“Why would straight people think of it if we don’t?”

Intimate partner abuse amongst women in same sex relationships

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise at this or any other University and that it is entirely my own work, except where acknowledged.

I agree that Trinity College library may lend a copy of this thesis upon request.

__________________________
Lynne Cahill
Summary

This thesis presents an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of intimate partner abuse between an adult sample of non-heterosexual women living in Ireland who experienced IPA in a female-to-female relationship. The research on which it is based is concerned with understanding the nature and the experience of intimate partner abuse. With a principal aim of capturing and representing the participants’ own unique views and subjective experiences, this thesis is also concerned with presenting an understanding of the broader societal contexts that ultimately shape and influence the subjective experiences of those women.

Utilising a qualitative methodological approach, an in-depth understanding of intimate partner abuse is achieved by engaging adult women. Situated within an interpretative phenomenological perspective, the research draws on qualitative data generated via semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 9 women who self-identified as having experienced intimate partner abuse in a previous same-sex relationship.

A major objective of this qualitative study was to generate in-depth knowledge and understanding of the nature, dynamics, and the impact of intimate partner abuse for non-heterosexual women. As such, this study explores how intimate partner abuse is experienced by non-heterosexual women, the impacts of such abuse, the help-seeking strategies in response to the abusive behaviour, and the participant perceptions of informal and formal supports. The research is particularly interested in ascertaining how women subjectively understood their experience of IPA by capturing, understanding, and interpreting their meaning-making processes.

Key findings emerging from this thesis suggest that non-heterosexual women are experiencing diverse forms of abusive behaviours from their female partners involving coercive control, physical, financial, identity, and sexual abuse, and incurring impacts during and post-relationships, and longer-term, that affect mental and physical well-being. Help-seeking is principally directed toward informal support options (friends), counselling services are the most sought formal support option while domestic violence services are the least sought option.

Key findings from this research further identify that stereotypical constructions of femininity, and societal perceptions of female-to-female relationships, and violence, negatively influence the familial and professional response to victims of female-to-female
intimate partner abuse. Specifically, two discourses, the heteronormative heterosexual public story of ‘domestic violence’ and the non-heterosexual story of a ‘lesbian utopia’ have contributed to the invisibility of female same sex intimate partner abuse. Discourses that construct ‘domestic violence’ as predominantly physical in nature involving primarily a male abuser and a female victim, and discourses that construct women, and female same sex relationships, as non-violent, passive, and egalitarian, serve to alienate, silence, and marginalise non-heterosexual victims of intimate partner abuse.

The study concludes by challenging the assumption that intimate partner abuse is a predominantly a heterosexual male-perpetrated/ female victim phenomenon. This thesis further asserts that a continued understanding of intimate partner abuse as a predominantly heterosexual phenomenon at the policy, research, and practice level, creates direct inequalities for non-heterosexual women and their access to appropriate service provision. Finally, this thesis advocates for a re-assessment of the current approach to the phenomenon of intimate partner abuse and challenges academics, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to return to the guiding principles and values of the anti-abuse, discrimination, and equal rights movements, to procure a service response that is inclusive of men and women in same sex and transgender relationships, and the heterosexual male victim experience.
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Glossary of Terms

**Bisexual**: term used to describe anyone sexually and romantically attracted to both males and females.

‘Coming out’ is the public act of declaring oneself lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It is important to remember that a person may be out in selected circumstances, such as to friends, but not to family, co-workers, or neighbours. The coming out process is never over for LGBT people, this is an ongoing, sometimes daily, decision and can cause the person significant stress.

**Gay**: a man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other men. The term is more commonly applied to men who self-identify as same-sex attracted, rather than men who have sex with men but do not self-identify as gay. While many women identify as gay, the term lesbian is commonly used to describe same-sex attracted women.

**Gender identity**: a person’s internal sense of whether one is male or female.

**Heterosexism**: is the presumption that heterosexuality is the norm or standard or is considered the ‘natural’ or superior sexual preference.

**Heteronormativity**: the assumption that heterosexuality and heterosexual norms are universal, or at least the only acceptable, conditions. Closely related to heterosexism, heteronormativity negatively affects LGBT people in a variety of ways, from actively oppressing those who do not fulfil heterosexual expectations to rendering them invisible.

**Heterosexual**: a person whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to people of the opposite sex.

**Homophobia**: describes a fear, dislike, or hatred of same-sex relationships, of gays and lesbians, and/or of one’s own feelings for individuals of the same gender.

**Internalised Homophobia**: For many people, regardless of sexual orientation, homophobia can be internal and not always recognised by the individual. However, internalised homophobia can and does cause many negative effects for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It can affect the way people see themselves and the way others

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Internalised homophobia often leads to denial of one’s true sexuality in situations that are threatening or require the individual to “come out”.

**Intersex**: stands for the spectrum of variations of sex characteristics that occur within the human species. It is a term used to describe individuals who are born with sex characteristics (chromosomes, genitals, and/or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time. ‘Intersex’ also stands for the acceptance of the physical fact that sex is a spectrum and that people with variations of sex characteristics other than male or female do exist.

**Lesbian**: a woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other women. This term often refers to women who are same-sex attracted rather than women who have sex with other women but do not self-identify as lesbian.

**LB**: acronym for lesbian and bisexual.

**LG**: acronym for lesbian and gay.

**LGB**: acronym for lesbian, gay and bisexual.

**LIPA**: acronym for lesbian intimate partner abuse.

**LGBT**: acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

**LGBTIQ**: acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer.

**Minority Stress**: Minority stress can be understood as a psychosocial stress derived from minority status. When applied to lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people, a minority stress model proposes that prejudice based on sexual orientation is stressful and may lead to adverse mental health outcomes.

**Sexual Orientation**: an umbrella term which describes the whole spectrum of sexual and emotional attraction, including the four most commonly used terms, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual.

**Sexual identity**: a person’s sense of identity defined in relation to the categories of sexual orientation, usually only using the four main terms, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual. Someone’s sexual identity may not necessarily match their sexual behaviour.

**Sexual minority**: a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from a majority in society.
**SSIPA:** acronym for same sex intimate partner abuse.

**Transgender:** an umbrella term to refer to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differ(s) from the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Queer:** is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual and/or not cis gender (cis gender is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth.)
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH, THEORY & CONTEXT

Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is a phenomenon that pervades societies worldwide (Krug, et al., 2002). Described as a ‘global public health problem’, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate that annually more than one million people lose their lives and suffer non-fatal injuries because of self-inflicted, interpersonal, or collective violence, with violence being the leading cause of deaths worldwide for those aged between 15-44 years (Ibid, 2002). A recent European study investigating the financial cost of IPA on State’s economies and societies estimated that EU countries spend €109 billion per year, with all gender-based violence costs estimated at €226 billion annually (Walby and Olive, 2014). The estimated annual cost of ‘domestic violence’ to the Irish economy is 2.2 billion euro. This figure was arrived at using EU estimated costs for each member state at €555 per citizen annually when policing, health bills, lost productivity and court procedures are measured.² The examination of what has been traditionally conceptualised as ‘domestic violence’ has evolved under the rubric of a feminist ideology, comprising the application of a gender-based analysis to understanding intimate partner abuse. Within this framework, women are characterised as victims and men as perpetrators (Dobash and Dobash, 2004).

Although the feminist gender-based analysis of IPA is the dominant lens applied to the field of IPA, the last forty years of research and practice has witnessed the emergence of other victim experiences, occurring outside of intimate heterosexual relationships and without the presence of a male perpetrator. More recent developments of the experiences of IPA include male heterosexual victim experiences (Corbally, 2015; Kieran McKeown & Kidd, 2002; Watson & Parsons, 2005) and IPA occurring in same sex relationship contexts (Lobel, 1986; Miner, 2013; Miner, 2003). Consequently, the number of studies examining IPA in same sex relationships has grown substantially (Edwards, et al., 2015). The international research community has made inroads to further understand this phenomenon, most notably in the US (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992), the UK (Barnes, 2013; Donovan

² Women’s Aid (‘The Economic Costs of Domestic Violence’, no date provided).
& Hester, 2014), Canada (Ristock, 2002), and Australia (Irwin, 2008). More recently, studies are emerging from European researchers within Macedonia and Serbia (Lozanoska, 2016), Italy (Primo & Meraviglia, 2016), and Spain (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015).³

The empirical evidence highlighting other victimisation experiences challenges the feminist analysis and long-established gender-based ideas about what constitutes an abusive relationship. However, this present research is not concerned with challenging established feminist perspectives that account for the experience of IPA; rather it aims to capture the subjective experience of IPA for non-heterosexual women perpetrated by their female partners.

This chapter begins by introducing this research, the aims and objectives, the research questions, the rationale underpinning the study, and where this study fits within the broader IPA debates. The operational definition for the current thesis is discussed along with current Irish definitions of IPA, and IPA definitions applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) samples. What follows is an account of the different theoretical frameworks conceived to understand the problem of IPA. The socio-cultural, legislative, and policy contexts related to this research are reviewed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the subsequent chapters to assist the reader in navigating the thesis.

1.1 The research context

This thesis is concerned with understanding the experience of intimate partner abuse for non-heterosexual women abused by a female partner. In the broadest terms, this research seeks to generate knowledge and understanding of the particular lived experience of women in Ireland who have experienced IPA from a female partner. The principal aim of the study is to capture and represent the participant’s unique and individual experience of IPA and how they made sense of their abusive experiences. Consequently, the thesis is also concerned with understanding the broader contexts that influenced the subjective experiences of the participants. Drawing on an interpretive constructionist epistemology, this research sets out to fulfil four key objectives:

³ Researchers from the University of Valencia, Spain conducted the first quantitative systematic review of lesbian IPA prevalence and correlates.
1. Document participants’ experience of IPA from a female partner;
2. Capture how women made sense of their abusive experience;
3. Illuminate the support services lesbian women access in response to an abusive relationship; and
4. Identify barriers and opportunities for lesbian women accessing and using support services.

This study represents the first in-depth qualitative exploration of female same sex IPA to be conducted in Ireland. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was chosen as the methodological tool to analyse the interview data from nine participants. The collection of this data took place between December 2015 and June 2016. Interviews were conducted in the East, North, South, South-East, West, and the midlands of Ireland, involving participants from a city, urban, and rural locations. The participant’s data was analysed over a seven-month period between July 2016 and January 2017.

1.1.1 The research rationale

Previous research, policy and practice in Ireland concerning IPA has tended to focus on heterosexual women who are victimised by male partners, family members, or other men (Clancy & Ward, 2005; COSC, 2011; Kelleher & O’Connor, 1995; Tánaiste, 1997; Watson & Parsons, 2005). The current research aimed to fill this gap in knowledge by contributing to the beginning of a theoretical knowledge base to understand the experience of female same sex IPA.

There is a clear rationale for the conduct of this study, primarily, the paucity of research on LGBT people in Ireland in general and a significant gap in knowledge and understanding of the issues that can affect this population (Mayock, et al., 2009). The current study focuses attention on the issue of lesbian intimate partner abuse (LIPA). The knowledge base in Ireland regarding lesbian women’s experience of IPA could be legitimately described as embryonic, with a dearth of empirical research available to describe this population’s experience of IPA. An examination of the national empirical base, reveals one unpublished
doctoral study (Miner, 2003), that specifically examined the experience of LIPA. The same author is responsible for the subsequent report data available in Ireland, commissioned by LGBT agencies, concerning LIPA (L,Inc, 2006; Miner, 2013).

The Irish empirical evidence available suggests that when studies engage with LGBT communities (Higgins et al., 2016; Mayock, et al., 2009), there is a tendency to focus on mental and physical health risks contextualised within a ‘minority stress’ framework (Meyer, 2003), where LGBT individuals are understood as an ‘at risk’ population (Ceatha, 2016). This approach also extends to the Irish policy landscape: ‘LGBT people are at a heightened risk of psychological distress because of the stresses created by stigmatisation, marginalisation, and discrimination’ (Health Service Executive, 2009a, p. 24).

Irish national studies (Higgins et al., 2016; Mayock et al., 2009) with LGBT samples capture the experience of emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, and identity abuse (using sexual orientation to control), yet reports do not establish if the abuse occurred in an intimate relationship. Instead, the abuse is contextualised as victimisation and harassment associated with having a non-heterosexual sexual orientation. In LGBT Lives, an Irish mixed-methods study (n=1100), 80 per cent of participants experienced verbal abuse, 40 per cent were threatened with physical violence, 34 per cent experienced the threat of being outed (identity abuse), 25 per cent were assaulted, and 9 per cent were attacked sexually (Mayock et al., 2009). The experience of ‘identity abuse’ (Donovan & Hester, 2014), also known as ‘homophobic control’ (Hart, 1986), is an abusive tactic that distinguishes the experience of same sex and heterosexual IPA. Respondents in Mayock et al.’s (2009) study were asked about their experiences of harassment and victimisation in ‘any setting’. Assuming LGBT individual’s experience of violence is occurring in contexts outside of intimate relationships obscures our knowledge of the contexts in which this population experience violence and abuse.

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4 Described as a mixed-methods study, Miner’s (2003) research was largely quantitative in nature, consisting of 154 questionnaires and 4 interviews.
5 Chapter 2 reviews the Irish empirical research base.
6 Minority stress can be understood as a psychosocial stress derived from minority status. When applied to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people, a minority stress framework suggests that prejudice based on sexual orientation is stressful and may lead to adverse mental health outcomes (I. H. Meyer, 2003).
The Irish research also highlights that LGBT agencies who commission such reports have an interest in maintaining a public perception of LGBT individuals as marginalised and as victims of societal homophobia (Mayock & Bryan, 2012). Thus, in the Irish research context, LGBT individuals are understood primarily as victims (rather than perpetrators) of heterosexual violence.

Running parallel with the lack of empirical evidence pertaining to LIPA, service provider’s expertise in Ireland is centred on the heterosexual female experience of domestic violence (DV). The experience of LIPA is not included in organisations training and awareness modules to inform incoming volunteers within the DV sector. A theme that will be considered throughout this thesis, the heterosexual ‘public story’ of DV, constitutes DV as a heterosexual phenomenon, involving primarily physically violent behaviour (Donovan & Hester, 2010), promulgated primarily by those in the DV support services. For lesbian victims of IPA, such heterosexist constructions have been found to contribute to non-recognition of behaviour as IPA, and create barriers for lesbian women accessing DV services (Bornstein, et al. 2006; Donovan & Hester, 2011; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005).

The current research explores the experience of intimate partner abuse for individuals whose victimisation experiences have not received significant attention, subsequently remaining misunderstood, under-served, and overlooked in access to services and policy decisions.

The following section explores the current research in the context of the larger feminist approach to IPA, the operational definition of the research is explained, along with Irish definitions, and definitions applied to LGBT research samples.

1.2 Positioning the present research with the IPA debate

The debates surrounding IPA are typically located between two dominant perspectives, feminist and family violence perspectives (Johnson, 1995), that produce conflicting results.

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7 This knowledge was gathered by the researcher following email correspondence with the training Manager in Women’s Aid.
in the examination of IPA. Ristock (2003) asserts that the biggest challenge for researchers studying lesbian IPA is to overcome the heterosexual paradigm that defines the domestic violence movement. The feminist philosophy that instigated the DV movement (initially known as the battered women’s movement), explains male violence toward women as a form of gender-based oppression underpinned by patriarchy, misogyny, and sexism (Kelly, 1988). Within the feminist framework for understanding IPA, women are victims and men are perpetrators (Elliot, 1996). In the absence of a male perpetrator, this gender-based approach has the potential to render the lesbian experience of IPA as non-existent and invisible.

Moreover, US researchers, Cannon and Buttell (2015), argue that the feminist paradigms exclusive focus on heterosexual relationships fails to capture IPA in three important ways. Firstly, it fails to address IPA in non-heterosexual relationships. Secondly, it fails to capture the different configurations of abuse and victims’ identities. For example, female perpetrated violence against women and men. Finally, a feminist focus fails to identify the key motivating factors and ameliorating effects for an abuser and victim that falls outside of the heterosexual construction of DV (male perpetrator, female victim).

Kelly (1996) argues that feminists have remained silent on the issue because of the complex theoretical and political implications of confronting it. Furthermore, LIPA has been used to critique the feminist analysis, with researchers claiming that battering is more common in lesbian than in heterosexual relationships (Dutton, 1994).

1.2.1 The current thesis operational definition

“How we define violence determines what we find”

When this present research was first initiated, the term ‘intimate partner abuse’ was chosen as an appropriate terminology to engage with a non-heterosexual female sample. The

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8 Both perspectives have been found to contribute to gender symmetry (family violence) and asymmetry (feminist) debates. This aspect of IPA is discussed further in this chapter, see ‘dominant theoretical perspectives’ section.
9 The point is further expanded upon by recalling the negative reception researchers experienced once they began their explorations of female perpetrated violence. See (Kelly, 1991; Renzetti, 1997; Taylor & Chandler, 1995).
definition was the preferred term, as at that time, a large-scale UK national community survey found that LGBT people do not frame the abuse happening in their relationships as 'domestic violence', rather they associate domestic violence as something that happens in heterosexual relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2014). However, informed by the research process, the term domestic violence was utilised during the recruitment phase. The research returned to the original term ‘intimate partner abuse’ following interviews with lesbian participants.¹¹

Researchers argue that the term ‘domestic violence’ has the potential to overlook other forms of abusive behaviour which are equally and more damaging to a victim, such as emotional/ psychological and coercive controlling behaviours (Corbally, 2010). Studies show that many women find emotional and psychological abuse more intolerable than physical abuse (Mahoney, Williams, & West, 2001; Watson & Parsons, 2005). The international literature on LIPA (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016), as well as the Irish data available (Miner, 2003), suggests that emotional and verbally abusive behaviours were more frequently reported by women than physically abusive behaviours. Donovan and Hester (2014) found that women are more willing to use emotionally abusive ways of behaving and speaking that undermine and establish an abusive power dynamic.

In the current study, participants who had abusive experiences that were not physical in nature but more emotionally and psychologically damaging, and women who were not living with abusive partners, could be incorporated in a definition by removing the terms ‘domestic’ and ‘violence’. The term partner is appropriate as it is a gender-neutral alternative (Johnson, 1995). Also, the participants used the word ‘partner’ many times over the course of the interviews. The term ‘abuse’ represents a move away from emphasising physical violence and is selected instead of the term violence to encompass all forms of violence whether it is emotional, physical, psychological, identity, sexual, or financial. Overall, the definition of intimate partner abuse (IPA) allows for a more inclusive investigation of the varied forms of abuse that can be experienced and further, moves the analysis away from more traditional approaches to IPA that would have largely utilised the term domestic violence within a heterosexual relationship context.

¹¹ This point is expanded upon in Chapter 4, the research methodology.
This study also remains cognisant of the limitations of the category “lesbian” and that many women involved in relationships with women identify as queer, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirited or some prefer not to categorise themselves at all. However, within the current study, eight women self-identified as lesbian and one as queer. The participant who described themselves as queer used this term and lesbian interchangeably. This thesis will engage with a few terms to describe the sample. These will include the terms ‘lesbian relationship’ or ‘non-heterosexual women’. Also, the terms ‘lesbian intimate partner abuse’ (LIPA) or ‘female same sex intimate partner abuse’ (FSSIPA), or same sex intimate partner abuse (SSIPA) is used to describe abusive relationships.\textsuperscript{12}

The term SSIPA is utilised to describe same sex relationships in general. Throughout the thesis, the reader will also encounter abbreviations like LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer), LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) or LB (lesbian and bisexual women) or LG (lesbian and gay men) to describe the population under discussion. When referring to the domestic violence sector specifically, the abbreviation ‘DV’ will be utilised.

1.2.2 A clarification of terms: the use of ‘discourse’ and ‘myth’

Throughout the thesis, the reader will encounter terms such as ‘myth’ and more frequently the term ‘discourse’. This section clarifies what is meant by the researcher when employing these terms. A myth is a representation of an idea and information about our past. Typically, a myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of people. Myths have been interpreted as a function to form and shape society and social behaviours, to establish models for behaviour, or provide a religious experience (Eliade, 1998). When utilising the term ‘myth’ in this study, the researcher is referring to a specific historical reference related to female-to-female relationships generated during the 1970s by cultural and radical feminists. These feminists in their attempts to challenge patriarchal theory, theorised that female-to-female relationships were privileged, and superior, and lesbian relationships were idealised and understood as peace loving, nurturing, non-competitive.

\textsuperscript{12} Recent legislative developments in Ireland with marriage equality for same sex couples has increased awareness and application of the term same sex, and it is the term widely used in the policy, practice, and legislative domains.
and non-violent (Irwin, 2013). During this period, lesbianism challenged patriarchal norms about relationships and represented an idealised model of a relationship between equals. Based on this historical reference (myth) surrounding female-to-female relationships terms such as ‘egalitarian myth’ (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984), the ‘lesbian nation’ (Renzetti, 1992), \(^{13}\) and more commonly a ‘lesbian utopia’ (Benowitz, 1986; Girshick, 2002) emerged from the existing literature, and were used to explain and describe discourses surrounding lesbian relationships as being egalitarian and non-violent.

When using the term discourse, I am referring to the Foucauldian analysis of knowledge and power. For Foucault, knowledge is inextricably linked to power (Diamond, Quinby, Benhabib, & Cornell, 1990). Discourses represent the transfer of ideas and information that typically emerge from powerful institutions in society. Discourse, as theorised by Foucault, refers to:

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\text{...ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between producing them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind, and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987, p.108).}
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In his analysis of the social construction of madness, punishment and sexuality, Foucault demonstrated how some discourses shaped and created meaning systems that define how we understand ourselves and the social world (e.g. heterosexism), yet alternative discourses are marginalised and oppressed (e.g. homosexuality) (Weedon, 1987). Unlike a myth, a discourse emerges from a social institution and provides structure around our language, thoughts, our lives, our interactions and relationships with others, and society (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003). For example, the category of ‘domestic violence’ is the basis for laws, social service providers, social science research, and experts in the field. The practices and documents of these discursive locations constitute and reinforce the domestic violence discourse (Ferraro, 1996). Importantly for Foucault, a discourse is a form of power that can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance (Diamond, Quinby, Benhabib, & Cornell, 1990). In Foucault’s analysis, there are no fixed social or personal

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\(^{13}\) By “lesbian nation” Renzetti is referring to the notion or ideal of a woman-identified subculture that is violence-free, and free of the problems that are typically associated with patriarchal social relations.
identities or practices rather the formation of identities and practices is connected to, or are functions of, historic discourses (Weedon, 1987).

When employing the term ‘discourse’ in this study, I am specifically referring to heteronormative discourses related to domestic violence where domestic violence is primarily constructed as a male perpetrated heterosexual phenomenon, consisting primarily of physical violence. Discourses that construct women as weak, passive, and non-violent, arising from stereotypical assumptions and understandings of women and men, are further explored in the thesis to demonstrate how such heteronormative assumptions contribute to the silence and invisibility of intimate partner abuse for non-heterosexual women.

