in DoC conflicts    | Women's Childcare role dissatisfaction | -0.09 | 0.45 | -0.19    |
| IPA in DoC conflicts    | Men's Childcare role dissatisfaction   | -0.68 | 0.56 | -1.23    |
| IPA in NonDoC conflicts | Women's Childcare role dissatisfaction | 0.76  | 0.19 | 3.97***  |
| IPA in NonDoC conflicts | Men's Childcare role dissatisfaction   | -0.08 | 0.25 | -0.30    |

*Notes.* DoC = Division of childcare, NonDoC = Conflicts regarding topics other than division of childcare. B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. Gender coded as Women = 2, Men = 1. Childcare role dissatisfaction: higher scores represent greater difference between actual and ideal division of childcare tasks.