The chapter continues by outlining the definitional approaches to IPA in the Irish research context.

1.2.3 Irish definitions of IPA

The pervasive nature of IPA is reflected in the numerous terms that attempt to describe it. The literature contains a variety of terms operationalised by researchers. Ristock (2001) asserts that the traditional term, ‘domestic violence’ was conceptualised in a heterosexual paradigm where terms like ‘battered wives’, ‘battered women’ and ‘the battered women’s movement’ framed the social problem. Domestic violence is more recently referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) as this new terminology differentiates this type of family violence from others, i.e. children and the elderly, while being inclusive of any intimate relationship regardless of the couples’ marital status, age, or gender (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015).

In Ireland, domestic violence is the term traditionally associated with violence between partners, that is, heterosexual partners. The standard definition of domestic violence in use today includes the actual use or threat of emotional, physical, and sexual force in “close adult relationships” (Office of the Tánaiste, 1997, p.27). Assuming a close adult relationship conjures up images of abuse occurring in a domestic setting. Abuse in relationships can occur irrespective of whether the couple is cohabiting or currently engaged in a relationship. While the Task Force (1997) definition acknowledges the threat

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14 See Appendix 1 which illustrates the number of search terms used for IPA.
of abusive behaviours, it assumes the prevalence of violence which may not be a factor in an abusive relationship.

Corbally (2010) asserts that the term “domestic violence is narrow by its very nature” (p.301), in that, abuse happening in the home could be interpreted as a family affair and less as a serious crime. Further, the term domestic violence has the potential to overlook other forms of abusive behaviour which are equally and more damaging to a victim. Corbally (2010, p.31) draws attention to the development of IPA tactics and perpetration in conjunction with the advancement of modern technologies which have “shifted the locus directly to the victim – regardless of location. A study by Women’s Aid found that 41 per cent of female clients reported experiencing stalking and harassment online. Moreover, research shows that abusive behaviours can escalate and continue when a relationship has ended, and where the couple involved are no longer in a close relationship (Kimmel, 2002).

Alternative Irish definitions have been put forward, such as ‘domestic abuse’ that is inclusive of male and female victims of IPA (Watson and Parsons, 2005, p.23) “a pattern of physical, emotional or sexual behaviour between partners in an intimate relationship”. This conceptualisation of domestic abuse does not incorporate singular incidents of abuse unless they lead to physical injury or high levels of fear or distress. However, the definition does incorporate abuse occurring as part of a pattern reflecting similar thinking in international research where IPA is interpreted as a process and not just a collection of incidents (Madden Dempsey, 2006; Stark, 2007; Stark, 2009). Another Irish definition from Clancy & Ward (2005) includes economic abuse as a specific tactic utilised by an abuser.

An Garda Síochána domestic violence policy (An Garda Síochána, 2017) includes their own definition of IPA which names physical, sexual, emotional and mental abuse. It differs from the Task Force definition in that categories not included are the destruction of property, isolation from sources of support and financial abuse, and coercive controlling behaviours. The definition is quite narrow and more concerned with criminal activities. Another state-sponsored body, the Health Service Executive (HSE) adopt a different

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15 Accessed 19 January 2017
16 An Garda Síochána, more commonly referred to as the Gardaí or "the Guards", is the police force of the Republic of Ireland.
definition from Pillinger and O’Connor (2009) of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence that states, “there are other forms of violence experienced by women, men and children in Ireland today e.g. trafficking, forced prostitution, and female genital mutilation” (Health Service Executive, 2009b, p. 40). The Irish definitions of IPA demonstrate a development in the knowledge and understanding of the complex dynamics associated with IPA affecting men, women, and children. The definitions reflect a change in understanding that recognises IPA as an incident and pattern based social problem. However, the definitions outlined could be described as heterosexist as they have been constructed based largely on the experiences of heterosexual women, and men.

There are issues with the terminology of ‘domestic violence’ and ‘domestic abuse’ in the Irish context. An abusive relationship is not defined by or limited to contexts where the relationship is ongoing, the couple is cohabiting, or the prevalence of behaviours that are more physical in nature. Abuse can continue after a relationship has ended and digital stalking has been identified as a factor in this type of abusive behaviour (Perry, 2012). The standard definition (Office of the Tánaiste, 1997) is described as gender-neutral, however, this has arisen in the context of naming female violence against male partners (Miner, 2013), and while there is nothing in the definition that excludes female to female IPA, it is not explicitly named. In addition, none of the definitions incorporates the issue of identity abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014), one facet of abuse that distinguishes the same sex and heterosexual experience of IPA.

1.2.4 Definitions applied to LGBT samples

The study of same sex IPA has a relatively recent history, with a body of research gaining traction from the mid-to-late 1980s (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Kelly, 1991; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti & Miley, 1996; Taylor & Chandler, 1995). As such, research (Ristock, 2001; Ristock, 2003) and policy responses (Corbally, 2010) are centred on the heterosexual

17 Threatening to out or outing sexuality, (birth gender), gender identity or HIV status. Undermining sense of self as a lesbian, gay, bisexual man, or women, controlling what she/he looks like, clothes she/he wears, threatening to, or withdrawing medication, hormones, refusing money for gender transition.

18 Although Diamond and Wilsnack (1978) focused their lens on lesbians who abuse alcohol, their study represents one of the earliest studies of lesbians and abusive behaviour.
experience of IPA. Corbally (2011, pp. 30–31) argues that heterosexual IPA definitions have tended to be “pre-formulated in advance of research or policy”.

In the UK, one of the first to speak out about violence in female relationships was Liz Kelly (1991). Kelly’s (1991, p. 19) paper, titled, Unspeakable Acts, argued for “a framework which is more than mapping heterosexual theory into lesbian experience”. In contrast to heterosexual definitions of IPA, Kelly (1996) observed that research examining abuse in lesbian relationships operationalised definitions that placed more emphasis on emotional factors, including dishonesty, manipulation, and disrespectful behaviour. Kelly expressed concerns about the use of such wide definitions and the impact this would have on higher rates of lesbian IPA. Further, she suggests that lesbian respondents may be more sensitive to issues of power and violence and this may also contribute to higher rates of lesbian IPA being reported.

Taking a different definitional approach, Donovan and Hester’s (2014) COHSAR study compared love and what they termed ‘domestic violence and abuse’ (DVA) within same sex and heterosexual relationships. The research engaged in a multi-methodological approach including a national same sex community survey (n=746) plus focus groups and interviews (McCarry, et al., 2008). The COHSAR study’s definition incorporates abusive behaviours, potential impacts, and whether individuals self-identified as experiencing DVA. This unique approach allowed the researchers to penetrate the complexities of DVA by asking questions about the impact of the experience of the abusive behaviour; whether the behaviour identified had an impact on their lives; whether the behaviour identified was understood as abuse of themselves or another; and crucially, if the abuse was a part of defensive, protective, or retaliatory behaviour. Additionally, the definition allowed the researchers to “move the analysis beyond static categories of victim and perpetrator” (p.89). This is an important development in the analysis of SSIPA as researchers argue that the terms ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ are gendered constructs (Barnes, 2008).

1.2.5 Feminine gender stereotypes & “sexual scripts”

The concept of gender is difficult to define however, there is wide consensus amongst scholars that gender is a social construct (Andersen, 2005; Butler, 1990; Messner, 2005;
Taylor, 1999). When we discuss gender in this manner, of what it is to be feminine or masculine, we move beyond the perception of anatomical and physiological markers, to the incorporation of fixed cultural and societal interpretations (Taylor, 1999). Woodward (2008) argues that our identities as male and female are merged, interconnected, and represented through the characteristics of our culture. Woodward (2008) proposes that masculinities and femininities are constructed gender identities that frequently comprise of stereotypical features that are strongly influenced and associated with the ethos of a particular time and culture. Such constructs have led to a socially constructed perception of females as maternal, nurturing, passive, and non-violent (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Gilbert, 2002; Jack, 2001; Richardson, 2005; Richardson) compared with the perception of males as strong, dominant, and aggressive (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Gerber, 1991; Gilbert, 2002). We see further examples of the interconnection between our culturally informed construction and perception of gender with the segregation of employment into masculine and feminine occupations. In an Irish context, women were frequently employed in cleaning, childcare, education, and healthcare, whereas men were typically employed in agriculture, construction, the defense forces, the police force, and law (Tovey & Share, 2000).

An understanding of gender as a social and cultural construct is advantageous to the current study for several reasons. Our understandings, perceptions, and representations of events and experiences starts with our individual position, and what we know and understand is shaped and reliant upon that position (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, how we interpret, understand, and respond to female same sex intimate partner abuse is shaped by our individual position; our socially constructed perception of women and their role in society. There is research evidence indicating that professionals and law makers attitudes to female aggression, in the general sense, act to obscure the extent of the problem (Allen, 1990; Allen, 1987). When one examines the empirical evidence exploring female same sex intimate partner abuse there appears to be a minimisation of violence committed by women whereby such violence is perceived as less harmful and less dangerous than that committed by a male (Elliot, 1996; Hassounah & Glass, 2008; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Walters, 2011). At the individual level, gender role stereotyping has been found to affect a victim’s ability to recognise an abusive context and acts to prevent a victim reaching out for support (Hassounah & Glass, 2008). Furthermore, research identifies that police officers, counsellors, and professionals working in the domestic violence sector hold distinct gendered concepts about victim and perpetrator in abusive relationships (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Hassounah & Glass, 2008; Helfrich & Simpson, 2006; Irwin, 2008). Similar findings have been reported with studies examining female sexual offenders. Denov (2004) found that their roles in the offences were viewed
as harmless and their actions minimised, even when they had committed violent and aggressive crimes.

In agreement with Woodward (2008), the existing research evidence examining female same sex IPA, female sexual perpetration, and the response of professional suggests that there is a perception of ‘females’ that is consistent with stereotypical features typically associated with traditional representations of femininity. As Allen (1987) asserts, these groups did not invent such a representation of women, their portrayal represents the many cultural belief systems that have historically represented women as maternal, nurturing, passive, non-aggressive or violent, vulnerable, and sexually passive (Allen, 1987; Woodward, 2008).

In acknowledgement of the influence of traditional perceptions of femininity for this research, this study adopts the concept of “sexual scripts” (Denov, 2004). Traditional sexual scripts are heterosexual and gendered (Byers, 1996) and relate to the long held, socially reinforced beliefs that border constructions of masculinity and femininity. In traditional sexual scripts, men are perceived to be highly sexually aggressive; having no control once a man’s sexual response has been set in motion (Denov, 2004). Such scripts exclude the perception of males as sexually reluctant or as victims of sexual violence (Mendel, 1995). On the other hand, women are said to play a role in assisting men avoid or refrain from sexual activity (Clark & Hatfield, 1989). Traditional sexual scripts of appropriate female behaviour exclude constructions of women as sexual aggressors, as sexual initiators, as indicating their sexual preference, and as engaging in sexually coercive behaviour with men (Byers & O’Sullivan, 1998). The concept is useful to the current study as it exposes existing discourse on how abusers and victims in female same sex relationships are constructed to conform to outdated societal “sexual scripts” concerning women. Viewing women through these gendered frameworks further exposes the perception of women’s position in society. The chapter now changes direction and proceeds to review the prevalence data available concerned with SSIPA.

1.3 What is known about same sex IPA: Prevalence data?

1.3.1 Systematic reviews & international prevalence data

Little is known about the national prevalence of IPA among non-heterosexual women.\(^{21}\) A fundamental challenge for researchers exploring SSIPA is obtaining a representative

\(^{21}\)There is no national prevalence data on the non-heterosexual experience of IPA in Ireland.
sample (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Murray & Mobley, 2009). Hence across different samples, methodologies, and time frames, studies have found a wide range of reported frequencies of relationship violence. The first systematic review on IPA in self-identified lesbians found that studies used five-time periods to establish the ‘prevalence’ of LIPA victimisation comprising of current or most recent relationship, last year, last five years, lifetime, and examples where the time was not specified (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015). 

Not surprisingly, prevalence rates were higher (40-50%) with studies that evaluated longer time periods. The experience of any form of IPA over the five different time periods ranged from 9.6 – 51.5 per cent, of current, or most recent relationship (9.6 - 37.5%); in the last year (12.2%); in the last 5 years (43.39%); and lifetime (42.4 - 51.5%).

Badenes -Ribera et al. (2016) found that the most frequently measured form of IPA was physical violence, with a prevalence ranging between 2.6 per cent (specific behaviour using a weapon) and 3 per cent for multiple forms of physical violence (as the only abuse between the couple), and 58 per cent. The experience of physical violence was reported as higher when received at some time in life (40-50%) as compared with prevalence rates for physical violence in the most recent relationship (between 9 and 17%). Economic abuse was the least evaluated aspect of IPA, with a reported range within one study as 46 per cent (lesbians) and 33 per cent (gay women).

Emotional psychological abuse was the second most evaluated form of abuse, with prevalence ranging from 7.4 per cent for stalking, to between 18 – 64.5 per cent for emotional/psychological/verbal abuse as the only form of abuse between the couple. When studies defined emotional abuse and included the ‘threats to out a partner’ as a form of abuse, higher prevalence rates were reported between 31 – 84 per cent. The prevalence of sexual violence ranged between 0.6 per cent for non-consensual sex or sexual torture as the only form of violence between the couple, and between 2.2 – 56.8 per cent for sexual assault. The review also found a perpetration rate between 17-75 per cent (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016).24

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22 The review analysed studies that used convenience samples.
23 The review analysed 14 studies of self-identified lesbians, analysed separately from other groups in the samples that specified the gender of the perpetrator.
24 Using a nationally representative sample of 1,925 lesbians from every state in the US, to examine the prevalence and mental health sequelae of child sexual abuse, rape, IPA, and hate crimes. Descamps et al. (2000) reported that older age was related to the greater prevalence of IPA victimisation.
The issues with the reported frequencies and the disparity displayed with the results stated above are that they are not representative samples. All of the studies included in the Badenes-Ribera et al., (2016) review were based on convenience samples. The authors acknowledged further limitations with the LIPA literature including, definitions of abuse and forms of violence used to measure IPA, not examining the relationship between minority stress and IPA, not measuring ‘homophobic control’ (a specific psychological tactic of SSIPA), and not incorporating the influence of heterosexism in the analysis of LIPA.

Studies that use representative samples demonstrate conflicting results when non-heterosexual women are compared with heterosexual women’s experience of IPA. For example, the National US Violence Against Women Survey (NVAW) found that 11 per cent of women in same sex relationships reported being physically assaulted and/or stalked, and raped by a female partner. This was compared to 30.4 per cent of women reporting such violence with a male partner. While acknowledging the need for further research, the authors suggest that their findings indicate that IPA is more prevalent in heterosexual contexts. In contrast, Walters et al. (2013) prevalence data show that individuals identified as lesbian, bisexual, and gay experienced more physical, sexual, and emotional abuse than those identifying as heterosexual. The lifetime prevalence rate of rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner reported was 61.1 per cent for bisexual women, 43.8 per cent for lesbians, and 35 per cent for heterosexual women. Similarly, Messinger’s (2011) secondary data analysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey found that LGB persons were more likely to experience IPA than heterosexuals.

25 A limitation with the Tjaden and Thonnes (2000) data is that respondents were not asked about their sexual orientation, the survey asked whether they had ever lived with a same sex partner as part of a couple. The survey consists of telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 8000 men and 8000 women. 1 per cent of women (n=79) and 0.8 per cent of men (n=65) reported living with a same sex partner at one point in their lives. The survey also compares victimisation rates between men and women, same sex, and opposite-sex couples, and with specific racial groups (Hispanics and non-Hispanic).

26 Walters et al. (2013) completed interviews with 16,507 adults (9,086 female and 7,421 male). The sexual orientation of the sample included 96.5 per cent females identified as heterosexual, 2.2 per cent bisexual, and 1.3 percent lesbian. For males, 96.8 per cent identified as heterosexual, 1.2 per cent bisexual, and 2.0 per cent gay.

27 Messinger (2011) analysed a nationally representative sample of 14,182 adults (7,257 females and 6,295 male). The sexual orientation of the sample included n=144 lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents.
What is clear from the US prevalence data is that bisexual women report higher frequencies of IPA than both lesbian and heterosexual women. For example, using the California Health Interview Survey, Goldberg and Meyer (2013) found that bisexual women reported higher rates of victimisation in couple violence in the past year (27.48%) and at some time in life (51.99%) than lesbian women (10.23% and 31.87%). Walters et al. (2013) found 61% of bisexual women, 44% of lesbian women, and 35% of heterosexual women experienced physical violence, stalking or rape as a result of IPA. In contrast to the prevalence studies, Turell’s (2000) US convenience sample (n=499) with LGBT individuals reported that bisexuels experienced less IPA than gays and lesbians.

The available US prevalence data indicate that most perpetrators of IPA and sexual violence are male (Tjaden & Thonnes, 2000; Walters et al., 2013). Prevalence data available on perpetrators of IPA shows that bisexual women primarily experienced IPA from male partners, and sexual violence to lesbian and bisexual women was mainly experienced from male perpetrators (Walters et al., 2013). Messinger (2011) reported that IPA was most commonly reported by bisexuais with opposite-sex partners. Thus, the high levels of IPA reported for bisexual and lesbian women were not necessarily within a same sex relationship.

As previously mentioned, there is no national prevalence data available concerning non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA. There is, however, prevalence data to explain this populations experience of violence and abuse at the EU level. The chapter proceeds to discuss the results from two large-scale European studies involving an Irish LGBT sample, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) LGBT survey (2012), and the Violence Against Women: an EU-Wide Survey (2014).

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29 The California Health Interview Survey (2007-2008) comprised of 51,048 adults. Only adults ages 70 or younger were asked to describe their sexual orientation (n=31,632) resulting in (16,926 females and 14,089 males). The sexual orientation of the female sample comprised of 96.5% heterosexual, 1.5% lesbian, 1.4% bisexual and 0.5% women who have sex with women (WSW).
30 NISVS data: 26% for gay men, 29% for heterosexual men, and 37.3% for bisexual men
31 Heterosexual women and gay men also reported sexual violence primarily from male perpetrators.
1.3.2 European LGBT survey data with Irish samples

In 2012, FRA launched the LGBT hate crime and discrimination survey across Europe and Croatia. The survey represents the largest ever study (n=93,079) undertaken to capture the experiences of LGBT people in the EU.\textsuperscript{32} What follows is the results for the Irish lesbian and bisexual respondents in the sample (n= 1,625). The FRA study reported that 78 per cent of lesbians and 26 per cent of bisexuals were physically/sexually attacked or threatened with violence at home or elsewhere; 45 per cent of lesbians and 35 per cent of bisexuals were physically/sexually attacked or threatened with violence over the last 12 months. The last physical or sexual attack consisted of a threat of a physical attack for both groups, 55 per cent for lesbians and 39 for bisexuals.

One major flaw of the survey is that it did not provide an option to establish if the perpetrator of abuse is a partner or ex-partner of a respondent. The survey provides thirteen separate items to establish the perpetrator of abuse without including partner or ex-partner. In response to the question, who was the perpetrator, 45 per cent of lesbian and 39 per cent of bisexual women indicated a stranger, and someone unknown to them.

The evidence presented on female perpetration suggests that in the case of the last incident of a physical/sexual attack or threat of violence, 16 per cent of lesbians and 22 per cent of bisexual respondents, was abused by a female. When this is broken down by the sexual orientation of the perpetrator, 6 per cent of lesbian and 4 per cent of bisexual respondents were abused by a lesbian woman. Again, a note of caution is due here as the research failed to include partner as an option for the perpetration of violence. What is striking about the FRA results is the levels of non-reporting to the police by both lesbian (90\%) and bisexual (87\%) women in response to an incident of physical/sexual attack or threat of violence. Lesbian (54\%) and bisexual (58\%) respondents selected too minor/not serious enough/never occurred to me, as reasons for non-reporting (FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

\textsuperscript{32} 93,000 LGBT people were surveyed across the 27 EU countries and Croatia, including 1,625 LGBT people from Ireland.
1.3.3 Violence against women: an EU-wide survey

The second large-scale survey conducted by FRA, the Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, is the most comprehensive survey to date at the level of the EU on women’s experience of violence (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Of the total sample, 526 out of the survey’s 42,002 respondents indicated being lesbian, bisexual, or other. The survey highlighted differences in the levels of violence experienced between heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents. Regarding differences between the two categories in terms of prevalence of various forms of violence, 70 per cent of non-heterosexual women compared with 43 per cent of heterosexual women experienced psychological violence by any partner (current or previous) since the age of 15; stalking since the age of 15 (36% non-heterosexual and 18% heterosexual); any physical or sexual violence by any partner (48% non-heterosexual and 21% heterosexual); any physical or sexual violence by a non-partner since the age of 15 (50% non-heterosexual and 21% heterosexual); sexual harassment since the age of 15 years (78% non-heterosexual and 55% heterosexual); and finally, physical, sexual, psychological violence before the age of 15 years (57% non-heterosexual and 35% heterosexual). The results of the analysis show a higher rate of violence experienced since the age of 15 among non-heterosexual respondents, irrespective of the gender of the perpetrator.

The study revealed differences between victimisation rates. For example, 16 per cent of non-heterosexual women reported they had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a non-male partner since the age of 15 compared with 12 per cent of heterosexual women. 11 per cent of non-heterosexual women experienced this type of violence from a female perpetrator, compared with 4 per cent of heterosexual women.

Further differences between the two categories of women were found with the respondent’s experience of abuse with both a male and female perpetrator, 23 per cent of non-heterosexual women reported having experienced non-partner violence by both male and female perpetrators, compared with 5 per cent of heterosexual women. These results provide important insights into the different abuse experiences of heterosexual and non-

33 Given the small number of non-heterosexual women in the sample, it was not possible to analyse these results at the member state level, results were considered at EU level
34 As is demonstrated in the following chapter concerned with the Irish IPA literature, similar findings were reported in a recent Irish report published by the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (Mears, 2015).
heterosexual women. The report concludes that non-heterosexual women are “doubly exposed to violence because of their gender as well as their sexual orientation” (FRA, 2014, p.185).

Studies exploring non-heterosexual female IPA have yielded contradictory results due to a combination of definitional issues, using different time periods, the lack of representative samples, and not including the gender of the perpetrator in the analysis. The limited prevalence data available highlights the importance of establishing the gender of the perpetrator in the measurement of IPA for this population. Studies that don’t gauge the gender of the perpetrator run the risk of disseminating misleading figures for non-heterosexual IPA, where the abuse measured may not have occurred in a female-to-female relationship.

The next part of this chapter moves on to review the theoretical perspectives to explain intimate partner abuse.

1.4 Dominant theoretical perspectives

“The first people to identify a problem often shape how others will perceive it”


A review of the empirical literature suggests that studies employ individual (psychological), feminist (socio-political), intersectional, family violence, coercive control, and integrative (ecological) perspectives to the study of SSIPA. The prevailing IPA theories are predominantly prescribed to the heterosexual experience (Ristock, 1994). Theoretical perspectives explaining IPA have ranged from understanding the issue as an individual or psychological problem, (for example, from over-consumption of alcohol or drugs), to its being perceived as a learnt behaviour (for instance, drawing on intergenerational transmission of violence approaches). Feminist and family violence perspectives have been arguably the most prevalent (Azam Ali & Naylor, 2013). The impact of both perspectives has resulted in gender symmetry/ asymmetry debate surrounding IPA that encompasses violence as predominantly physical in nature, male-perpetrated, or as perpetrated in equal proportion by men and women. Other researchers have attempted to forge a new perspective that steers away from the polarised views of feminist and family violence
approaches.

The section proceeds by discussing each approach, firstly outlining the psychological models, followed by feminist, intersectional, and family violence perspectives. A discussion of the effects of feminist and family violence models are considered in the context of Michael Johnson’s work regarding the gender symmetry/asymmetry debates. The section concludes with a synopsis of the ecological framework as applied to IPA.

1.4.1 The Individual Model (Psychological)

The individual (psychological) model focuses primarily on the behaviours and characteristics of the victim and the batterer to understand the causes of IPA. Within this approach, researchers focus on substance abuse, over-dependency and jealousy, fusion, personality disorders, and feelings of powerlessness and low self-esteem (Coleman, 1994). In response to feminist theory, Island and Letellier (1991) who focus on gay male IPA, argue that the feminist lens should be replaced with a psychological lens that focuses specifically on the psychology of the batterer. Hence, perpetrators are classified and identified by their behaviour and not their gender. Critical of socio-political theory and its emphasis on a ‘gender and power’ model, the authors argue for a gender-neutral perspective. According to Island and Letellier (1991), the feminist approach has led to ineffective batterer programmes and an overemphasis on battered women. Instead, they argue that treatment must be based on the personal and behavioural characteristics of the batterer. In their understanding, the psychology of perpetrators is key to understanding the source of the problem.

The strictly psychological theory proposed by Island and Letellier (1991) has been criticised for failing to explain the disproportionate number of male perpetrators in heterosexual IPA (Merrill, 1996). Furthermore, their approach is criticised because they equate and generalise about all intimate relationships (Ristock, 1994). Despite their attempts to challenge a dominant heterosexual status quo, their theory places too much weight on agency and does not address the structural issues which contribute and perpetuate IPA.
1.4.2 The Sociological Model (Socio-psychological)

Merrill (1996) integrated both feminist (socio-political) concepts and psychological principles to suggest that a social-psychological model is sufficient to examine the complexities of both heterosexual and same sex IPA. According to his model, the causes of battering are divided into three steps: learning to abuse, having the opportunity to abuse, and choosing to abuse. Within this model, individuals learn three psychological processes in their family of origin: direct instruction, modelling, or learning through observation, and reinforced violent behaviour. However, the model emphasises that because violent behaviour is learnt, that this does not necessarily equate with or predict violent behaviour as an adult. A key component of this perspective involves the individual having the opportunity to abuse without experiencing negative consequences. Abuse is unlikely to occur when an individual perceives another as having greater power or the power to bring about a negative consequence. Conversely, an individual is likely to be abusive if they perceive another as having equal or lesser power, and less able to bring about negative consequences.

Building on Merrill’s theoretical perspective, McClennen (1999) proposed that when referring to lesbian IPA, the patriarchal social-psychology theory is more appropriate. McClennen included the addition of the feminist term ‘patriarchal’ to emphasise the sexism and gender socialisation experienced by all women regardless of their sexual orientation (McClennen, 1999).

1.4.3 Social Learning Theory

Using a sociological lens, social learning theory, also known as “learned behaviour theory” is one of the most widely used theories from this perspective (Azam Ali & Naylor, 2013). This model proposes that violence is a coping mechanism learned through observation and experience. Unlike the social-psychological approach, whether or not one exerts violence depends on environmental factors (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991) and not the individual as the decision maker in committing violence (Merril, 1996). Within this model, violence is likely to be repeated if it is reliant on reinforcement. Thus, if abusive behaviour achieves the desired outcome for the batterer, they are likely to recognise this achievement and incorporate the behaviour into practice to meet their needs (Pagelow, 1984).
The intergenerational transmission of violence is one element of social learning theory (Coleman, 1994). This perspective on violence proposes that children who grow up in families where they experience or witness violence between their primary carers are more likely to incorporate violent behaviour as a coping mechanism and transfer this form of behaviour into their own families as adults.

1.4.4 Coercive control

Contemporary approaches to IPA include the measurement of coercive control (CC) over physical violence and typologies of abuse. Coercive control involves a pattern of violence, intimidation, isolation, and control whereby IPA is defined as a form of subordination, rather than a violent physical act (Stark, 2006). Stark (2007) developed the concept of CC to primarily describe non-violent controlling behaviours in heterosexual relationships. However, researchers examining SSIPA, have found evidence of and have argued for, its application within non-heterosexual relationship contexts (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Frankland & Brown, 2014). Although traditional approaches to DV understand the aim of DV as being about power and control in a relationship, CC understands control tactics as the primary means of subordinating female partners (Stark, 2006). Primacy is given to the CC in the relationship over physical violence and the use of typologies. Instead, Stark (2007) draws attention to the cumulative pattern of non-violent behaviours by an abuser and their impacts which he suggests takes place within an unequal gender context.

One of the first systematic reviews of the LIPA reported that the most frequently evaluated form of abuse was psychological/emotional violence (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015). Other qualitative work supports the finding of lesbians experiencing primarily emotional/psychological violence (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Irwin, 2008; Turell, 1999). The evidence from the literature suggests that Stark’s model of coercive control is a useful framework to explore abusive behaviours in lesbian relationships.

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35 Coercive control is a term Stark adapted from the literature on brainwashing, applied to battering by cognitive psychologists in the 1970s. Stark reformulated the concept of coercive control to identify control tactics that are the primary means to subordinate a victim Stark (2006).
1.4.5 Family violence perspectives

The family violence perspective is primarily the genesis of the sociologists Richard Gelles and Murray Strauss. Within this framework, the conflict between family members and those in intimate relationships is understood as inevitable and universal, where violence is viewed as a means to resolve a conflict. Violence and abuse in relationships are grouped under the rubric of family violence (Gelles & Straus, 1979). In contrast to the psychological models explaining IPA, violence in the family is not understood to result from individual pathology but is instead an inevitable and universal occurrence. The unit of analysis is the family (rather than the individual or the couple), and relationship violence is understood as an expression of violence related to the larger family structure (Lawson, 2012). The key component of this type of analysis is trying to understand what makes family members resort to violence as a mechanism to resolve a conflict.

Researchers that adopt this perspective, by and large, apply the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) in their analysis of IPA. The scales assume that abuse is about inappropriate forms of conflict resolution rather than power and control issues. The results from using this methodology have led researchers to conclude that there is a considerable amount of violence in intimate relationships, and furthermore, that both men and women engage in violence in relatively equal numbers (gender symmetry). Donovan & Hester (2014) argue that this survey approach is intrinsically flawed as studies utilising this methodology are designed, conducted, and analysed without context or impact being considered. Areas that have been identified as key in the study of LIPA, include contexts of homophobia and heterosexism (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2002; Walters, 2011). In addition, establishing the impact of abuse becomes crucial in the absence of gender as a marker to identify the perpetrator in lesbian relationships. Consequently, a repeated criticism levelled at family violence research is the failure to connect acts of physical violence with the consequences of these acts (Dobash, et al., 1992).

1.4.6 The Socio-Political Model (Feminist)

Sociological theories on IPA understand violence as a function of social structures rather than individual pathology and tend to view the issue from the family violence perspective.

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36 The CTS is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
or a feminist (socio-political) perspective (Lawson, 2012). Feminism is an ideology responsible for the predominant model to explain IPA. Beginning as a political movement to advocate for gender equality and to empower women, feminists drew attention to the issue of IPA, and have been responsible for creating women’s shelters, initiating intervention and advocacy programmes, and established changes in the criminal justice system to make IPA a crime (Azam Ali & Naylor, 2013). The central feature in this model is the exertion of power and control by men over women in contexts of gender inequality (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Gender-based theories of violence against women in intimate relationships often assume a male perpetrator and interpret the roots of violence in misogyny and patriarchy (Kelly, 1988; Koss et al., 1994).

Contrasting the feminist and the family violence approach, the feminist model understands IPA as fundamentally a gender issue (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo, 1993). The feminist model explains IPA as a consequence of living in a patriarchal society, where men dominate, subordinate and control women, and that these actions are condoned and supported by the larger structural systems, such as the political, legal, and religious arenas (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). In contrast to family violence perspectives, the feminist position argues that there are many types of violence within families (e.g., violence between children, between children and parents, and between partners). Gender rather than the family unit is the central feature of the analysis, and violence between partners is studied separately from the family structure (Lawson, 2012). A crucial difference between both perspectives lies in the feminist emphasis on domination (power and control) rather than conflict resolution as the basis for IPA. Commonality occurs with both feminist and family violence perspectives in their rejection of individual and family pathology to explain conflict and violence.

There are certain limitations with the traditional feminist gender-based approach to explaining LIPA. The model has been criticised for being inherently heterosexist (Ristock, 1994), and assuming heteronormativity because it frames men as batterers and women as victims (Cannon & Buttell, 2015). The feminist analysis is underpinned by essentialism and the belief that aggression is inherent in men (Kelly, 1991). When theories assume the maleness of the perpetrator, the male gender and its relation to violence become the focus of analysis rather than power and its relation to gender (Hollway, 1996). This approach to IPA creates a situation whereby lesbian abuse is either seen as impossible, as mutual abuse,
or the lesbian perpetrator becomes seen as male, in order for the analysis to fit (Ristock, 1994). Moreover, LIPA has been used to critique the feminist analysis, with researchers claiming that battering is more common in lesbian than in heterosexual relationships (Dutton, 1994).

Feminist theories have been further criticised for failing to explain why some heterosexual men batter their partners and others do not (Island & Letellier, 1991; Zemsky, 1990), for not fully or adequately explaining why the same dynamic of abuse in heterosexual relationships occurs in same sex relationships (Coleman, 1994), and feminists of colour have argued that it does not reflect their experiences (Merril, 1996). According to Ristock and Timbang (2005), the exclusive emphasis on a gender-based analysis of IPA can obscure the differing contexts surrounding the experience of both same sex and heterosexual IPA. Moreover, research demonstrates that exploring contexts of abusive lesbian relationships is a crucial component of the analysis (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2002).

1.4.7 Gender symmetry/asymmetry perspectives

In the mid-1990s Michael Johnson, an American Sociologist, attempted to calm the heated debates about gender symmetry/asymmetry between the family violence and feminist researchers. Johnson’s primary innovation was to separate IPA into two distinct concepts, one he termed, patriarchal terrorism (later called intimate terrorism) and two, common couple violence (later called situational couple violence) (Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Key to Johnson’s analysis was a critique of the selection bias affecting the empirical research conducted by family violence and feminist researchers (Madden Dempsey, 2006). Effectively, Johnson argued that the discrepancies between family violence and feminist researchers were due to the fact that they were analysing “two distinctly different phenomena” (Johnson, 1995, p.284). The family violence researchers primarily rely on quantitative data collated from large-scale, national studies producing results that suggest gender symmetry in violent relationships. In contrast, the feminist analysis relies on data collected from victims of IPA who have encountered the criminal justice system, the health sector, and the domestic violence shelters (Johnson 1995; Johnson 2006), where violence is interpreted as asymmetrical. According to Johnson, the failure to
make distinctions about the nature of abuse and how it is exercised between couples has resulted in an IPV literature that “may be uninterpretable” (2006, p.1003).

Johnson’s (2005) theory of IPA identified three distinct patterns of violence, intimate terrorism, situational couple violence and violent resistance. The three patterns are distinguished from each other by the level of control exercised by an abusive partner. Intimate terrorism violence is overwhelmingly committed by men against women, involving one partner exerting power, control, and violence, and where the abuse is consistent/frequent and likely to escalate over time. Common couple or situational couple violence is not connected to a context of power and control; it is committed by men and women at approximately the same rate, both partners can use violence but where this happens it is of a low frequency, not likely to escalate over time or to involve serious injury. Violent resistance involves a victim of intimate terrorism responding with violence in retaliation or self-defence usually resulting in injury, however, the violent response is not part of a controlling context. Johnson (2006) added mutual violent control to his typology. In mutual violent control, both partners are violent and controlling.

Johnson’s typologies identified the root cause of the gender symmetry vs asymmetry debates whereby situational couple violence dominates in general surveys, and intimate terrorism and violent resistance dominate the agency samples (Johnson, 2006). While his work unravelled the discrepancies in the findings of two dominant theoretical approaches, others have sought to integrate the two and move away from the polarised perspectives.

1.4.8 The Ecological Model (Multi-systems approach)

Corbally et al. (2016) propose that the theory of knowledge relating to IPA is flawed in two key areas: its overreliance on quantitative methodologies and the minimisation of alternative theoretical perspectives to understand IPA. Firstly, the authors argue that the overreliance on quantitative methodologies ignores attention to detailed and contextual accounts to explain the complexity of IPA. For example, as with traditional feminist approaches, gender is conceptualised as biological sex where participants respond as either male or female, which the researchers argue, fails to account for the multiple social constructions of gender identities. This point is of relevance to the study of LGBT populations. Ristock (2002, 2011) for example, draws attention to the importance of the
Differentiation of gender with LGBT samples and the need to carefully examine the patterns and differences in the experience of IPA for those who identify as LGBT. According to Ristock (2011), without careful differentiation, we risk treating all cases as equivalent and interchangeable.

Secondly, the authors suggest that dominant theoretical understandings of IPA have resulted in the minimisation of alternative theoretical perspectives. They argue instead for a shift away from competing perspectives (feminist and family violence) towards a more inclusive paradigm which can account for the complexities and the multi-layered factors that contribute to an abusive relationship. As such, an ecological perspective to understand IPA is proposed (Corbally et al., 2016).

An ecological perspective consists of multiple layers of analysis including individual, interpersonal, community, and societal (Krug, et al. 2002). Responding to the groundbreaking work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), researchers have adapted his ecological model of human development to the study heterosexual and lesbian IPA (Heise, 1998; Walters, 2009). Originally applied in the context of child development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) was critical of theoretical models that studied children in isolation to the context they were living in. Instead, he asserted that childhood should be studied in a wider social and cultural context where children are seen as active participants (Hayes, et al., 2017). Bronfenbrenner understood development as a function of the interplay between the individual and their lived environment.

Using a multifaceted approach to understanding child development and abuse, Bronfenbrenner proposed that individuals are embedded in, and affected by, different levels of context, both macro (distant largescale contexts) and micro (small, local, and close by). As such, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) original ecological framework located the developing child within four different environments, which he called, the ‘microsystem’, the ‘mesosystem’, the ‘exosystem’ and the and the ‘macrosystem’. The model is organised from those closest, or proximal to the individual, to those whose influence is indirect or distal (Hayes et al., 2017).

The microsystem is the immediate setting for the individual, where they interact and participate face-to-face with those closest to them such as family, partners, friends, and colleagues. This also includes their personal history. The mesosystem is the setting in which two microsystems connect and interact. For example, Bronfenbrenner describes the home
and school as two independent microsystems. However, the events that occur in one setting may have an effect on the other. The exosystem refers to more distant influences. The developing individual does not participate directly in these environments but may be directly affected by them. Bronfenbrenner provides the example of a working mother. A child has no connection with the mother’s workplace yet is directly affected by this environment due to a mother’s work commitments. The final environment is the macrosystem which constitutes the larger societal and cultural views where the person lives but has no control over. The macrosystem is the environment in which all other environments operate within. For example, within our society, heterosexism is understood as a social norm. This system endorses male and female relationships, the traditional family, rigid gender norms, men as aggressive, and women as nurturing and non-violent. These societal and cultural views permeate this macrosystem, thus, influencing all other environments connected to the individual.

Applying an ecological perspective to an understanding of abuse “conceptualises violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors” (Heise, 1998, p. 262). Fundamentally, an ecological perspective allows the researcher to represent the different environments in which the individual occupies, explain the issues experienced within each environment, and crucially, demonstrate the interplay between the different environments and the effect on the individual.

1.4.9 Intersectional approaches

Traditional feminist perspectives understand IPA as men’s power and control over women in a patriarchal society. Later feminist approaches sought to de-centre heterosexism, and instead apply an intersectional lens to understand IPA (Ristock, 2001). Recent feminist approaches to LIPA utilise the power and control model and apply an intersectional lens to understand the violence. An intersectional framework allows the researcher to include contexts, the multiple nature of identity, and the interlocking nature of systems of privilege and oppression to demonstrate how race, class, sexuality, and gender rely on each other to function within systems of domination (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Donovan and Hester (2014) argue that the forms power and control take in abusive relationships arise out of various contexts (e.g., homophobia and heterosexism), and is mediated by the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity age and class. Similarly, Renzetti (1992)
argues that in lesbian relationships, a gender and power analysis can apply but needs to be expanded on to include different experiences, meanings and interventions related to IPA. While more critical of the gender power framework, Ristock (2002) interprets the experience of IPA for lesbians as heterogeneous, and she highlights the importance of social context to provide what she explains is a partial explanation of LIPA. Furthermore, an intersectional framework “challenges the over-simplified either/or binaries (e.g., us/them, male/female, good/bad, victim/perpetrator)” (Ristock & Timbang, 2005, p. 10) that are typically found with traditional feminist explanations of IPA.

For the reasons previously outlined, this present research will employ an ecological perspective to understand LIPA. This present research asserts that the complexity of IPA requires more than a single causal model. No single factor can explain why an individual chooses to be violent or why violence is more widespread in some communities and not in others (Krug, et al., 2002). While individual psychological perspectives offer vital components to understand IPA, they are arguably more efficient as part of an integrated model. There are limitations to applying the feminist perspective to the study of LIPA. Primarily, a feminist analysis explains violence as male domination over women. This framework becomes fragile when applied to lesbian relationships. As previously mentioned, the conceptualisation of gender with biological sex fails to account for gender fluidity. The feminist account of what constitutes IPA requires the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, where male masculinity equates with being the abuser, and female femininity equates with being a victim. Within this construction of IPA, other experiences (including heterosexual male victims) are made invisible because they don’t fit the ‘one size fits all’ model (Renzetti, 1992).

Family violence perspectives focus on violence as the resolution of conflicts rather than power and control, primarily within the domain of the family. Typically, these approaches are criticised for the exclusion of context, motive, and impacts of violence in abusive relationships (Dobash, et al., 1992), areas that have been identified as key to understanding LIPA (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2003). Researchers argue that the issue of IPA is complicated and complex and that this complexity is amplified when

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37 The application of an ecological perspective to explain LIPA is outlined in the Discussion chapter of the thesis.
studying a marginalised or minority group, including the elderly, racial and ethnic minorities, male victims of IPA, and immigrants (Walters, 2009). Ecological theory’s comprehensive approach and focus on the complex interactions between the different environments an individual participates, interacts, and is influenced by, is best placed to provide a comprehensive analysis of LIPA.

Similar to the analysis tools available with the application of an intersectional lens to understand IPA, an ecological perspective is expanded to include the socio-cultural context and demonstrate how dominant structural contexts can marginalise groups based on their age, class, disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and gender identities.

The chapter now moves to discuss the Irish historical socio-cultural context, to highlight the oppression of heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexuality, orchestrated primarily by the Catholic Church and the Irish State.

### 1.5 The Irish historic socio-cultural context

#### 1.5.1 The regulation of sexuality

*From infancy, we are taught and conditioned to believe that any expression of sexuality which does not conform to the rigid, procrustean heterosexual norm is perversion. We are, in fact, programmed to regard all feelings of sexual or sensual attraction for a person of our own sex as a sign of moral degeneracy and decadence.*

The quote above, taken from a publication by the National Gay Federation (NGF), references the oppressive socio-cultural context which non-heterosexual Irish men and women faced, where sexuality was oppressed, controlled, and regulated by the Catholic Church and their influence on the Irish State (Hug, 1999). Weeks (2003) argues that the

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39 The NGF was established in 1979, leasing a building called the Hirschfeld Centre, in the Temple Bar area of Dublin. The community centre was the first full-time lesbian and gay venue in Ireland. It housed a meeting space, a youth group, a café, a small cinema and film club and it ran discos at the weekend where gay men, lesbian women and transgender people socialised.

40 The church alone was not solely responsible for the social organisation and regulation of sexual life. The Irish historian Diarmaid Ferriter suggests that the history of Irish sexuality raises questions not just of religion and morality but also about public health, the attitude of the medical profession to reproduction, the operation of the criminal law system, the application of legislation, the age of consent, demographics, living standards and conditions, education, the role of family and patriotism, and ultimately the uses and abuses of power (Ferriter, 2009).
regulation of sexuality in Western societies tends to be applied in ways which subordinate women’s sexuality to men’s. Catholic social and moral teaching emphasised the virtues of chastity, virginity, modesty, piety and sobriety which was reinforced in Irish homes, schools and communities, was directed towards women and children in particular (Inglis, 1987), and even more so to single women (Redmond, 2008).

The regulation of sexual behaviour affected both men and women in Irish society, irrespective of their sexuality. In his description of the causal links between Catholicism and sexual behaviour in Ireland, Fahey (1999, p. 60) states, ‘There is no doubt that Catholic teaching provided much of the imagery and language in which relationships between the sexes and with the human body were spoken and thought about by the majority of the Irish population’.

From the 1920s, the Catholic hierarchy, lay groups, and the government together imposed a Catholic construction of sexuality and worked to regulate it. Anything that threatened the family was seen to threaten the stability of society, and of the nation as a whole (O’Callaghan, 1983). The Catholic Church focused on family and sexuality as the core concerns of its moral teaching. It is based on the concept of natural law, as expounded by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. The concept rests mainly on two precepts: first that one must do good and avoid evil; second, that it is in nature that we can find the moral values that enable us to distinguish between good and evil.41 It is within this framework that the Catholic Church promotes homosexuality as an objective disorder, ‘according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality...[This judgement] does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can be in no case approved of’ (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976, p. 119).42

The Republic of Ireland, for much of the last century was a mono-cultural society in which the church was the ultimate arbiter of morality on a range of social issues concerning sex

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41 The Catholic Church adopted this theory as its official doctrine in 1879, and to this day it still endorses natural law as the universal and obligatory moral law.

42 Throughout the 19th century, the Irish Catholic Church increased its ideological dominance, by its practical control of education, health, and social services. Inglis (1988) argues that adherence to the teachings, beliefs and values of the Catholic Church did not depend on historical loyalty or some innate spirituality, but rather on a systematic process of socialisation exercised at multiple levels of Irish life.
and sexuality, including censorship, reproduction, contraception, abortion, and sex outside the bonds of marriage (Inglis, 1988; Walsh, 1997). There are numerous examples of the Church influence on government. In 1944, Irish Bishops objected to the introduction of tampons, which was thought could harmfully stimulate girls and lead to the use of contraceptives (Fahey, 1999). Under instruction from Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, the Department of Local Government and Public Health banned their sale (Barrington, 1987).

Described as ‘cultural and religious protectionism at their most draconian’ (Brush, 2005, p. 139), the government’s most famous measure to safeguard traditional moral values was the Censorship of Publications Act 1929. Derived from the report of the Committee on Evil Literature published in 1927 (Whyte, 1980), the Act provided not only for the control of erotic literature but also defined as obscene any literature which provided information on or advocated ‘unnatural’ birth control methods (Fahey, 1999). Between 1946 and 1965 nearly 8000 books were banned (Ferriter, 2009). Irish writers found themselves classed with ‘mercenary pornographers’ while being deprived of a large share of their legitimate income (Fallon, 1999, p. 201).

The issue of contraception was also an ‘episcopal anxiety’. The Censorship of Publications Act 1929 made it illegal to publish any material which advocated the use of contraceptives (Inglis, 1998). The actual sale and import of these articles had not yet been interfered with. The government remedied this by carrying the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1935, section 17 of which prohibited the sale and importation of contraceptives (Whyte, 1980), a measure that was eventually invalidated in the Supreme Court in 1973. Inglis (1988) claims that

43 Between 1929 and the mid-1960s, virtually every leading Irish fiction-writer suffered under censorship, the exception being, James Joyce (Fallon, 1999, p.201).
44 In 1941, Irish author Kate O'Brien published The Land of Spices. Towards the end of the third chapter, the young Helen Archer saw Etienne, 'in the embrace of love' with her father (1941, p.157). Etienne was a man, and this single image was the only reference to homosexuality in the book. Those four words, ‘the embrace of love’ was found by a member of the Censorship Board to be ‘so repulsive that the book should not be left where it would fall into the hands of very young people’ (Brown, 2004, pp. 184–185). Colm Tóibín suggests that because Helen’s father and the man in the Land of Spices were not merely embracing, that they were in the embrace of love; it was perhaps that idea that disturbed the Censorship Board. Tóibín explained, “The idea, that there was someone not willing to caricature sexual relations between men but rather offer them dignity and suggestiveness” (The Embrace of Love: Being Gay in Ireland Now: A Public Lecture by Colm Tóibín, Thursday 14 May 2015 18:30pm Edmund Burke Theatre, Arts Building).
45 Mary McGee versus the Attorney-General. The Supreme Court ruled that banning contraceptives between married couples was unconstitutional and breached the right to privacy in marriage. See Whyte, (1980).
the monopoly of the discourse on sexuality was cemented with both Acts as they were important legislative instruments in the maintenance and propagation of Catholicism and nationalist Puritanism.

1.5.2 Two movements of resistance

By the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the field of sexuality and debate, and discussion of sex had been monopolised by the Catholic Church, where “The Church was the authority on sexuality” (Inglis, 1988, p. 38). However, where there is present a pervasive dominant discourse, counter cultures of resistance are usually in existence just below the surface (Weeks, 2003). Weeks (2003) identified cultures of resistance as crucial in the social organisation of sexuality. The Irish Women’s and the Gay Rights Movements are two cultures of resistance that challenged the church and put forward an alternative language and framework to understand both the self and society.

1.5.3 The Rise of the Women’s Movement

*The modernisation of Ireland and the liberalisation of its social laws owes much to education, and to the women’s movement. ... Women gave the lead. They were no longer willing to have their lives and their childbearing determined by elderly celibate and often unsympathetic, male clerics.* (Gilmore, 2015)

The decade of the 1970s appears to be the period where legal reform around domestic and sexual violence started to gain traction in Ireland. Like their Western counterparts in other countries, Irish women’s groups began to agitate for legal reforms. The emerging women’s movement began to highlight the levels of discrimination and injustice suffered by women, not least in the context of the laws governing sexual and domestic violence. The main sources of dissatisfaction with respect to legislation included the definition of rape; investigation and trial procedures; and sentencing policy (O’Malley, 1996).

Most commentators date second-wave Irish feminism from 1968, when ten traditional women’s organisations established an ad hoc committee to call on the Government to

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46 There was also a parallel campaign for the decriminalisation of consensual homosexual acts.
47 July 1977, Campaign Against Rape held its first meeting in Dublin – this led to the establishment of the Rape Crisis Centre, first such organisation in the country, in early 1979.
48 Organisations included the Irish Housewives’ Association, the Association of Business and Professional Women, the Soroptimist’s, and the Irish Country Woman’s Association.
establish a National Commission on the Status of Women (CWS).\textsuperscript{49} The commission was established to press the government to examine such issues as equal pay for equal work, discrimination against married women in employment, the unfair taxation of women and inequality in education.\textsuperscript{50}

1.5.4 The development of sexual and domestic violence services

Smyth (1988) suggests that movements arise when specific social and cultural factors act as a catalyst or trigger to action. On an October evening in 1978, an estimated five to six thousand women, marched through the centre of Dublin, to protest about rape. The march was in response to the gang-rape of a sixteen-year-old girl in a derelict basement in Dublin’s inner city. The ‘reclaim the night’ march was organised by a small group of feminists who went on, the following year, to establish the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC). Once the DRCC was established, actions and campaigns around rape legislation and violence against women were initiated (McKay, 2005). According to Smyth (1988, p. 340), during the period 1977-1983 of the movement, “violence against women was probably the major mobilising issue of this period”.

Regarding the Irish gay movement, a similar catalyst for change happened in 1983 with the murder of a gay man, Declan Flynn, in Dublin’s Fairview Park. Five young men were given suspended sentences ranging from one to five years on pleading guilty to the manslaughter of a man alleged to have been loitering for homosexual purposes.\textsuperscript{51} The sentencing triggered the first public march against violence and anti-gay sentiment in Ireland, which in turn lead to the initiation of Ireland’s first Pride parade.

It was the report by the CSW that led to the first significant parliamentary discussion in 1979 on sexual violence in the history of the state (Smyth, 1988).\textsuperscript{52} One year later, a Private

\textsuperscript{49} The CSW, chaired by Dr Thekla Beere, made an interim report on equal pay in 1971, and a full report containing 49 recommendations just over a year later. The official Council for the Status of Women was formed in 1973 to implement the recommendations and to act as an umbrella group for Irish women’s organisations. Smyth (1988) singles out the 1968 ad hoc committee as crucial in laying the groundwork for many of the legislative reforms and other measures which brought about improvement in Irish women’s lives over the following decade.

\textsuperscript{50} Report on a meeting of the ad hoc Committee of Women’s Organisations on the Status of Women, 5 May 1968 (N.I.L. Records of the ICA, MS 39, 866/3).

\textsuperscript{51} See Irish Times, (‘Manslaughter sentence suspended on five youths’, 1983).

\textsuperscript{52} 1979 Seanad debate on the report of the Council for the Status of Women (CSW).
Members Bill introduced in the Seanad by Senator Hussey, reflected the predominant concerns at the time. This Private Members’ Bills failed to survive the second reading but was quickly succeeded by a Government-sponsored Bill which led to the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981.

The 1981 Act furnished for the first time in Ireland a statutory definition of rape. The definition provided for the absence of consent rather than the presence of force as the essence of rape but, by specifying that sexual intercourse had to be ‘unlawful’, it effectively maintained the immunity of husbands from charges of rape. Such issues identified with the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981 were sent forth to the Law Reform Commission in 1987. Following the publication of its Consultation paper, the government reacted to the Commission’s report and introduced the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Bill 1988. This was preceded by The Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) 1990 that finally removed a husband’s immunity from charges of rape. Other significant changes included the introduction of a new offence, ‘Rape under Section 4’ which represents a shift to a gender-neutral approach to sexual violence. Rape under Section 4 includes rape committed by either sex and can include anal or oral rape.

Reflecting on the Irish Women’s movement, Smyth (1988, p. 249) writes that “There has been a willingness from the very beginning, to use state machinery, especially the legal process, to achieve radical change”. Action Information Motivation (AIM) was the first pressure group to come out of Irish Women’s Liberation Movement (Levine, 2002), having

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53 It set out procedures to be followed in Garda stations when a woman made a complaint of rape; provided for the anonymity of complainants; prohibited the complainant being asked questions during trial about her sexual relations with persons other than the accused; required that there should be at least four female members on the jury for a rape trial; abolish the marital rape exemption; and required that the trial of sexual offences should take place without delay.
54 Other areas of concern with this Act included rape being confined to vaginal intercourse; the conclusive presumption of incapacity in relation to boys under fourteen; and the mandatory corroboration warning and inconsistency in sentencing.
55 The law on marital rape was not introduced in 1981 partly because it was believed that it might be an obstacle to the reconciliation of the couple (McIntyre et al., 2012).
56 The Law Reform Commission produced two documents, a Consultation Paper on Rape (October 1987); and Report on Rape and Allied Offences (1988).
57 Many of the changes it introduced were later followed in England, a reversal of more traditional trends, e.g. the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981, by which Ireland regularly adopted English legislation almost as a matter of course.
a significant role to play in improving the social, economic, and legislative conditions for women in Ireland. With the remit of lobbying for family law reform, this group publicised the reality of marital breakdown and persistently lobbied ministers to improve conditions for deserted spouses.

Prior to 1976, a woman who found herself in an abusive relationship had very limited options available to her in terms of support. Abusive spouses could not be ordered to stay away from the family home, leaving many women little choice but to seek refuge elsewhere or remain in the abusive environment. In conjunction with AIM, Women’s Aid campaigned successfully for changes in the law to account for this negligence. The Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act (1976), Ireland’s first legislation on domestic violence, enabled one spouse to seek a barring order against the other, for a period of three months, where the welfare or safety of a spouse or children were at risk. In the same year, Women’s Aid, an offshoot of AIM, opened its first refuge for battered wives (McKay, 2005).

Crone (1988, p. 343) recalls how deep-rooted the taboo against lesbianism was in the Irish Women’s Movement, as she states, ‘To admit to lesbianism publicly was unthinkable’. In the early 1970s, the only place that Irish women could discuss sex publicly was the women’s movement, but there was no awareness of lesbianism as a political issue. Crone (1988) highlights the social and cultural context that gay women were living in, one in which lesbians simply didn’t have the feminist vocabulary to demand that lesbianism be acknowledged as a political issue. A similar point is put forward by Ryan (2006), in his discussion of gay mobilisation over the decade of 1970 to the 1980s. His analysis identifies David Norris, a founding member of the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) as crucial in creating a vocabulary around gay sexuality for the gay men’s movement.

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58 Areas of concern included a six-month waiting period to receive a deserted wife’s allowance and the fact that a husband could sell the family home without his wife’s consent.
59 Irish women whose marriages had broken down were often economically vulnerable, frequently homeless, and legally stifled. See Fahey (1995).
60 AIM was also responsible for the successful campaign in favour of the legal right to the children’s allowance being transferred from fathers to mothers, through the Social Welfare Act (1974).
1.5.5 The Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM)

Irish gay men and women were subjected to the same level of control over sexuality as were their unmarried and married heterosexual counterparts. Any sexual activity that fell outside of the context of marriage was marginalised. There was an attempt to control sexual relations even within marriage via the resistance to change around contraception and divorce (Hug, 1999). Weeks (2003) argues that forms of moral regulation give rise to cultures of resistance. In the Irish case, cultures of resistance came in the form of the Women Movement and the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM). The resurgence in second-wave feminism coincided with a parallel campaign for the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

1.5.6 Homosexuality and the law

Homosexuality was outlawed in Ireland under two Acts passed in 1861 and 1885 respectively. Following a sensational buggery case in London in 1631 concerning an Irish Earl of Castlehaven, the case highlighted the fact that this legislation didn’t extend to Ireland. A “Save Ireland from Sodomy” campaign, initiated by Revd. John Atherton resulted in a set of English laws being enacted in the Irish House of Commons on 11th November 1634. David Norris proposes that “by a delicious irony Revd. Atherton by now the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, became himself its first victim being executed in Dublin for the abominable crime of buggery on 5th December 1640” (Norris, 1981, p. 33). The laws surrounding homosexual behaviour that existed in Ireland until 1993, were, those which Atherton was instrumental in introducing.

In 1974, David Norris and Edmund Lynch founded the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM), the name of which was significant. It was a direct challenge to the construction of nationalist sexuality as exclusively heterosexual and the relegation of a homosexual to a marginal other in Irish society. The aims of the IRGM were two-fold: to provide a safe

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61 The Offences Against the Person Act 1861 Act specifically criminalises sodomy (anal intercourse) and carried a sentence of up to life imprisonment. The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 – incorporated the Labouchere Amendment which made it an offence for males to engage in acts of gross indecency in public or private, irrespective of their age, thereby placing all homosexual conduct outside the law (O’Malley, 1996). The 1885 Act criminalised any act of physical intimacy between two men. Since ‘physical intimacy’ was not defined under the Act, it could technically be interpreted to mean anything from a hand-shake to full sexual contact.
outlet for men and women to establish friendships and relationships, while using the income generated by these ventures to fund counselling services; and to lobby for political activities that would bring about decriminalisation. Norris believed that breaking the cycle of shame around homosexuality would be crucial in creating the conditions necessary for people to come together in some form of collective action. He identified the Catholic Church as key to preventing those conditions coming about by maintaining a sense of shame around sexuality:

“The Roman Catholic Church for hundreds of years invaded human sexuality simply because they knew how to capture hearts and minds; you grab them by the balls and their hearts and minds will follow. Because once you’ve got somebody prepared to accept your rulings in the most intimate and personal [areas], and cultivate a climate of shame about these things, then you are in a very powerful position” (Norris interviewed by Ryan, 2006, p. 91).

Homosexuality was decriminalised in Britain in 1967 and Australia in the mid-1970s. The dominance of the socio-cultural context of Catholicism in Ireland however rendered Irish society intolerant for longer. It was 1993 before homosexual behaviour became decriminalised in Irish law.62 Arguing that the existing legislation that criminalised homosexuality was in contravention of article 40.1 under the Constitution,63 Norris embarked on a lengthy legal battle. Following a case in the High Court in 1980, an appeal to the Supreme Court in 1983, Norris finally won his case in the European Court of Human Rights in 1988. The enactment of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 1993 finally decriminalised consensual sexual acts between adult males (Rose, 1994). The next section reviews the legislative context concerning both DV and recent legislative developments in Ireland concerning LGBT individuals.

63 Article 40.1 of the Irish Constitution guarantees the right of citizens to equality before the law. A provision on the right to privacy that was successfully used in the 1973 McGee case overturning the ban on contraception was also invoked. See Hugg (1999).
1.6 Legislative context

1.6.1 Domestic Violence – the legal context

Prior to 1976, victims of domestic violence had to pursue perpetrators through making a complaint to Gardaí and awaiting the initiation of criminal proceedings. The introduction of barring orders as a legal instrument to protect a victim of domestic violence was first introduced with The Family Law (maintenance of spouses and children) Act, 1976. Perpetrators of violence could be removed from the family home; however, it was only a temporary measure, the length of the order could only be a maximum of three months.

The Family Law (maintenance of spouses and children) Act, 1981 addressed the weaknesses of its predecessor by extending the length of barring orders to twelve months and introducing protection orders from the initiation of court proceedings. Yet difficulties persisted with the application of the law, with some judges unwilling to act on one incidence of violence, while the interpretation of law often failed to recognise any form of violence other than physical violence (McIntyre, et al., 2012). The Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act, 1989, offered a potential solution to those experiencing domestic violence. This law permitted the granting of a decree of judicial separation for, amongst other things, the unreasonable behaviour of one spouse toward another. It also provided for the vacation of the family home by an offending spouse and the transferral of ownership of the family home in certain circumstances.

There is no criminal offence of ‘domestic violence’. However, many of the behaviours considered to be part of the pattern of domestic violence are criminal offences. These may be prosecuted through the judicial system via other pieces of legislation. The legal response to domestic violence in Ireland is largely contained in the Domestic Violence Act

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64 They could also pursue perpetrators through the civil law system so long as injunctions were sought in a court higher than the district court.
65 Implementation deficits and the potential for violence to be perpetrated in the period between instigation of court proceedings and final judgement were flaws in the legislation. As will be discussed further in this section, the potential for violence between court proceedings is still being debated as an issue with the most current DV legislation in Ireland.
1996, the Domestic Violence (Amendment Act, 2002), and more recently, the Domestic Violence Bill (2017) and the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017.

There are four main orders that may be granted under the Domestic Violence Act 1996. The Domestic Violence Act 1996 broadened the categories of people who can apply for domestic violence orders to include parents, and cohabitee’s living with the applicant for six of the nine months prior to the application of a barring order. The 1996 Act allowed for the granting of Interim Barring Orders in the absence of, or without notifying the respondent. This was deemed as unconstitutional and the Act was amended resulting in The Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act, 2002. The 2002 Act allowed for a protection order to be granted in the same circumstances.

1.6.2 Recent DV legislative developments regarding same sex couples

Over a period of four decades, the Irish LGBT community has made considerable progress from a position of total marginalisation, invisibility, and powerlessness to one of equal citizenship in the realm of law (Higgins et al., 2016). In recent years, many positive significant legislative developments have occurred that have worked toward increasing visibility and acceptance of this population. In August 2011, amendments to the Domestic Violence Act 1996 were enacted via the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011. For the first time, the Act gave equal access to the protections of the Domestic Violence Act to opposite-sex and same-sex couples.

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67 Omissions were highlighted by the Report of the National Task Force on Violence Against Women (1997:60). The Act does not cover certain categories of persons, including those who have a child but do not cohabit. Other exceptions highlighted include adult siblings who want a barring order or persons who reside with adult children in the latter’s home.

68 Following an EU Victims directive, the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 was signed into law on November 7, 2017.

69 The Act includes a Protection Order; an Interim Barring Order; a Barring Order; and a Safety Order.

70 The act allowed for the legal intervention of state agencies. Section 18 of the Act introduced ‘probable cause’ arrest, where arrests can be made without the Garda witnessing the violence. Under section 6 of the legislation, health authorities are given the power to intervene, to protect individuals and their children from violence.

71 The provisions of this Act allowed a parent to apply for a Safety Order against the other parent in cases where they are not living together or had never lived together. Furthermore, co-habiting couples no longer had to be living together for six of the previous nine months to apply for a Safety Order.
As a pathway to ratifying the Istanbul Convention, the then Minister for Justice, Francis Fitzgerald, brought two Bills before Cabinet in December 2016. The Domestic Violence Bill and the Victims of Crime Bill are legislative measures to tackle domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Bill recognises the reality of online abuse. The new legislation allows a victim to apply for an order to prevent the perpetrator from following or communicating with the victim, including by electronic means, the only communication allowed in this instance would be for communications specified by the court.

However, as with all new legislation, gaps have been identified. Domestic violence is still not named as a criminal offence. There is a lack of an emergency barring order facility to provide immediate protection for victims during out-of-hours when courts are not sitting. Additionally, the Bill does not deal with harassment and stalking or the new technologies that are used in tandem with this form of digital abuse. Moreover, those working in the DV sector are critical of the Bill for not be able to capture the coercive controlling behaviours that form the backdrop of the experience of IPA.

The development of the legislation governing domestic violence in Ireland reflects the knowledge and understanding of domestic violence as a severely complex social issue. There has been a move away from dealing with the phenomenon as an act that occurs primarily between men and women, where men are the sole perpetrators of violence and sexual violence, to the understanding that domestic violence comes in many shapes and sizes, perpetrated by women against men, during relationships and after a relationship ends, between cohabiting and non-cohabiting, between children and parents, and more recently between same sex couples, plus a recognition of the reality of online abuse. However, the legislation fails to expand the definition of domestic violence to include not just married...

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72 The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) entered force on 1 August 2014.  
73 The Domestic Violence Bill extends access to interim barring orders by removing the barrier of property ownership and gives judges the power to refer perpetrators to programmes. Both issues are requirements under the Istanbul Convention.  
74 The Bill did not provide the option for the police to bar a perpetrator from the home for an extended period of 72 hours to enhance the protection of a victim.  
75 O’Connor, Orla. 20th December 2016. NWCI welcomes the Domestic Violence Bill but says it fails to meet the extent of the problem. Retrieved from http://www.nwci.ie/index.php?/learn/article/nwci_welcomes_the_domestic_violence_bill_but_says_it_fa ils_to_meet_the_exte  
76 (‘Safe Ireland: Domestic Violence Bill does not protect women and children’, 2017)
couples and cohabitees but also to include other intimate relationships, and the types of abuse that are specific to same sex relationships.

This part of the chapter now proceeds to discuss the recent flurry of legislative developments impacting Ireland's LGBT population, starting in 1993 when homosexuality was decriminalised.

1.7 Irish LGBT community – the legal context

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993

On Wednesday 30th June 1993, the Seanad passed all remaining stages of the Bill decriminalising homosexuality. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 provided for equality with heterosexuals. The Bill stated simply that ‘any rule of law by virtue of which buggery between persons is an offence is hereby abolished’ (Cited in Rose, 1994, p.1). Both homosexual and heterosexual behaviour would now be subjected to the same legal regime with a common age of consent of seventeen years and the same privacy codes. Kieran Rose, an Irish human rights activist, reflecting on this momentous day recalled that decriminalisation “symbolised the end of a twenty-year law reform campaign, and the beginning of a new relationship between the Irish state and its lesbian and gay community” (Ibid, 1994, p.1).

The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights & Obligations of Cohabitants Act, 2010

The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights & Obligations of Cohabitants Act, 2010 represented a stepping stone to full marriage equality for same sex couples. The Act provides same sex couples with rights and responsibilities similar, but not equal to, those of civil marriage.

Marriage Referendum 2015

77 Ireland's national parliament or legislature. It consists of the President of Ireland and two Houses: Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.
78 The legislation was rushed through the Houses of the Oireachtas, no more than 12 hours parliamentary time was allotted to it. There was a political advantage to this arrangement because of residual opposition to changing the homosexuality law. The speed of transit through parliament reduced the likelihood of individual deputies & senators being subjected to local pressure to oppose it (See O'Malley, 1996).
On May 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise same sex marriage by popular vote. 41 of Ireland’s 42 constituencies, representative of 1,202, 198 people (62\% of the electorate) voted in its favour, to amend Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution) so that: “Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex”\textsuperscript{79}. Within one year of the marriage referendum vote, 412 same sex marriages were registered within Ireland, with every county except one having registered a same sex marriage.\textsuperscript{80} At the last count, 1,082 marriages were registered in the country, with county registrars performing an average of twenty-one same sex weddings each week.\textsuperscript{81}

\textit{Gender Recognition Act 2015}

Two months on from the ‘historic’ day in May, Ireland’s transgender community welcomed the Gender Recognition Act that was signed into law on the July 22nd, 2015. Ireland became the fourth country in the world to pass gender recognition legislation based on self-determination. This legislation removes all medical criteria from the legal recognition process, meaning there is no requirement for medical interventions or diagnosis of a mental disorder. Trans* people over the age of 18 are now able to self-declare their gender by way of a statutory declaration. Since the commencement of the Gender Recognition Act, 113 Gender Recognition Certificates have been issued across Ireland.

\textit{The Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2015}

In Ireland, the Employment Equality Act, 1998, 2004 contained a derogation known as Section 37(1), for organisations which have an explicit denominational ethos (such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes). Section 37(1) permitted them to take ‘reasonable action’ to protect that ethos from being undermined.\textsuperscript{82} The Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2015 amended the provisions of Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality


\textsuperscript{80} Varadkar welcomes 412 same sex marriages since Referendum (2016, May 20\textsuperscript{th}). Retrieved from https://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr200516.aspx

\textsuperscript{81} Quigley, A. (2016, 12\textsuperscript{th} December). Over 1000 Same Sex Marriages in the last 12 Months. Retrieved from http://theoutmost.com/news/1000-sex-marriages-last-12-months/?platform=hoostsuite

\textsuperscript{82} Section 37 (i) of the Employment Equality Act, 1998, 2004 permitted a religious run institution to discriminate against an employee based on their sexual orientation.
Act (1998, 2004) making it illegal for religious-run institutions to discriminate against employee’s who were non-heterosexual.

The Children and Family Relationships Bill 2015
This Bill was enacted on 6th April 2015. The aim of this legislation was to modernise laws regarding children living in diverse family forms. The Tánaiste and then Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform, Frances Fitzgerald, described the legislation as “the most comprehensive reform of family law since the foundation of the State” (Fitzgerald, 2016). With respect to same sex couples, the law enables civil partnered or cohabiting couples to be eligible jointly to adopt a child. The passing of this piece of legislation represents the first-time same sex parents are recognised in Irish law.

The Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017
Up until October 2017, a couple had to be married to adopt a child in Ireland. The Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 signed into law 19th October 2017 means that non-heterosexual and heterosexual couples who have been living together for at least three years or non-heterosexual couples who are in a Civil Partnership are now able to apply to adopt a child. Previously, unmarried couples could only adopt a child as a single person (O’Regan, 2017).

Over the previous three decades, the Irish legislative landscape pertaining to sexuality and gender oppression has utterly changed. Ireland is now legally recognising all its citizens irrespective of their sexual or gender identity, and further, acknowledging the diversity in the formation of families in modern Ireland.

The chapter now proceeds to examine the policy context in Ireland governing domestic and sexual violence, showing that policy responses are focused on the heterosexual experience of IPA.

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83 http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/SP16000208
1.8 The Irish policy context

1.8.1 A multisector heterosexist approach to DV

In Ireland, there is a multisector approach to domestic and sexual violence (SV) involving not only the statutory, voluntary, and community agencies, but also public health and the criminal justice system. Programmes for perpetrators of violence are closely aligned to the Health and Justice Departments (Health Service Executive, 2010). However, the focus is primarily on male-perpetrated violence against women (Debbonaire, et al., 2004).

TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency, is currently responsible for providing “a national oversight of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence services” (TUSLA Child and Family Agency, 2017, p. 14). A review of their website and publications concerning DV and SV does not examine the issue of same sex IPA. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for the strategic planning and provision of prevention and intervention initiatives, and funding, regarding domestic and sexual violence in Ireland (Health Service Executive, 2010).

A needs analysis incorporating LGBT individuals was published by the HSE in 2009. The report represented the first time that the national health services provider had engaged with issues specific to LGBT individuals. The authors acknowledged that they were charting ‘new territory’ in the mapping of existing services for this population. The key findings to emerge around well-being and health issues for the LGBT community related to physical and mental health consequences because of ‘domestic abuse’. The report also highlighted that there is no HSE policy governing the support or funding of LGBT health-related work. Not surprisingly, the participants in the study reported difficulties accessing appropriate support services.

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84 Conversations between the researcher and COSC and the HSE revealed at present, there is no funding from either the HSE or COSC to support female perpetrator programmes.
85 The researcher collaborated with TUSLA in September and October 2017, as part of their training and awareness modules, aimed at professionals working with a DV and SV remit.
86 Through its remit of primary care and hospital services, the HSE manage the impact of DV and SV on the health and well-being of individuals, via a host of professionals including GPs, primary care teams, family support workers, social workers, community welfare officers, public health nurses, hospital doctors and nurses who provide a range of services to DV and SV victims.
87 Using Irish research data, Chapter 2 will highlight some of the impacts associated with a lack of support or funding in health-care services for LGBT individuals.
COSC, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, is another state-funded body charged with providing public raising awareness initiatives, the delivery of coordinated services, and the development of prevention initiatives in line with international practice.\(^{88}\) What is evident from a review of the policy documents publicly available concerning DV and SV, is that the attempts to include the same sex experience of IPA are minimal. State-sponsored agencies policy documents typically comprise of one sentence to say that DV exists in same sex relationships (Department of Justice and Equality, 2016, Health Service Executive, 2010, Health Service Executive, 2009; Kenny & ní Riain, 2014). The publications contain no information on the critical differences that occur in a same sex abusive partnership.\(^{89}\) A similar approach can be found within recent Garda Síochána policy initiatives to address domestic and sexual violence (An Garda Síochána, 2017).\(^{90}\)

A review of the existing policy context from state-funded agencies charged with addressing, managing, and promoting public awareness of DV suggests that public policy, and its impact on service provision and coordination, is primarily informed and catered to the heterosexual female experience of DV. It could be argued that a heterosexist approach at the policy level has the potential to create direct inequalities for non-heterosexual women experiencing IPA, and their ability to access appropriate service provision.\(^{91}\) For example, in the US, Cannon & Buttell (2015) found that a heteronormative bias in policies to address IPA results in female perpetrators receiving the same treatment as a male perpetrator of a male victim, or of a female victim, which the authors argue obscures the problem of IPA in same sex relationships.

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\(^{88}\) Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention requires that data collection is to be coordinated by a national body. COSC will act as the coordinating body.

\(^{89}\) This thesis will consistently reference the consequences of organisations that promote a heterosexual ‘public face’ when promoting IPA, and its impact on lesbian victims.

\(^{90}\) Currently, there appear to be issues with An Garda Síochána response to DV. The latest figures available report that officers responded to 5,988 domestic violence incidences in 2016. However, this figure has been criticised as too low to be reliable considering the police in Northern Ireland recorded 28,811 domestic violence incidents between October 2015 and September 2016 (Gallagher, 2017). Northern Ireland has almost 3 million fewer people than the Republic of Ireland. This is problematic considering An Garda Síochána is the only State institution collecting data on DV.

\(^{91}\) The consequences of this approach are discussed in detail in the final chapter of the thesis.
The development of domestic and sexual violence services in Ireland demonstrates that legislative, policy and service provision was targeted to improve the needs of heterosexual women. This is despite the fact that lesbian women were instrumental in the development of DV and SV services in Ireland (Crone, 1988; Mears, 2016). Considering the socio-cultural context of being a non-heterosexual woman in Ireland, it is understandable why lesbian women remained silent and did not campaign for their inclusion and service needs whilst DV and SV services were being developed. Crone (1988) argues that lesbians initial participation in the Women’s Movement occurred in societal contexts where there was no vocabulary to demand that lesbianism be acknowledged as a political issue. At this period of service development, Crone (2002, p. 1068) recalls that lesbians were “unwilling or unable to court publicity, because to do so may have invited violence, rape, or even death”.

It appears that the evolution of DV services, and silence from those in the lesbian community working toward the development of services, may help to explain how the services were initially organised and structured to combat violence against heterosexual women.

To conclude this chapter, the evidence described in the previous sections highlights that policy and service provision in Ireland is still geared toward the female heterosexual experience of DV and SV. Unlike the positive legislative advancements in relational to same sex relationships and same sex families, policy development on the issue of same sex IPA is minimal. A heterosexist bias occurring at the policy development and implementation level to address DV and SV could be better understood in the context of the dearth of knowledge available in Ireland regarding non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA. The last four decades have witnessed significant developments in legislation to address ‘domestic violence’ issues for both men and women in opposite and same sex relationships. However, the definitions to explain IPA do not include the specific types of abuse that manifest in same sex relationships (i.e. identity abuse).

**Conclusion: Chapter one**

This opening chapter has introduced this study of lesbian women’s experience of intimate partner abuse within the Irish socio-cultural, legislative, social policy contexts, and the theoretical knowledge base pertaining to IPA. While legislation and social policy demonstrate development in the Irish knowledge base that ‘domestic violence’ can occur between opposite and same sex couples, post-separation, and the inclusion of online abuse
tactics, there is a significant lack of understanding of how non-heterosexual women experience IPA from a female partner. This study aims to create a theoretical knowledge base and contribute to an understanding of how non-heterosexual women experience IPA from a female partner, how they understand and make sense of their abusive experience, and what are their help-seeking strategies in response to the abuse. Acknowledging that the Irish research base concerned with this topic is nascent, this study aims to highlight other victimisation experiences, that have until now, remained hidden and silent.

There are two separate literature reviews. The first, Chapter Two, begins by firstly introducing the Irish domestic research available followed by the international literature in this field of inquiry.\(^2\) Chapter Three reviews the international literature relevant to lesbian IPA (including same sex IPA in general where necessary), and the help-seeking decisions and strategies in response to IPA for this population.

Chapter Four presents the research methodological approach to the current study; an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The chapter describes the epistemological and methodological considerations, the research strategy, ethical considerations, and limitations and challenges encountered during the research process.

Chapter Five through to Eight presents and discusses the research findings in the context of both the domestic and international literature. Chapter Five captures the experience and nature of IPA for the study participants. Chapter Six focuses on the relationship dynamics reported by the participants that comprise of power in relationships, the influence of heterosexism in lesbian abusive relationships, the participant’s retaliation, and the impact of an abusive relationship experience. Chapter Seven presents the participants meaning-making in response to IPA, while Chapter Eight details the findings related to the participant’s experience of help-seeking. Chapter Nine summarises and discusses the findings and draws the study to its final conclusions.

\(^2\) In acknowledgement of the dearth of research available concerning the study’s population and their experience of IPA in an Irish context, the domestic literature concerning non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA, and the same sex experience of IPA in general, is presented as a standalone section.
2 CHAPTER TWO: THE DOMESTIC IPA RESEARCH DATA

This chapter charts the beginning of two separate literature review chapters. Firstly, this chapter addresses what is known about both the heterosexual and the same sex experience of intimate partner abuse in the Irish research context. The second literature review, chapter three, is concerned with the existing international research connected to lesbian intimate partner abuse, and where necessary, same sex relationships IPA in general.

2.1 Intimate partner abuse – the Irish research context

2.1.1 The heterosexual experience of IPA

In Ireland, there are three key sources of prevalence data for domestic abuse. The first, a national survey called “Making the Links”\(^\text{93}\) commissioned by Women’s Aid,\(^\text{94}\) was the first study of its kind carried out in the European Union. The survey set out to determine the extent, type and impact of violence, and the service response to women who have experienced violence. The findings are based upon a national postal, self-completion survey of women and interviews and surveys conducted with women attending doctor’s surgeries in Dublin. A total of 1,483 women aged 18 years and older were randomly selected for inclusion in the national survey, 46 per cent (679) responded. The research found 18 per cent (101) of women reported at least one form of violence at some point in their lives by a current or former partner. The most common form of domestic abuse reported by the women was mental cruelty\(^\text{95}\) (13%), followed by physical violence (10%) and threatened physical violence (9%). A smaller number of respondents reported sexual violence (4%) or had their property damaged (2%) by a current or former partner. (Kelleher & O’Connor, 1995, pp. 15–17).\(^\text{96}\)

The second Irish nationwide survey exploring domestic abuse (Watson and Parsons, 2005) examined prevalence and attitudes to domestic violence – primarily, it is concerned with victims and their interaction with the criminal justice system. The report estimates that 15 per cent of women (one in seven) and six per cent of men (one in 16) have experienced

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\(^{94}\) Women's Aid is a leading national organisation that has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women and children since 1974.

\(^{95}\) ‘Mental cruelty’ was included in the study’s definition of domestic violence.

\(^{96}\) This first national prevalence study did not ask questions establishing the gender of the perpetrator.
severely abusive behaviour of a physical, sexual, or emotional nature from an intimate partner at some time in their lives. The report recognised for the first time that the risk of domestic abuse exists for men and women across the general population. The survey found in the region of 213,000 women and 88,000 men in Ireland had been severely abused by a partner. Similar to international research, the study found women are more likely to experience severe physical abuse, while 6 per cent of male respondents indicated they had experienced some form of severe abuse from a partner at some point in their lives. With this 6 per cent of male respondents, 4 per cent experienced severe physical abuse, 3 per cent reported emotional abuse, and one per cent disclosed that had experienced sexual abuse (Ibid, 2005). However, the report did not ask respondents to verify the sexual orientation of the respondents or if the abuse they were reporting happened in a same sex or a heterosexual relationship. Therefore, we must ask what these statistics can really tell us. The identified limitations of large-scale national studies could offer a possible explanation as to why national prevalence studies report greater victimisation experiences for those in same sex relationships. For example, Janice Ristock (2011) drew attention to a serious omission with the data from the Statistics Canada research on violence and victimisation. The report indicated that IPA was more widespread in same sex (15 per cent) relationships than in heterosexual (7 per cent). However, questions had not been asked whether the abuse occurred in a same sex relationship. Similar issues were identified with the UK’s main prevalence data for domestic violence, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Smith et al. (2010) explored data from the CSEW intimate partner violence module that included a lesbian, gay and bisexual sample. Lesbian and gay respondents (13 per cent) were more likely to experience any domestic violence and abuse than those who were heterosexual (5 per cent). Lesbian women were also found to experience the highest prevalence of sexual assault from any perpetrator, followed by gay and bisexual men (Smith et al., 2010). Without capturing knowledge of the perpetrator of the abuse and the nature of the relationship in which the abuse occurred, prevalence studies in their current format contribute to disseminating inaccurate prevalence rates about domestic and sexual violence victimisation experiences for non-heterosexual women.

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98 The CSEW asks questions to capture sexuality of respondents. Due to low numbers of respondents identifying as bisexual, lesbian, and gay, the authors merged CSEW data from 2007/08 and 2008/09 to produce a sample (n=500) of bisexual, lesbian, and gay respondents.
The third source of prevalence data in Ireland is the SAVI Report - the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (McGee, Garavan, de Barra, Byrne, & Conroy, 2002). Up until this point, the only information available on sexual abuse was based on the number of people seeking counselling or reporting to the Gardaí. The SAVI findings were based upon telephone interviews with 3,118 randomly selected respondents, representing a 71 per cent participation rate. The research found that “in the case of both women and men who experienced sexual violence, the abuser was more often known to the abused person than a stranger (70% versus 30% for women and 62% versus 38% for men). Similar numbers of men and women (25% male and 30% female) reported some level of sexual abuse in childhood. Almost one quarter (23.6%) of perpetrators of violence against women as adults were intimate partners or ex-partners. This was the case for very few (1.4%) abused men.

2.1.2 What is known about female perpetrated IPA in Ireland?

To date, there has not been a national study in Ireland focused specifically on the experiences of men or non-heterosexual women that could provide some insights into female perpetrated IPA. There is, however, research available that gives some flavour as to the types of abusive behaviours females engage with. Using a cross-sectional survey design to examine women and men’s experience of IPA, Paul et al (2006) recruited male and female respondents from six general practices including both affluent and deprived areas. One hundred and forty-one female (79%) and one hundred and eight males (72%) completed the questionnaire. The research found a higher portion of men than women reported ever experiencing one or more controlling behaviours. A higher portion of women sustained more injuries than men and reported being afraid of their partner. These findings correspond with previous studies where male and female perpetrated IPA differs with respect to the impact of abuse on the victim (Archer, 2000; McKeown & Kidd, 2002; Watson & Parsons, 2005).

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99 The authors opted to call the study “SAVI”, a play on the word “savvy” meaning “to have understanding of”.
100 SAVI is the only prevalence report on sexual violence in Ireland.
101 Most perpetrators of abuse against men were friends or acquaintances (42%).
102 The total response rate was 76 per cent.
103 Archer (2000) and McKeown and Kidd (2002) analysed studies that used the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) in the assessment of IPA. The CTS measure is discussed in the following chapter. See section Controversies in the literature.
A study of heterosexual married couples attending a Catholic counselling service asked respondents to complete a questionnaire about their reasons for attending counselling and their relationship generally (McKeown, Lehane, Rock, Haase, & Pratschke, 2002). The authors included one question on domestic violence taken from the British Crime Survey published in 1999. Just over half the sample (53%) of those attending counselling had experienced domestic violence at some time in their lives. The research evidenced mutual abuse between the couples in almost half of the sample (46%), with female perpetrated in three out of ten cases (30%) and male perpetrated in a quarter of cases (24%). When the study examined domestic violence occurring in the previous year, the proportion of females perpetrating (36%) was slightly higher than the proportion involving perpetration by men (28%). As the study engaged with a Conflict Tactics Scale methodology, the researchers advised caution when interpreting their findings, “these results do not tell us anything about the severity of the violence involved, the context, reasons or initiation of the violence or the extent of injuries resulting from it” (McKeown et al., 2002, p.48).

COSC, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence produced a report in 2008 that examined public perceptions of the seriousness of domestic abuse, understandings of the phenomenon, and the perceptions of impact on men and women (Horgan, Muhlau, McCormack, & Roder, 2008). The study found the public perceived domestic violence to be more common against women and the consequences were deemed more severe for women than men. Respondents expressed the opinion that in the context of an abusive relationship, women had more to be fearful of (53%), experienced more physical abuse (83%) and emotional abuse (52%) than men. The Irish public perception of IPA suggests that Irish opinion is largely located within a conceptualisation of DV that encompasses women as victim and men as perpetrators.

104 The question asked, “People sometimes use force in a relationship – grabbing, pushing, shaking, hitting, kicking, etc. Has your partner ever used force on you for any reason? Have you ever used force on your partner for any reason?” (McKeown et al.2002, p.31).

105 The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) is a measure designed initially to capture how families respond to conflicts (Straus, 1979). See footnote 108.

106 This understanding of IPA creates challenges for lesbian women in terms of their help-seeking strategies. This point will be further elaborated in Chapter 7, see section Factors influencing non-recognition of IPA.
Using a biographical narrative interpretive method, Corbally (2015) explored male victims’ experience of IPA from their female partners. The terms “first wave abuse” and “second wave abuse” were operationalised to describe the forms of IPA experienced by participants. First wave abuse included repeated physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Men experienced being isolated from children, having their children removed from the home and false accusations of sexual abuse. Participants were also subjected to second wave abuse involving abuse through social services, the legal system, police, solicitor’s, and a psychologist. Overall, Corbally (2015) found three dominant narrative strategies were used by male participants as a means of disclosing IPA experiences, the fatherhood narrative, the good husband narrative, and the abuse narrative. In contrast to the other narratives, the abuse narrative was cited as the most difficult to articulate as it runs counter to masculine norms. The study found that subscription to masculine norms for male victims prevents help-seeking and prolongs men’s abusive relationships.

The chapter proceeds to discuss what is known about same-sex IPA in the Irish research context.

2.1.3 The same sex experience of IPA- the Irish research context

In Ireland, there is limited reliable data on domestic and sexual violence and abuse for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT). A contributing factor to this lack of data is due to the availability of heteronormative demographics exclusively. This is reflected in Irish general population surveys and national administrative databases which do not include items which capture sexual orientation, the gender of the perpetrator, gender identity and same-sex partnership/cohabitation. As Mayock et al. (2009, p. 144) forewarn in their study of LGBT mental health:

“A notable feature of Irish social research is its lack of recognition of LGBT people, as evidenced in the absence of questions pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity within most quantitative and qualitative research studies.”

No males in the study used the term ‘victim’ to explain their experiences of IPA.

Similar findings were found in the current study suggesting stereotypical feminine norms create challenges for non-heterosexual women recognising their experience as abusive and impact on help-seeking. See Chapter 5, The role of physical stature in lesbian relationships.

The same can be said for the heterosexual experience of IPA. The previously mentioned SAVI report was the last time national sexual violence data was collated in Ireland.

Apart from Census data since 1996, same sex cohabitation is recorded.
The first published study examining an Irish lesbian and gay (LB) population were conducted in 1984 by two researchers from the Lewis and Clarke College in the United States (Carlson & Baxter, 1984). The study set out to determine if non-heterosexual men and women experienced greater psychological problems, evidenced by lower self-esteem and high depression scores, than heterosexual males and females. The findings were based on questionnaires with a non-probability sample of heterosexual and non-heterosexual men and women. A total of 112 respondents including 49 non-heterosexual men (44%), 23 heterosexual men (20%), 23 non-heterosexual women (20%), and 17 heterosexual women (15%).

To place this first study in context, at this period Irish law classified homosexual acts between men as criminal and punishment could be as severe as life at hard labour (D Norris, 1980). Despite a repressive societal attitude, the research found no difference between non-heterosexual and heterosexuals in self-esteem or depression scores. The authors corroborated this finding to the non-heterosexuals in the sample being classified more frequently as androgynous. The researchers suggest the ability to acquire high levels of masculine and female characteristics enabled a rejection of traditional sex-role conditioning said to be quite strong in the Ireland of that period. Self-perceived masculinity was found to be a ‘powerful predictor’ of self-esteem and depression in the non-heterosexual sample. The authors attribute this finding to “reflect the high-value society puts on masculine characteristics” (Ibid, p. 466).

In 1995, a report published by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) (Combat Poverty Agency, 1995) painted a dismal picture for those who were lesbian and gay living in Ireland. The report documented multiple layers of discrimination and prejudice existing in education, employment, training, and access to services experienced by LG people. It also outlined the impacts of having a lesbian and gay identity in the Ireland of that period, with three-fifths (60%) having emigrated at some point in their lives and over half (53%) expressed the opinion that their sexual identity was a key factor in the decision to move. Respondents indicated that they had experienced harassment and violence, 25 per cent had been punched, beaten, and kicked, 9 per cent had been assaulted or wounded with

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111 Respondents ranged in age from 17 – 59 years.
112 More recent studies demonstrate that LGBT people experience more psychological distress than heterosexual people and are at greater risk of mental health problems (King et al. 2008; Meyer, 2010).
114 The sample (n= 159) comprised of 74 male and 85 female respondents.
a weapon, and the majority (84%) knew somebody who had been verbally harassed, threatened with violence or physically attacked. The harassment and violence results were attributed solely to having a lesbian or gay sexual identity. The researchers did not ask questions to establish the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. The report by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network was published two years after the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between males. Perhaps as an attempt to avoid further community stigma, the researchers did not ask questions to establish the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. A tendency to focus on hate crimes rather than SSIPA has been acknowledged in international studies (Russo, 1999).

2.1.4 Studies specific to LIPA

Specific to the lesbian experience of IPA, there is one study, an unpublished Irish PhD thesis (Miner, 2003), which exclusively examines this phenomenon with a lesbian sample. Miner’s doctoral study was concerned with the demographic and “out” status of lesbian women, power differentials in lesbian relationships, assessing the controlling and violent behaviours used, the impact of the behaviours, causal or correlative factors associated with controlling/violent behaviours, help-seeking and service provision needs of lesbian women experiencing IPA. The most commonly reported behaviours, either in current or past relationships, were of non-physical and non-sexual forms. However, half of the women in the sample reported experiencing at least one physical or one sexually abusive behaviour from a previous partner(s). The most commonly reported form of abuse for the one-hundred and fifty-four participants was ‘pushed, grabbed or shoved you’. In contrast to a recent UK study investigating LGBT domestic violence and abuse (Donovan, et al., 2014); Miner (2003) found no significant correlation between having a

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115 154 questionnaires and 4 interviews were conducted in total. The survey was administered at the Lesbian Lives Conference 1999, UCD, a weekly disco for lesbians, and a social group for lesbian and bisexual women.

116 Miner classified emotional, verbal, or psychological abuse as controlling and physical and sexual abuse were classified as violent.

117 Miner’s findings echo the result of existing research. For example, Lockhart et al (1994) and Scherzer (1998) found that emotional and verbal abusive behaviours were more frequently reported than physical behaviours. Donovan & Hester (2014) found that women were more willing to use emotionally abusive ways of behaving and speaking that undermined and established an abusive power dynamic.

118 Sample (n=154).

119 Physical and sexual behaviours listed included ‘forced sex on you’, ‘choked you’, ‘tried to strangle, burn or drown you’, threatened to kill you, ‘harmed your pets’, and harmed your child/children’
“lower out status”, i.e. not being completely open about your sexual orientation to family, friends, and colleagues and the experience of higher levels of violent behaviours.

Ten years prior, as part of her Master’s thesis, the same author (Miner, 1993) attempted to investigate physical and verbal violence committed against lesbian women in Ireland because of their sexual orientation. Although her master’s study was not directly investigating intimate partner abuse between lesbian couples, Miner’s study is possibly the first in Ireland to specifically document physical, sexual, and verbal abuse in Irish lesbian women’s lives,

“Relationship was breaking up. Not accepted by partner. Received initially verbal abuse which proceeded onto being physically attacked and sexually assaulted”

The demographic make-up of Miner’s (2003) sample was similar, and open, to the same criticisms as previous international studies, in that, the sample consisted of all white (97% of participants listed their racial/ethnic identity as white/settled/Irish); middle class (68.4%); educated (52% of participants had a primary or postgraduate degree. A further 16 per cent completed a third level non-university qualification); living in an urban area (76% of the sample lived in a city, 14.5% in a large/small town, 3% in a village and 6.5% from a rural area); were out to family and friends (90.8%); and therefore more likely to be connected with supportive LGBT organisations (Leventhal & Lundy, 1999; Lie et al., 1991; McCarry et al., 2008; Renzetti, 1992).

Miner (2003) asked questions to determine if the women in her sample were subjected to abuse and/or the abuser in their relationships. Fifty-three (35%) of participants reported using some behaviours in self-defence against either a current or previous partner. Eleven women (7%) reported using violence in retaliation for earlier controlling/violent behaviours experienced from partners. Perpetrators in the sample were classified as having used six or more violent behaviours and supplying a ‘yes’ response when asked if their partner was afraid of them.121 Perpetrator status was measured using only physical and sexually abusive

121 3.6 per cent reported that their current partner was afraid of them.
behaviours. This measurement would not be adequate to capture data on a female perpetrator. There is a general consensus in the LIPA literature that victims experience predominantly non-violent emotional psychological abuse from female perpetrators (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015).

Based on this classification, Miner states that the study results did not yield any women who could be classified as perpetrators. However, having said that, she reports that 40 per cent of women in her study reported using violent behaviours against their current or previous female partner, 28 per cent of the total identified between one and three incidences. One-third (33%) of the 154 participants reported using physical or sexual violent behaviour on one or more occasion against any female partner.

Miner (2003) reported that forty-one (26.6%) respondents in her sample sought help at one time from formal and informal sources. Lesbian friends were cited as the most popular option for support 29 (27%), this was followed by seeking help from a counsellor 24 (23%), family members 16 (15%), straight friends 15 (14%), Gardaí 6 (6%), and medical personnel 5 (5%). Interestingly, specific lesbian help lines 2 (2%), battered women services 4 (4%), and lesbian support groups 4 (4%) were the services women least utilised as a source of support.

Having reviewed the extent of the Irish academic literature on LIPA, the chapter proceeds with a review of SSIPPA data available from the voluntary and statutory sectors.

2.1.5 Voluntary & statutory agency reports of SSIPPA

The issue of lesbian IPA surfaces again in a study by LINC (2006). LINC (Lesbians in Cork) is a community development organisation working exclusively with lesbian and

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122 87.5 per cent reported experiencing one or more controlling/violent behaviours from a current and previous partner(s).
123 No participant reported ‘forced sex on her’, two reported ‘choked her’ and ‘tried to strangle her’. 12 per cent reported that their previous partner was afraid of them.
124 Internationally, it is well documented that in general, LGBT communities experiencing IPA do not seek help from mainstream support services, help-seeking behaviours are directed principally toward friends (McClennen, 2005; Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Murray & Mobley, 2009; Donovan et al., 2014).
bisexual women in the south of Ireland. This study set out with the aim of assessing the health needs of the lesbian community in Cork. The research utilised a combination of methods including focus groups and a survey, resulting in one-hundred and seven completed questionnaires and forty-four lesbian women participating in focus groups that were divided into self-selected categories of younger lesbians; 25-40-year-old lesbians; older lesbians; lesbian parents; and the LINC staff. The results of the study indicate that 20 per cent of the sample reported that they had experienced sexual abuse or violence from a female partner at some time in their lives. Another finding emerging from this study was that differences were found between lesbian relationships and heterosexual relationships with respect to the amount and accessibility of the support services to deal with such issues. A key finding regarding health services for this population was that ‘violence exists within the lesbian community and it needs the full acknowledgement of all state services if it is to be reported and understood’ (p. 23).

An LGB service needs analysis, again conducted in southern Ireland (Power, 2002), involved questionnaires and interviews with twelve service providers operating in county Cork. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) participants were asked to comment on data provided by service providers via a series of focus groups. The findings reveal that the LGB population in Cork felt a very strong sense of being excluded and not catered for within mainstream services.

2.1.6 Irish National LGBT survey data

From 2009 -2016, three national studies with LGBT samples emerged in Ireland, Supporting LGBT Lives, Visible lives, and LGBTIreland. The Supporting LGBT Lives mixed methods study (Mayock, et al., 2009) represented the first national study of the mental health of LGBT adults and young people. Survey respondents ranged from 14 to 73 years with an average age of 30.5 years, with 35 per cent of the sample being 25 years of age or under. Sixty-four per cent identified as male, and thirty-four per cent identified as female. The qualitative component of the study involved interviews with 40 participants aged from 16 to 62 years, with an average age of 31 years. Just over half of the sample

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126 1,100 completed surveys with a response rate of 80% and 40 individual in-depth interviews
127 LGBT people in their fifties and sixties were underrepresented in the sample.
128 40 per cent of the sample were 25 years or under.
was male, all of whom identified as gay, two-fifths identified as female, most of who identified as lesbian, with two bisexual participants.\textsuperscript{129}

In the case of LGBT victimisation, 80 per cent of on-line survey respondents experienced verbal abuse, 25 per cent of all respondents experienced physical violence, 40 per cent were threatened with physical violence, 25 per cent experienced being punched, kicked, or beaten, 8 per cent reported being attacked with a weapon or implement (knife, gun, bottle, or stick), and 9 per cent reported they had been attacked sexually as a direct consequence of having an LGBT identity.

Mayock et al.’s (2009) inaugural national study could be said to be more representative of hate crimes, prejudice, and discrimination against LGBT people. Questions did not establish if the abusive behaviours were experienced as part of an intimate relationship, rather, respondents were asked about their experiences of victimisation or harassment in ‘Any setting’. The research commissioners interpreted the findings as ‘Minority stress exposes a significant percentage of LGBT people to suicidality’ (GLEN/ BeLongTo, 2009, p. 6). However, this interpretation is contested by the researchers (Mayock & Bryan, 2012). Mayock and Bryan (2012) argued that applying a mono-causal explanation limited to one’s LGBT identification perpetuates and sustains LGBT marginalisation. Instead, the researchers suggest that respondents experiences of suicidality “was often motivated by a complex constellation of experiences” (Mayock & Bryan, 2012, p. 11), that included home-based difficulties, school and exam based pressures, or sexual abuse during childhood. International studies highlight that LGBT community agencies are reluctant to discuss the issue of SSIPA because it confounds the hate crime discourse that characterises LGBT people as primarily victims (Russo, 1999). Despite the differences of opinion, Mayock et al.’s (2009) study draws attention to the ongoing discrimination and abuse of LGBT people in Ireland.

Whereas Mayock et al.’s (2009) findings could be said to largely represent a young LGBT sample, Higgins et al. (2011) concentrated solely on an older Irish LGBT population. Existing studies into older LGBT people is nascent in an Irish context (Health Service Executive, 2009b; McCann, Sharek, Higgins, Sheerin, & Glacken, 2013). The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences and needs of LGBT people over the age of 55

\textsuperscript{129} Transgender people made up 10 per cent of the sample.
years living in Ireland. Findings were based on a mixed methods study involving 144 surveys and 36 semi-structured in-depth interviews. The average age of both survey and interview participants was 60 years.

The qualitative interviews addressed mental health status, suicide and self-harm, substance misuse, violence, and grief and loss. Almost half of the sample (47%) reported being verbally insulted and 19 per cent reported physical abuse (punched or kicked) based on their LGBT identity. A quarter of the sample had been threatened with physical violence and one-fifth described experiencing ‘identity abuse’ where people threatened to ‘out’ them. A further six participants interviewed described experiencing forms of physical and sexual violence, including stranger and date rape. In addition, participants attributed mental health problems to a previous childhood abuse experience and with being in a violent relationship.

It is within the qualitative component of the study that the issue of violence and abuse emerged. The research found that 16 per cent of participants had experienced IPA in their relationships, and 6.7 per cent reported experiencing sexual violence. As one in four of the sample were divorced or separated from the opposite sex, it is unclear if the IPA occurred in a same sex relationship or with a same sex partner as the researchers did not establish the nature of the relationship or the gender of the perpetrator. Ristock (2011) argues for the critical need for research with LGBT samples exploring violence and abuse within relationships, to establish if the LGBT respondents are reporting experiences of IPA in a same sex or a heterosexual relationship context.

The LGBTIreland Report details the findings of a national study of mental health and wellbeing of LGBTI people in Ireland (Higgins et al., 2016). The report represents the largest study of LGBTI people to date. An online survey gathered data from 2, 264 LGBTI people (38.6% gay male; 26.5% lesbian/gay female; 14.4% bisexual; 12.3% transgender; 33 per cent (n= 44) experienced a mental health problem, suicide 11 per cent (n=15) had seriously thought about ending their life, 4 percent (n= 6) had self-harmed, 14 per cent (n=9) worry about drinking too much, 9 per cent survived the death of a partner or spouse of the same sex and one in four 25 per cent were divorced or separated from the opposite sex.

Other areas identified related to mental issues were fear of gay life, loss and bereavement, and stress related to family, ill health, work, and finances.

(n= 1,064) were aged between 14- 25 years, 1, 193 were aged 26 and over.
The study had two separate components, firstly, to gain an understanding of LGBTI people and factors that impede or facilitate their mental health and wellbeing. Secondly, the study assessed public attitudes toward LGBTI people to understand how societal contexts shape lives and wellbeing. Similar to Mayock et al. (2009), the study reported that 75 per cent experienced verbal abuse, one in three were threatened with physical violence, and one in three experienced identity abuse, one in five were abused online, one in five had been punched, hit, or physically attacked in public, and one in six experienced sexual violence.

The study explored LGBTI-specific barriers to accessing mental health services. Respondents expressed the opinion that a lack of understanding of LGBTI sexual identities, and fear of receiving a negative response to their sexual identity, would impede their access to mental health services (Higgins et al., 2016).

An Irish report by the national health services provider highlighted key findings to emerge around well-being and health issues for the LGBT community, related to physical and mental health consequences arising from domestic abuse (HSE, 2009). Both the national studies from Mayock et al. (2009) and Higgins et al. (2011) focused on vulnerabilities associated with having an LGBTI sexual identity, i.e. self-harm, suicidality, stress, anxiety, and depression. Neither study, however considered that the experience of violence and harassment for the LGBTI sample could potentially be occurring in the context of an intimate relationship. Hence, it could be argued that both studies adopted a ‘mono-causal explanation’ (Mayock & Bryan, 2012) limited to having an LGBTI sexual identity in the explanation of violence and harassment.

2.1.7 The heterosexual assumption

Previous research has shown that health professional’s lack of knowledge about someone’s sexual orientation may prevent them from delivering the best outcomes (Neville & Hendrickson, 2006; Stevens, 1995). Focusing attention on the health care experiences of the sample, Mayock, et al. (2009) found that 75 per cent believed healthcare providers needed to have more knowledge of, and sensitivity to, LGBT issues, with only 44 per cent

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133 6.3 per cent indicated ‘other identity’.
134 The report found one in four believed LGBT is a choice, and one in five believed you can be convinced to become LGBT.
of participants GPs being aware of their sexual orientation. Correspondingly, McCann and Sharek (2014) discovered that while 63 per cent of their sample was ‘out’ to practitioners, 64 per cent reported that mental health professionals lack knowledge about LGBT issues, and 43 per cent felt that practitioners were unresponsive to their needs.\textsuperscript{135}

In their need’s analysis of an LGBT population in the west of Ireland, \textsuperscript{136} Gleeson and McCallion (2008) found a cross-cutting theme in relation to health service provision was participant’s experience of being presumed heterosexual, with over half the participants reporting that they had been assumed heterosexual by their family doctor. \textsuperscript{137} Likewise, a study investigating LGBT people’s experience of mental health service provision in Ireland found that approximately two-thirds of respondents reported that the mental health services assumed they were heterosexual (McCann & Sharek, 2014). Moreover, almost thirty per cent of the sample reported receiving a negative reaction when they disclosed their LGBT identity.\textsuperscript{138}

Gibbons et al. (2008) interviewed 43 participants, in a predominantly rural area to explore their experiences as health service users and their perspectives on the quality of care received.\textsuperscript{139} The study found that for a minority of participant’s attending hospital emergency departments, they were assumed to be heterosexual by staff. Participants described a positive disclosure of sexual identity to their GPs that included reassurance of both acceptance and confidentiality; provision of time and space for subsequent discussion; follow-up queries about supports and health care; provision of tailored information relevant to lesbians, gays, and bisexuals; and the absence of pathologising of homosexuality. Negative experiences related to disclosure of sexual identity to a GP included, signs of discomfort such as lack of eye contact; rushing the remainder of the consultation; a lack of friendliness; lack of an obvious response of any sort or avoidance of the issue; automatic association of LGB sexuality with HIV status, STIs, or other negative connotations; subsequent over-focus on sexuality issues; and a reluctance to take sufficiently seriously health issues that may be associated with sexuality, such as relationship difficulties.

\textsuperscript{135} The sample consisted of LGBT people (n=125) over 18 years of age living in Ireland.
\textsuperscript{136} Counties Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon.
\textsuperscript{137} The study employed a mixed method design that included an online survey (n=132), focus groups (n=31), and a service provider questionnaire (n=29).
\textsuperscript{138} The sample consisted of LGBT people (n=125) over 18 years of age living in Ireland.
\textsuperscript{139} Female (n=24), Male (n=19). 27 participants were aged under 40 and 16 were 40 or older.
The research evidence suggests that GP’s have a significant role to play in providing the space and opportunity for the disclosure of IPA. Two Irish studies reported that both women (n=109, 82%) and men (n=66, 70%) agreed that it would be acceptable to be asked about IPA during a consultation (Paul et al., 2006). Using a cross-sectional design across 22 GP services, Bradley et al. (2002) reported that 1,304 out of a total 1,692 (77% to 80%) respondents were in favour of routine inquiry about IPA by their usual general practitioner. Based on the experiences of the LGB sample in Gibbons et al. (2008), it is possible to hypothesise that non-heterosexual individuals face additional barriers in the health services that would prevent a disclosure of IPA. A negative reaction to the disclosure of sexual identity, and a reluctance to take seriously relationship difficulties could quite conceivably influence an individual’s decision to disclose details of an abusive relationship.

2.1.8 What is known about lesbian women’s access to services?

Commissioned by LINC,140 Miner (2013) conducted a mapping of services exercise to examine what services exist for both women experiencing IPA from a female partner, and women perpetrating violence against a female partner. Using an online survey method, Miner (2013) contacted domestic violence services (39), and sexual violence services (18), and LGBT (14) organisations across the Republic of Ireland.141 A mapping exercise was engaged with to ascertain, firstly, the level of services used by lesbian and bisexual women experiencing and perpetrating IPA over the previous three years; and secondly, to obtain information from service providers about how they felt services could improve to cater for lesbian and bisexual women. Considering the dearth of knowledge surrounding non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA and their engagement with formal supports, the subsequent sections provide a detailed analysis of this report.

Service providers reported that at least one woman utilised the following types of service provision in response to IPA from a female partner, helpline (50%); refuge (50%); support

140 LINC (Lesbians in Cork) is the only community development organisation working with lesbian and bisexual women in the Republic of Ireland.
141 Seventy per cent of mainstream domestic violence and sexual violence participated, either by completing the survey or by providing information via telephone. Overall, thirty per cent of LGBT organisations contacted either completed the survey or provided information verbally. However, the response rate for LGBT services was sixty-five per cent where services provided direct individual services including helpline, drop-in, support, advocacy, and outreach.
(45%); advocacy (20%); and counselling (20%). The number of women engaged in an individual programme due to IPA from a female partner was minimal – less than two per year. A different picture emerged however across Dublin-based services. Miner (2013) reported that one refuge provided services to 11 lesbian and bisexual women in 2012. A preference for helpline type support was evident with one helpline service receiving approximately 140 calls relating to same sex IPA from women in 2011.  

The LGBT Helpline, a national support service, found further evidence of a preference for helpline support (*LGBT Helpline Annual Report*, 2015). Callers to the helpline experiences of violence included incidents of IPA alongside disclosures of homophobic and transphobic abuse. The support and information sought by callers in response to a violent experience included the opportunity to discuss the impact of the abuse, to consider personal safety measures, and to get information on IPA services. The most frequently sought information was in relation to LGBT-friendly counsellors and psychotherapists.

Miner (2013) found that half of the LGBT services who responded to the survey had been contacted by at least one lesbian / bisexual woman because of experiencing IPA. The abuse experienced was both physical and emotional. Women contacted LGBT services via a helpline, and support and outreach options. The response from the LGBT services to disclosures of IPA was to support and refer the women to IPA services, general practitioners (GPs), An Garda Síochána and private counsellors. Between 2009 and 2012, one-third of LGBT services were also contacted by at least one woman because of perpetrating IPA. In such cases, the women were referred to private counselling supports. Regarding sexual violence, all Rape Crisis Centres (RCC) provided services to lesbian and bisexual women, however, only one RCC supported a lesbian woman who had experienced sexual violence from a female partner. (Miner, 2013).

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142 Representing 2% of the total number of calls.
143 Violence, including homophobic and transphobic bullying and abuse, represents 4 per cent of support calls.
145 This point will be expanded upon further using the *Finding a Safe Place: LGBT Survivors of Sexual Violence and Disclosure in Rape Crisis Centres*, 2016.
2.1.9 A positive service response to LB women experiencing IPA

Service providers were asked questions about how best to respond to lesbian and bisexual women experiencing IPA. Using a five-part multiple-choice question, service providers were asked to rate the following: improving relationships with LGBT organisations; joint work with LGBT organisations; specific training for staff and volunteers; different service advertising; policies to enable distinctions being made between perpetrators and victims; and lesbian and bisexual staff and volunteers. Most DV services opted for improving relationships with LGBT organisations (80%) with lesbian and bisexual staff and volunteers (15%) being the least favoured option. The RCCs opted jointly for improving relationships with LGBT organisations and specific training for RCC staff and volunteers, (89%) and different service advertising (33%). The LGBT services requested training and more information about IPA, and information about safety and barring orders. Consistent with recent UK research (Donovan et al., 2014), establishing links with DV and sexual violence services were understood as ways to improve service delivery to women abused by a female partner.

2.1.10 Potential barriers for LB women experiencing IPA

Miner’s (2013) report also identified potential barriers for lesbian and bisexual women should they attempt to access mainstream DV and RCC support services, including invisibility, screening, and knowledge of female same sex IPA. Information through websites and mobile applications can be the first step for those seeking supports to determine if a service is appropriate. Miner reported that 25 per cent of services did not have a functioning website. For those that did, 17 per cent had no definition of DV or IPA; 10 per cent used gendered definitions; 57 per cent use non-gendered definitions, and only 13 per cent named same sex relationships. The RCC websites and mobile app do not name the relationship of the perpetrator, while 7 per cent of RCCs does not have a website.

Miner’s (2013) examination of services revealed that most DV services engage with a risk assessment tool to determine if a woman is a victim or a perpetrator. However, these tools have been devised using knowledge from the heterosexual experience of IPA and are not inclusive of the lesbian and bisexual experience and needs. On a positive note, Miner
(2013) found that 89 per cent of RCCs and 45 per cent of DV services reported training their staff and volunteers to increase knowledge of female same sex IPA.

In terms of working with a female perpetrator, 84 per cent of LGBT programmes suggested information and training would better enable them to provide services to female perpetrators; 50 per cent opted for links with perpetrator programmes, and 33 per cent identified the Garda LGBT Liaison Officers as a support option. Overall domestic violence, sexual violence (SV) and LGBT services reported that existing services should work in conjunction with each other to provide the best possible services for lesbian and bisexual women experiencing IPA (Miner, 2013).

2.1.11 What is known about same sex sexual violence?

In 2015, the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) launched the first LGBT report concerned with sexual violence (Mears, 2016). Evidence was collated from individual LGB survivors (n=88) via the RCNIs Data, Knowledge, and Information System. In 2013, a total of 88 (4%) of survivors of sexual violence attending 15 Rape Crisis Centres (RCC) for counselling and support identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). LGB survivors experience of sexual violence were similar to heterosexual survivors in that both groups self-referred to RCCs (59% of LGB and 54% of heterosexuals); health professional accounted for the largest number of referrals from another source (27% of LGB and 26% of heterosexuals); telling someone for the first time (13% LGB and 9% heterosexuals); and reporting to a formal authority (37% LGB and 36% heterosexuals).

The report also evidenced the differences between the experience of sexual violence for LGB and heterosexual survivors. There were significant differences found in the length of time taken to report an incident (47% LGB and 21% of heterosexuals waited over ten years to report). LGB survivors disclosed higher levels of multiple incidents of sexual violence than heterosexual survivors (26% compared with 15%). Lesbian and bisexual (LB) women disclosed lower levels of rape than heterosexual females (43% compared with 54%), and slightly higher levels of sexual assault (39% compared with 35%) and other forms of sexual violence (18% compared with 11%) than heterosexual females.\(^\text{146}\) LB female survivors

\(^{146}\) Gay and bisexual males disclosed higher levels of rape than heterosexual males (63% compared with 34%) and lower levels of sexual assault than heterosexual males (29% compared with 55%).
disclosed higher rates of male and female perpetrators abusing together (10% compared with 2%). Finally, the key difference between LGB and heterosexual survivors’ concerned disclosure of abuse and the high level of trust placed in friends (25% compared with 12%).

To conclude this first literature review chapter, the Irish national survey data and agency reports available provides some insights into the challenges faced by those who are non-heterosexual and experiencing IPA. When healthcare professionals make assumptions around an individual’s sexual orientation, this creates additional barriers with the disclosure of IPA, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Furthermore, the national survey data with LGBTI samples suggests that there is currently a partial picture to explain and understand violence and abuse for LGBTI people. The research captures the types and frequency of violence experienced by those who are LGBTI but falls short by failing to ask questions about the gender of the perpetrator and the nature of the relationship. A primary focus on hate crime and victimisation with LGBTI samples means that violence and abuse within intimate relationships are not being captured.

This following chapter moves to examine the existing international literature concerning lesbian intimate partner abuse. The chapter begins however by explaining the research process engaged in prior to the conduct of the literature review.

147 28 per cent disclosed to parents or to other family against 39 per cent of heterosexual survivors.
3 CHAPTER THREE: THE INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN IPA RESEARCH DATA

Aim

The aim of the current literature review is to demonstrate what is known about lesbian women experiencing IPA from a female partner, and what help-seeking behaviours they adopted in response to IPA.

Search strategy

The search strategy adapted the PICO model (Richardson, et al., 1995). PICO is a method to assist with database searches by breaking up a research question into the following parts, P (population), I (issue or intervention), C (comparison), and O (outcome or measurement). In the current search strategy, PICO was adapted to PSRI. Population (adult females only); Sexuality (lesbian, bisexual, queer, non-heterosexual); Relationship (same sex); and Issue (IPA). A detailed search of two electronic databases was implemented to extract relevant publications for the literature review. The search was completed using two databases, with the following time periods shown:

- SCOPUS (1980 – March Week 3 2016)
- Web of Science (1980 – March Week 3 2016)

Inclusion criteria

Research inclusion was limited to studies published in a peer-reviewed journal and written in English. Studies were included that consisted of an original qualitative study; studies with an adult population where participants who self-identified were eighteen years old; studies that included a sample of participants who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer women, and that had been analysed as a separate group within the study. Articles were included that were conducted in clinical settings such as therapy and counselling.

148 An example of the search terms used during the database is provided in Appendix 1.
149 Ulrich’s web online platform assisted with this task.
services as the empirical evidence suggests this is primarily where lesbian women seek support in response to IPA.  

Analytic strategy

The articles extracted for this literature review were reviewed systematically. The papers were evaluated primarily to ascertain the main types of abuse experienced by lesbian women and their help-seeking behaviours. Each article was evaluated with a focus on the authors and their nationality; the aim of the article; the studies research design (sample size, methodology); the findings (results and the authors interpretations). Strengths and limitations of the articles were noted.

3.1 What is known about LIPA – the international literature

Beginning with Kerry Lobel (1986), survivor stories and scholarly articles investigating lesbian IPA (LIPA) began to emerge toward the latter end of the 1980s (Benowitz, 1986; Hammond, 1986; Hart, 1986; Renzetti, 1992) and the early 1990s (Kelly, 1991; Lockhart, et al., 1994; Renzetti, 1992; Taylor & Chandler, 1995). Similar to the initiation of the violence against women movement in the 1970s, these aforementioned seminal studies were conducted largely by feminist and lesbian activists (Hammond, 1986; Hart, 1986; Lobel 1986; Taylor and Chandler, 1995), and academics (Kelly, 1991; Renzetti, 1992; Lockhart, et al., 1995) who utilised samples of non-heterosexual female victims who were engaged with domestic violence support services. For example, the first empirical study of what was termed ‘lesbian battering’ was conducted in collaboration with members of a battered lesbian support group, The Working Group on Battered Lesbians (Renzetti, 1992). Although these studies made commendable attempts and were successful in recruiting women of colour, rural women and women with disabilities, the seminal studies data is reflective of the personal accounts of lesbian survivors who were ‘out’ about their sexual

150 Originally, the review sought to only include studies with a qualitative methodological component to the research. This original stance was reviewed to include quantitative studies as the numbers of qualitative studies were low. Additional quantitative literature was necessary and reviewed following the analysis phase of the research.

151 Appendix 2 contains the literature review matrix.

152 The Lesbian Task Force of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence was the first group to address the issue publicly in 1983 See Balsam (2001).
orientation, and therefore out enough to engage with support services.\textsuperscript{153} As such, they may not be representative of the experiences of women who are concealing their sexual orientation or women who have experienced non-physically violent behaviours, and as a result of the methodological approach taken, may represent a partial picture of non-heterosexual women’s experiences of IPA from a female partner.

Prior to the 1980s, lesbian intimate partner abuse (LIPA) data was based upon clinical samples and practice observation from lesbian victims (L. Lockhart et al., 1994), with some authors arguing that SSIPA was virtually excluded from academic, clinical, and activist discussions (Coleman, 1994). Numerous reasons have been posited to explain this lack of focus on LIPA, including, a preference for examining HIV and AIDS over SSIPA (Byrne, 1996), a focus on hate crimes (Russo, 1999), denial and silence from the lesbian community (Russo, 1992), and non-recognition of behaviour as IPA (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001).

Bornstein et al. (2006) propose that researchers may have been reluctant to explore SSIPA due to the inadequate availability of theoretical conceptualisations and language to describe the phenomenon. A lack of scholarly attention from those examining domestic violence research has been linked to a perception that violence perpetrated by men is more serious than other forms of IPA, where researchers focused primarily on the heterosexual experience (Poorman, et al., 2003). Furthermore, a second systematic review of empirical research examining SSIPA identified, “the most fundamental challenge to domestic violence researchers in studying SSIPA is that it confronts the underlying feminist paradigm that has propelled much of the domestic violence movement” (Murray & Mobley, 2009, p. 363).\textsuperscript{154}

An examination of the empirical literature reveals a focus on the following areas: the forms of abuse that constitute LIPA; the factors that appear to contribute to LIPA, such as, internalised homophobia; violence in the family of origin; substance misuse; fusion;\textsuperscript{155} individual personality traits; the imbalance of power in relationships, and the identification of discourses that impact on LIPA. Although these characteristics of LIPA are discussed

\textsuperscript{153} The early empirical studies provided examples of recruiting participants from a women’s music festival and at a lesbian weekend gathering. See (Renzetti, 1992; Lockhart, et al., 1994).

\textsuperscript{154} Murray and Mobley reviewed 17 studies examining SSIPA that appeared in the literature between the years 1995 – 2006.

\textsuperscript{155} The concept of fusion is explained further in the chapter.
separately in the chapter, they are often interrelated, occurring at the same time, and may act to increase the probability of IPA in lesbian couples.

The chapter proceeds with an examination of the diverse types of abuse experienced by women in lesbian relationships, that include, emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, control using sexual orientation, practices of love, and financial exploitation.

3.1.1 Emotional/psychological abuse

Studies demonstrate that abuse in LIPA includes emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, and financial abuse (Barnes, 2009; Irwin, 2008; Renzetti, 1992), and what some researchers have termed ‘identity abuse’ (Donovan & Hester, 2014), where abusive partners use a partners sexuality to as a means to exercise power and control over them. Research demonstrates that when compared with heterosexual women, higher frequencies of verbal, emotional/psychological abuse than physical abuse is reported in lesbian abusive relationships (Renzetti, 1992). Other LIPA research found higher levels of emotional abuse over physical abuse (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Irwin, 2008; McClennen, et al., 2002; Turell, 1999). For example, 91.5 per cent of McClennen’s lesbian sample reported emotional abuse.156 Lesbians in Donovan and Hester’s (2014) UK study, reported higher levels of emotionally abusive sexual coercion. Irwin’s (2008) Australian study found that emotional/psychological abuse was the most frequently cited form of abuse in her twenty-one interviews. Moreover, Irwin (2008) reported this type of abuse as the most difficult for participants to identify.

The most common forms of emotional/psychological abuse include verbal threats, such as being demeaned in front of friends, family, and strangers (Renzetti, 1992). Other common forms of emotional/psychological abuse include the disruption of eating and sleeping pattern and the abuse of others in the household, such as children and pets (Poorman, 2001), and stalking (Glass et al., 2008).

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156 McClennen et al. (2002) recruited 78 lesbian respondents (45 had experienced an abusive relationship with a female) via social workers.
3.1.2 Physical violence

The experience of physical violence is present in studies of LIPA and is often reported as occurring in combination with experiences of emotional/psychological abuse. Physical violence can include acts of indirect and direct aggression not limited to restraining, grabbing, pushing, shoving, punching, slapping, kicking, and biting (Poorman, 2001; Ristock, 2002). Indirect aggression involves physical violence directed at objects, such as hitting/punching walls, throwing objects at partners and around the room, destroying property and throwing belongings out (Ristock, 2002). More severe forms of physical violence reported include incidents of stabbing, shooting, having a gun inserted into the vagina, choked, broken bones and head injuries, and deliberately burning with a cigarette (Poorman, 2001; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002).

3.1.3 Sexual violence

Studies examining LIPA report the occurrence of sexual violence, arguing, however, that this form of abuse in lesbian relationships has yet to be fully explored and understood (Barnes, 2008; Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002). In the absence of service agencies addressing this issue (Girshick, 2002), studies show that participants struggle with an absence of language to explain this type of abuse (Barnes, 2008). Sexual violence in LIPA has been defined as any non-consensual sexual behaviour (Poorman, 2001). Walden-Haugrud et al. (1997) reported over half of the lesbian sample experienced sexual coercion at least once, with the most common form of sexual violence cited as non-consensual penetration. Ristock (2002) constructed three categories to explain sexual violence in LIPA, forced sex or rape (being sexually violated against your will, using an object, hand, or finger to penetrate a woman’s anus, mouth, or vagina, physically restraining while assaulting); sexual coercion (engaging in sex as a result of pressure when you don’t want to); and emotional sexual abuse (withdrawing sexually from partners, rejecting partners sexually to hurt or humiliate, making demeaning comments about sexual behaviour and body parts). In support of Ristock’s classification of sexual violence, Barnes (2009) found evidence of both physical and emotional sexual violence that included perpetrators withdrawing sex to punish, and verbal abuse and humiliation related to sex. Girshick (2002) further included being forced to watch pornography as part of her assessment of sexual violence in non-heterosexual women’s relationships.
In addition, researchers highlight that women experiencing sexual violence from another woman are in a double bind. They have to contend with the trauma of the sexual assault alongside experiencing a lack of language to describe this type of violence (Barnes, 2009; Girshick, 2002; Miner, 2003; Ristock, 2002). Ristock (2002) found that LGBTQ women may be reluctant to disclose sexual assault by another woman because the term ‘rape’ is synonymous with penile penetration. Participants in her study disclosed a fear they would not be believed if they disclosed sexual violence. Furthermore, women who are not open about their sexuality may experience further challenges as disclosing the perpetrator of a sexual assault may involve disclosing one’s sexual orientation.

3.1.4 ‘Outing’ as a form of abuse

In addition to the experience of emotional/psychological, physical, financial, and sexual violence, LIPA has a unique element that is not an issue in heterosexual IPA, namely, outing and the threat of ‘outing’ an individual as a form of abuse. Researchers describe this type of abuse as an additional weapon of control (Renzetti, 1997; West, 1998). According to (Hart, 1986, p. 189), outing a form of abuse includes:

> Threatening to tell family, friends, employer, police, church, community, etc. that the victim is a lesbian…; telling the victim she deserves all that she gets because she is a lesbian; assuring her that no one would believe she has been violated because lesbians are not violent; reminding her that she has no options because the homophobic world will not help her.

In the larger social context of homophobia and heterosexism, an abusive partner can exploit victims sexual or gender identity to leverage power and control (Allen & Leventhal, 1999). Other work with lesbian samples supports this finding (Carvalho, et al., 2011; Donovan & Hester, 2014). Abusive partners threaten to or tell family, friends, employers, and ex-spouses as a way to exercise power and control (Renzetti, 1992), or to prevent the victim from reporting the abuse or seeking help (Carvalho et al., 2011). Bisexual women experience this form of abuse from both heterosexual and lesbian partners because they are not seen as belonging to either community (Sulis, 1999). Outing as a form of abuse has real-life negative consequences, such as the loss of employment, custody of children, and the support of family and friends (Renzetti, 1992; Richman, 2002).
3.1.5 Practices of love

More recent investigations of SSIPA move toward identifying the role of love and intimacy in abusive relationships (Donovan & Hester, 2014) as a means of constructing power and control over intimate partners (Donovan & Hester, 2011a). Donovan and Hester’s (2014) research began from the premise that relationships that become violent, regardless of gender or sexuality, start out motivated by love. As such, they set out to “unpack how love is understood and enacted when DVA is present” (Ibid, p.18). This recent UK research suggests that practices of love employed by both the survivor and the abuser in LGBT relationship contexts serve to firstly, confuse the survivor about what is happening in an abusive relationship, secondly, how a survivor understands the abusive behaviours, and finally, how they recognise and name their experience as IPA. As such, the researchers argue that “expressions of love can in themselves form part of the violence/abuse as they confuse, manipulate, and act to glue victim/survivors into abusive relationships” (Ibid, p. 207).

According to the author’s framework for understanding how love operates in abusive relationships, practices of love underpin and reinforce what they term ‘relationship rules’. Their research demonstrates that relationship rules set by an abusive partner and reinforced by practices of love; reflect gendered understandings of roles in dominant constructions of adult heterosexual love, such as the decision maker as associated with masculinity and carer as associated with femininity. The abusive partner sets the relationship rules so that the relationship operates for them and on their terms, and that the survivor is responsible for the abusive partner’s care, children, the relationship, and the upkeep of the household if they cohabit. Effectively, the abusive partner establishes herself as a key decision maker who sets the terms of the relationship. The survivor is positioned in a caring role, being responsible for the abusive partner and her behaviours, and the relationship. Furthermore, the researchers identified gendered norms of abusive behaviour. For example, they found that female abusers were more likely to engage in emotional violence and abuse, and emotionally coercive sexual violence, while male abusers were more likely to engage in physical violence and abuse, and physically coercive sexual violence.

Donovan and Hester used domestic violence and abuse (DVA) as the operational definition of their research.
3.1.6 Financial abuse & exploitation

Similar to the heterosexual experience, financial abuse and exploitation occur in lesbian abusive relationships (Barnes, 2009; Donovan, et al., 2014; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2002). In Ristock’s (2002, p. 51) interviews with one-hundred and two women, eighteen reported abusive partners “creating debt, stealing money, running up credit cards, controlling all finance”. Donovan et al. (2014) found 20.4 per cent (177 approx.) of their 872 respondents reported experiencing financial abuse in the last twelve months. Three quarters (30 out of 40) of Barnes (2009) sample reported paying most of the mortgage, household bills, and social expenses. Barnes (2009) reported that in most cases, participants were paying the majority share and earned more than their partners. However, in some cases, participants earned less or the same amount, yet still paid the majority share. This unequal contribution of financial expenses resulted in financial hardship for participants, with many reporting the acquisition of substantial debts over the course of their relationships. Donovan and Hester (2014) expanded the category of financial abuse to include, refusing to get paid work and expecting to be supported, preventing the partner getting a job, making her ask for money, giving her an allowance, and taking her money. The nationwide study similarly found that gay males were typically more likely to experience financial abuse than heterosexual men and women, bisexual and queer women, and lesbians.158

3.1.7 The impact of intimate partner abuse

Studies report that minimal research focuses on the impact (Barnes, 2013), and recovery processes for both lesbian and heterosexual survivors of IPA (Flasch, Murray, & Crowe, 2017). Lesbian victims report countless psychological, physical, and social consequences of their IPA victimisation (Descamps et al., 2000; Irwin, 2008; Walters, et al., 2013). Participants in Irwin’s (2008) Australian sample reported attempting suicide following an abusive lesbian relationship. Descamps et al.’s (2000) national US sample of 1,925 lesbians found that lesbians who experienced IPA reported significantly more daily stress, depression, and alcohol abuse. Another US nationally representative sample found that negative outcomes are more common for LGB IPA victims than heterosexual victims of IPA. For example, Walters et al. (2013) found that 57.4 per cent of bisexual female victims

158 The authors did not report per cent rates for experiencing financial abuse.
and 33.5 per cent of lesbian victims reported at least one negative impact (experienced PTSD symptoms, missed one day from work/college, felt concerned for safety) compared to 28.2 per cent of female heterosexual victims of IPA. A recent review of the existing literature examining psychological and physical consequences of psychological and physical abuse on partners reported a variety of consequences for victims (Lawrence, Orengo-Aguayo, Langer, & Brock, 2012). The most striking finding reported was the strong correlation between physical victimisation and poorer physical health outcomes that was found to be more pronounced for females. Physical victimisation was associated with increased chronic pain, gastrointestinal problems, and women were more likely to suffer longstanding illnesses and chronic diseases in comparison to men. The psychological consequences of physical abuse were found to significantly decrease a female’s psychological well-being and increase the probability of suffering from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcohol or other substance abuse, and higher rates of suicide ideation. Physically and psychologically abused females were also reported to have poorer health behaviours such as smoking, poor eating habits, and engaging in sexually risky behaviours. Serious economic and social consequences recorded as an impact of physical abuse included being more likely to miss work, have lower relationship satisfaction, and have fewer social and emotional supports (Lawrence, et al., 2012).

The existing research suggests that both heterosexual and non-heterosexual survivors of IPA may experience negative longer-term consequences from their abuse, that involve mental health symptoms (depression and PTSD), long-term physical health effects, negative career and educational outcomes, and an increased risk of experiencing additional abusive relationships (Tjaden & Thonnes, 2000; World Health Organisation, 2012). A recent critical review of the literature concerned with IPA among sexual minority populations (Edwards et al., 2015), found between 17 – 36.6 per cent of LGB individuals report sustaining injuries as a result of IPA, 13-31 per cent of LGB victims report seeking

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159 The authors reviewed articles examining male and/or female abusers and studies examining male and/or female victims. They concluded that there is a dearth of research examining the impact of physical and psychological victimisation in men.
medical attention for their injuries, and 18.4 per cent of LGB adults experiencing physical violence report that they feared for their lives.\textsuperscript{160}

Regarding the impact of sexual violence, studies report that heterosexual women may cope with sexual assault by self-medicating with alcohol and/or drugs and engage in casual sexual activity (Lonsway & Archambault, 2017). A US qualitative study exploring sexual violence with a lesbian (81%) and bisexual (16%) female sample (Girshick, 2002) found depression and suicidal feelings were commonly reported as impacts of sexual violence. Furthermore, research with heterosexual and non-heterosexual women demonstrates victims may lose interest in or reject sex after an assault, or they may become promiscuous when this was not previously their typical behaviour (Campbell, et al., 2004; Girshick, 2002).

Other studies report women’s positive feelings in the aftermath of abusive relationships. Using qualitative data, Flasch et al.’s (2017) US study with 123 participants found positive recovery was related to both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes.\textsuperscript{161} The author’s found that \textit{intrapersonal processes} were associated with regaining and recreating one’s own life, embracing the freedom and power to direct one’s own life, determining whether and how to enter a new relationship, and healing from the mental and physical health symptoms of abuse. \textit{Interpersonal processes} comprised building positive social supports and relationships and using one’s experience to help others.

A review of the literature identified several myths around lesbian and heterosexual women’s relationships. The impact of these myths for lesbians experiencing IPA is discussed in the next section.

\textsuperscript{160} The author’s reviewed 96 empirical studies examining IPA among samples of LGB individuals published between 1999 and 2013.

\textsuperscript{161} Interviews were conducted with females (95.1%) and males (4.9%), participants in same sex relationships comprised 4.9% of the sample.
3.2 Discourses that support the domestic violence status quo

3.2.1 The construction of the battered woman

Feminist theoretical explanations to explain IPA encompass learned helplessness and the battered women syndrome (Azam Ali & Naylor, 2013).\textsuperscript{162} Learned helplessness implies that following continuous and repeated abuse, a woman’s ability to respond to abuse is minimised and this enforces passiveness (Walker, 1979), leading to a woman remaining in, and not making attempts to leave an abusive relationship. The battered woman syndrome was developed to explain female retaliation and has been used in court cases to defend women who have killed their husbands (Azam Ali & Naylor, 2013). Writing in the 1990s, Eaton (1994) described feminist litigators struggling to convince courts to admit expert evidence of the battered woman syndrome in cases where women killed their male perpetrators. Eaton suggests that when this line of self-defense was presented to juries, it was succeeded in many jurisdictions. Feminist accounts believe that female retaliation is always an act of self-defence (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995). These theoretical perspectives fail to consider women’s agency in abusive relationships, and their attempts to negotiate and minimise violence.

The gender-specific language of the two perspectives outlined and the conceptualisation of women as helpless victims contributes to a perception of the ‘real battered woman’. The perception of the real battered woman is supported and maintained by DV services theory, literature, and training information, and a lack of experience, awareness and training about LIPA (Helfrich & Simpson, 2006; Van Natta, 2005). Van Natta (2005) argues that in the context of limited resources of DV services and shelters, service providers make decisions around the provision of services based on the ‘normal case’, an ideal type of client who is typically white, heterosexual, middle-class, and able-bodied. She suggests that this focus on the ‘normal case’ may lead service providers to marginalise lesbian and bisexual women who do not fit the normative model.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that feminist approaches to addressing the issue of LIPA, have promoted a dominant narrative privileging the white, middle-class lesbian experience (Holmes, 2009). Holmes explored discursive constructions of violence

\textsuperscript{162} Additional feminist theoretical explanations include patriarchy, the cycle of violence, and the power and control wheel.
in educational pamphlets, workshops, and interviews with lesbian and queer anti-violence educators who conduct LIPA workshops. Her work draws attention to the way LIPA was simply added to the existing dominant heterosexual domestic violence framework. She argues that this additive approach had resulted in heterosexual women’s experiences becoming the norm. Similarly, she asserts that when differences or oppressions based on race, class, and disability are added on to the lesbian experience of IPA, “the result is the construction of a universal woman who identifies as lesbian, who is white, middle-class, and able-bodied” (Holmes, 2009, p. 81).

3.2.2 LGBT community silence on SSIPA

The LGB community was established in the face of oppression and marginalisation (Allen & Leventhal, 1999). Rather than focusing on violence within the LGB community, those involved in the lesbian and gay rights movement expended time and energies in the pursuit of recognition of LGBT rights and equality (Russo, 1999). Primarily, this focused on hate crimes perpetrated and condoned by heterosexuals and the heterosexist society (Ibid, 1999). Consequently, there has been a noted reluctance from the community to acknowledge IPA for fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes, e.g., that same sex relationships are dysfunctional or unhealthy (Elliot, 1996; Hart, 1986; Knauer, 1999). Those in the LGBT community have expressed the opinion that “the disclosure of violence by lesbians against lesbians may enhance the arsenal of homophobes, who seek to stifle the free and whole participation of lesbians in this society” (Hart, 1986, p. 10).

Research suggests that LGBT community agencies play a pivotal role in supporting an individual. Social support within LGBT communities is associated with positive self-identification and greater social and psychological well-being (DiFulvio, 2011), and positive self-esteem (Detrie & Lease, 2007), a finding also mirrored in a recent Irish study (Ceatha, 2016). Ceatha (2016) found that involvement in social groups promoted the LGBT participants sense of self-esteem through the achievements and affirmations of other group members.

Since the issue was first addressed, studies and activists have documented strategies of denial, silence, and minimisation as the primary response of the lesbian community to SSIPA (Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Russo, 1992). Russo (1999) draws a comparison
between the DV and LGBT movements approach to the issue of SSIPA. She writes that to discuss women as perpetrators of abuse disrupts the feminist analysis and complicates the picture. Similarly, she contends that the LGBT movement is reluctant to discuss the issue of IPA because violence in same sex relationships confounds the hate crime discourse that frames LGBT individuals as primarily victims (rather than perpetrators) of heterosexual violence.

Several lines of evidence suggest that a reluctance to admit that violence occurs, and a prioritising of the desire to avoid further stigmatisation of the community over the needs of victims, further isolates and silences victims, impacts on their ability to name and recognise the abuse, limits choices and access to supports, and reinforces the perception that IPA is a heterosexual phenomenon (Bornstein et al., 2006; Giorgio, 2002; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006). The community strategies in response to SSIPA has become increasingly problematic as studies demonstrate that lesbian women tend not to opt for formal support services due to fears of receiving a homophobic response (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991; Renzetti, 1989, 1992), and instead cite a preference for LGBT specific services (Bornstein et al., 2006; Turell & Herrmann, 2008).

3.2.3 Stereotypes associated with a “butch-femme” lesbian relationship dynamic

According to Taylor and Chandler (1995, p. 45) butch-femme lesbian relationships have been interpreted as “aping male-female roles”. Consequently, these types of relationships have been branded as more likely to include abusive behaviour associated with heterosexual relationships. Early researchers attempted to explain same sex IPA as the result of gay and lesbian couples acting out traditional masculine and feminine gender roles (Walker, 1979). Gay and lesbian gender role-playing has however been disputed in the literature (Hart, 1986; Renzetti, 1992). These early interpretations of SSIPA could be best understood by what Ristock describes as an “unintended heterosexual bias” (1994, p.417), where heterosexual IPA is understood as normative for all abusive relationships.

A later study by Ristock (1997) suggests that stereotypes of the butch-femme lesbian relationship dynamic reinforces gender-role stereotypes and is analogous to power differentials in heterosexual relationships. Taylor and Chandler (1995, p.46) propose that when we extend this butch-femme stereotype, “we develop the equation butch equals
maleness equals violence”. Such types of reinforced set ideas have the potential to be harmful to lesbian victims of IPA that present as ‘butch’. Previous studies show that lesbian victims report being larger in stature than their abusive partners and that their smaller abusive partners exploit female gender role stereotypes and dupe police into believing they were the victim of the offence (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Renzetti, 1988). Furthermore, research demonstrates that gendered stereotypes associated with butch-femme relationships act as a barrier to help-seeking (for the bigger partner), are used by law enforcement to identify the perpetrator, femme abusers exploit these stereotypes concerning women to conceal their abusive behaviour (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008), and butch/femme stereotyping has led to the misidentification of the victim as batterer and to wrongful arrest (Wolf, et al., 2003). Female gender role stereotyping has tangible negative implications for non-heterosexual female victims of IPA; it presupposes feminine, smaller women are incapable of enacting physical aggression and violence, which may lead to the diminishment of a crime, minimisation of its seriousness, and contribute to the assumption that the problem does not exist (Denov, 2004).

3.2.4 The myth of a lesbian utopia

Joan McClennen (2005, p. 150) argues that despite the similarities with heterosexual women’s experience of IPA, LIPA “differs in its theoretical underpinnings and is fraught with myths”. Within the same sex IPA literature, terms such as ‘egalitarian myth’ (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984), the ‘lesbian nation’ (Renzetti, 1992), and more commonly a ‘lesbian utopia’ (Benowitz, 1986; Girshick, 2002) are used to describe discourses surrounding lesbian relationships as being egalitarian and non-violent. The roots of this egalitarian discourse can be found in the writings of second-wave radical and cultural feminists in the 1970s (Irwin, 2013). During the 1970s, cultural and radical feminists contributed to discourses that reinforced the view that only men are violent, and that women are essentially peaceful and non-violent. This approach was adopted to validate lesbian relationships and challenge dominant constructions of lesbians as perverted, sick, and deviant (Barnes, 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2013). According to Irwin (2013), radical and cultural feminists constituted themselves as a privileged form of feminism where values of egalitarianism, non-violence and non-hierarchical practices challenged the

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163 By “lesbian nation” Renzetti is referring to the notion or ideal of a woman-identified subculture that is violence-free, and free of the problems that are typically associated with patriarchal social relations.
dominant values of patriarchy that shaped women’s lives. Irwin (2013) argues not only did this challenge to patriarchy start to generate discourses of a lesbian utopia, but also the values became the basis for the ‘ideal’ community. Not infrequently, lesbian relationships were idealised as egalitarian, non-competitive, and free of the power struggles that plague heterosexual relationships. Such discourses closed off the opportunity to discuss violence in relationships, resulting in a denial of its existence.

A number of authors have considered the myth and its association with LIPA (Barnes, 2011; Girshick, 2002; Hardesty, et al., 2011; Irwin, 2008; Patzel, 2006). The results from these studies indicate that the myth has tangible impacts on lesbian survivors, in terms of creating barriers to help-seeking (Girshick, 2002; Hardesty et al., 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008), perpetuating silence, denial, and isolation (Barnes, 2011; Girshick, 2002), and non-recognition of behaviour as abusive (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). Renzetti (1992, p. 85) reported that her participants (n=100) desire to protect the ideal of the “lesbian nation” was a major factor in their remaining in the abusive relationship. Moreover, lesbian community support services have been found to use the myth to deny and minimise the existence of LIPA (Merlis & Linville, 2006).

3.2.5 Heterosexist discourses about aggression & violence

Research demonstrates that in Western societies, masculinity is associated with aggression and a dominating authority in relationships (Jack, 2001). Gender-based theories of IPA have attributed violence to rigid adherence to patriarchal values (West, 1998), to traditional feminine and masculine gender stereotypes (Walker, 1979), where conceptualisations of IPA, are almost exclusively constituted as something females experience at the hands of men (Corbally, 2010).

Traditional gendered stereotypical norms construct femininity as caring, weak, passive, and nurturing (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Gilbert, 2002). In contrast, masculinity is constructed as strong, controlling, powerful, and often aggressive and violent (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Gerber, 1991; Gilbert, 2002). Heterosexist norms of masculinity and femininity are associated with violence in intimate relationships and are particularly prominent in feminist gender-based IPA perspectives. Within this literature, there is an assumption of male aggression (Kelly, 1991), and female passivity (Richardson, 2005),
where female retaliation is understood as always an act of self-defence (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995). Richardson (2005) argues that the notion of female aggressiveness is an idea that is inconsistent with our stereotypical view of femininity.

Gender role stereotypes reinforce societal ideas about who can be a victim or perpetrator of IPA, and further, demonstrate how heterosexism shapes societal responses to SSIPA (Brown, 2008). Studies have demonstrated that the police are reportedly less likely to intervene in IPA cases that involve gay or lesbian couples due to gender-role stereotypes that women cannot be abusers and men cannot be abused (Island & Letellier, 1991; Renzetti, 1992). Using heterosexist discourses about aggression and violence that position men as aggressors, a lesbian abuser may manipulate her partner by convincing her that no one will believe her claims of abuse by another female. West (1998) proposes that the fear of disbelief becomes another weapon that can be used to maintain the imbalance of power. Corbally (2010) argues that such assumptions and societal norms about perpetrators and victims act to minimise the existence of other forms of IPA, such as female to female, female to male, and gay male IPA.

There is evidence to suggest that assumptions and societal norms about femininity have been exploited by female abusers to disguise their abusive behaviour. In her attempt to understand the causes of violent acts committed by women, Jack (2001) developed the concept of cultural masks.164 She writes that throughout history, women have been punished for acts of aggression and have been forced to camouflage their intent to hurt, in culturally sanctioned, hidden ways. She contends that while boys learn about the use of physical force to confer agency, girls learn of the power and use of words and of manipulation that silences feelings of aggression. As such, Jack contends that women’s use of aggression is masked, “most often fashioned from a cloth of stereotypical feminine behaviour such as sweetness, silence, and passivity. This strategic performance of femininity disguises women’s intent to hurt, control or oppose another” (Jack, 2001, pp. 236–237).

The use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) survey to research IPA has contributed to controversy in both heterosexual (Johnson, 2006) and same sex (Donovan & Hester, 2014) IPA literature. The next section describes the issues identified with this method, including

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164 Jack’s (2001) study was not specifically focused on women retaliating in abusive relationship contexts.
the concept of ‘mutual combat’. Considering the discussion of mutual combat in lesbian relationships, the section ends with a review of the literature concerned with a female’s motivations for ‘hitting back’.

3.3 Controversies in the literature

3.3.1 The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS)

Much of the research on heterosexual IPA and surveys on SSIPA in the US have, by and large, been based on the CTS, CTS2 or modified versions of the survey (Archer, 2000; Balsam et al., 2005; Fortunata & Kohn, 2003). The original CTS was developed to measure the ways in which families attempt to deal with conflict, with a focus on verbal reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical aggression within the family (Straus, 1979).165 The results from using this methodology have lead researchers to conclude that there is a considerable amount of violence in intimate relationships, and furthermore, that both men and women engage in violence in relatively equal numbers. For example, a meta-analysis of gender differences in physical aggression between heterosexual partners, probing 82 studies (76 used the CTS), reported gender symmetry in physically aggressive behaviours (Archer, 2000).

Numerous issues have been identified with the original CTS. One problem with data collected using the measure is the inability of the scale to distinguish between the use of violent tactics to attack or control, and the use of violent tactics in self-defence (Ristock, 2003; Stark, 2007). In addition, the CTS emphasises physical abuse; and does not include measures to address emotional or sexual abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).166 The CTS excludes crucial details about motives, intentions, and consequences (Dobash, et al., 1992). Without capturing data on motive, context, or impact related to abuse, CTS approaches produce results that cannot differentiate between hitting someone as part of wider

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165 The CTS consists of eighteen items. The items range from “verbal reasoning” (from calmly discussing the issue to bringing in someone to mediate) to “verbal aggression” (from insults and swearing to throwing, smashing, hitting, or kicking someone) to ”physical aggression” (from throwing something at another person to using a knife or gun). Male and female respondents are asked how many times they had perpetrated each act in their attempts to settle a disagreement with a spouse, a child, or a sibling, and how many times they had been victims of these acts. There are no questions asked on sexual assault.

166 Straus and colleagues designed the CTS2, questions relating to sexual violence, and differential levels of violence were added, with consideration paid to injuries sustained. According to Donovan and Hester (2014), the CTS2 is still not conducive to capturing the impact of violence.
controlling behaviour, such as ongoing IPA and retaliating to protect oneself from being hurt, as in self-defence. There is increasing recognition that the CTS emphasis on perpetrators actions results in the omission of information on the impact and consequences, and ‘tends to generate a spurious gender symmetry that vanishes if and when the impact of the act is brought into focus’ (Walby & Allen, 2004, p. 37). A consequence of the decontextualised data emanating from studies that employ the CTS method have resulted in IPA being categorised as ‘mutual combat’ (Steinmetz, 1977; Straus, 1999).

3.3.2 Mutual combat in lesbian relationships

Mutual combat represents a significant controversy within the LIPA literature. Mutual combat is defined as a situation in which both partners contribute equally to violence in an intimate relationship (Peterman & Dixon, 2003). Within this framework, a victim’s actions of self-defence against perpetrators are quantified as equivalent with acts of engaging in physical fights. In the absence of gender (i.e. more physically powerful male partner) as a marker to identify the abuser from the abused, SSIPA is often mislabelled as mutual abuse rather than self-defence by victims (Barnes, 2011; Giorgio, 2002; Turell & Herrmann, 2008), by formal service providers (Hammond, 1988; Helfrich & Simpson, 2006; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005), and by those working in LGBT community organisations (Merlis & Linville, 2006).

In the context of LIPA, the concept of mutual abuse creates unique obstacles for women in terms of recognition of IPA and access to services. Unlike heterosexual female victims, when a lesbian resists her partner, victims believe that the abuse is mutual (Hart, 1986a; Lie, et al., 1991; Renzetti, 1992). Studies have shown that where lesbians interpret their response to violence as mutual, believing they are the aggressors in relationships (a belief reinforced by abusers), that this creates a barrier to recognising their experience as IPA (Giorgio, 2002; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Taylor & Chandler, 1995), and increases a sense of shame, blame, and isolation (Hammond, 1986). Studies report that where lesbian batterers are using the myth of mutual abuse to further victimise and control their partners, abusers may claim mutual abuse to deny responsibility for their violent behaviour (Renzetti, 1997). If a partner retaliates, an abuser will use this to justify her own behaviour (Hart, 1986a; Renzetti, 1997).

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167 Also known as mutual abuse or mutual battering.
Moreover, the continued belief in the existence of mutual abuse has resulted in victims receiving an inadequate response from support services who do not believe that abuse occurs in same sex relationships, or where the abuse is minimised and understood to be not as harmful or dangerous (McClennen, 2005). Within such a view, it is difficult for support professionals to identify a victim and perpetrator. Consequently, US law enforcement has been found to be reluctant to intervene (Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). A perception of LIPA as mutual, impacts on a lesbian's ability to obtain assistance from the criminal justice system where choices are reported to be limited (Hammond, 1988). For example, a US study found that judges offer mutual restraining orders rather than a protection order to lesbian victims (Simpson & Helfrich, 2005).

Pervasive societal heterosexist assumptions about IPA, and DV theory that guides the service response have been found to influence service providers (DV and LGBT agencies) understanding of LIPA as mutual abuse (Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Studies report that members of the LGBT community organisations minimise the level and severity of violence in LIPA by relabelling it as 'mutual battery' (Merlis & Linville, 2006).

Although the literature evidences that there are lesbians involved in IPA that identify as victims who fight back with the intention to hurt (Marrujo & Kreger, 1996; Ristock, 2003), research that explains IPA between same sex partners as ‘mutual combat’ is dismissed by the weight of evidence as a myth (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hart, 1986a; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1997). Studies show that perpetrators are different from victims in terms of their intent and their emotional reaction following a violent event. Perpetrators deliberately instigate violence and blame their victims for their behaviour, whereas victims tend to blame themselves and are emotionally distraught (Morrow, 1994).

3.3.3 Motivation for fighting back

Langhinrichsen-Rohling, et al. (2012) reviewed seventy-four empirical studies to ascertain what motivates partners to perpetrate IPA and to establish if such motivations differ between men and women. Common motives assessed across samples included, self-defence (76%), power and control (76%), anger/ expression of a negative emotion (63%),

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168 75 samples (reviewed across 74 articles) consisted of 24 (32%) women only samples, 6 (8%) men only samples, and 46 (62%) men and women samples. The review did not examine studies with LGBT samples.
using violence to retaliate (60%), communication difficulties (47%), and jealousy (49%).

Across the review, only eight study samples provided a direct comparison of men and women’s motivation for IPA and considered gender differences in the power and control motive. The author’s hypothesis that men would report perpetrating violence as a means of power and control more frequently than women was only partially supported. Of the eight studies reviewed, three reported no significant gender differences in being motivated by power and control to perpetrate violence. One study found that women were more motivated to perpetrate violence because of power and control than men. The remaining three studies reported men as more likely to perpetrate violence to obtain power and control (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012).169

Self-defence as a motive for perpetration was found to be more common for women than men. The review included 10 studies containing gender-specific analysis; five studies indicated women were significantly more likely to report self-defence as a motive for perpetration than men. Four studies did not find statistically significant gender differences. Only one study reported that men were more likely to report this motive than women (Shorey, Meltzer, & Cornelius, 2010 cited in Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars, et al., 2012).

The chapter proceeds to review power in lesbian relationships. As will be made evident, the influence of traditional forms of power, typically associated with heterosexual relationships, on lesbian abusive relationships, is contested in the LIPA literature. Non-traditional forms of power have been found to exist in abusive lesbian relationships, involving power using control over sexuality, ‘experiential power’ and fluctuating power. These dimensions of power are described in the following section.

### 3.4 Power in lesbian relationships

Power is described as “the ability to influence others, the ability to get others to do what one wants them to do regardless of whether or not they want to do it” (Renzetti, 1992, p. 43). Among heterosexual couples, power imbalances have been associated with IPA.

169 The 3 studies cited: (Barnett, et al., 1997; Ehrensaft et al., 1999; Shorey, et al., 2010).
However, researchers acknowledge that unlike heterosexual relationships, lesbians lack a cultural ideology that legitimates power imbalances (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984). The association between power imbalance and IPA appears to be inconsistent in the LIPA literature. West (1998) suggests the inconsistency is linked to how power imbalance is defined across studies. Using dimensions of power typically associated with heterosexual relationships (the division of labour, decision making, financial resources), studies demonstrate no correlation between power imbalance and IPA (Bologna, et al., 1987; Renzetti, 1992).

3.4.1 Traditional forms of power in lesbian relationships

The first empirical study to explore gender and power in same sex relationships reported power imbalance as one of the five principal variables established to explain the occurrence and severity of abusive relationships (Renzetti, 1992). To define power imbalance in lesbian relationships, Renzetti (1992) examined four areas: 1) personal characteristics (a taker, yielding, decisive); 2) feelings and patterns of interaction (division of household chores, initiator of sexual activity, economic dependence); 3) sources of conflict or strain (money, social class, intelligence); and 4) status differential (older, more educated, occupational status). Her findings demonstrate the correlation between a power imbalance and the tendency to be the abusive partner, where the greater the imbalance results in more severe physical and psychological abuse. Other work suggests that a batterers dependency is associated with increased frequency and severity of violence (Lockhart et al., 1994; Renzetti, 1988).

Renzetti (1992) reported that a lesbian batterer’s dependency on her partner was the factor most strongly correlated with abuse. However, acknowledging the complexity and multifaceted nature of power, she also reported no clear association between power imbalance and IPA. Conversely, the 77 respondents in Caldwell and Peplau’s (1984) US study reported that the partner who was relatively less committed, less dependent on the relationship and who had greater financial resources tended to have greater power. In their

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170 Traditionally, the power imbalance between heterosexual couples was attributed to variables associated with the America’s patriarchal society such as rigid gender role socialisation, wage inequality, and childcare responsibilities. See Walker (1979).

171 The other variables identified were dependency, jealousy, substance abuse, and intergenerational transmission of violence. In a later publication (Renzetti, 1996), added internalised homophobia and personality disorder to the list.
examination of power in lesbian abusive relationships, Lockhart et al. (1994) reported the occurrence of severe physical violence was associated with a partner’s financial dependency, the act of spending money, housekeeping/ cooking duties, and who had the right to make major decisions.

Studies have incorporated social status, including class, income, and education to examine power differentials in lesbian abusive relationships. Kelly and Warshafsky (1987) found no significant correlations between IPA and social status and further reported greater financial resources were not associated with being the abuser. Ristock (2002) reported similar findings regarding financial resources. Mc Kenry et al (2006) found that female perpetrators and non-perpetrators did not differ on socioeconomic status. Other work contradicts these studies, however. Turell (1999) found higher income was correlated with increased threats, stalking, sexual, physical, and financial abuses. Similarly, Peplau and Cochran (1984) reported that inequality in personal resources was related to the power imbalance in lesbian relationships. Respondent’s in their sample with the least education and income tended to have less power in the relationship. Overall, the authors reported that level of education made the largest contribution to predicting power in the relationship. While Renzetti (1992) found that as differences in intelligence and social class became a source of conflict in relationships, the frequency and severity of some forms of abuse increased. These dimensions of power were specifically correlated with batterers choking, hitting, and pushing partners.

Influenced by Renzetti’s (1992) work, McClennen et al. (2002) designed the Lesbian Partner Abuse Scale-Revised (Le-PAS-R) to identify variables related to power imbalance between lesbian couples resulting in IPA. Confirming Renzetti’s (1992) findings from ten years prior, jealousy and dependency were found to be separate issues from power imbalance. Imbalance of power was partly attributed to the intergenerational transmission of violence while faking illness and status differentials were identified as aspects of control in lesbian relationships. The role of communication and social skills was described as a poignant factor associated with power imbalance (McClennen et al., 2002) which adds

172 The researchers found that gay male perpetrators had lower socioeconomic status then non-perpetrators (McKenry, et al., 2006).

173 The original 135 item scale established two scales (the Index of Self-esteem and the General Contentment Scale), and demographic information was completed by 45 abused and 33 non-abused lesbians.
empirical support to the social-psychological theories concerning causality of SSIPA (Island & Letellier, 1991; Merril, 1996).

The previous examples demonstrate inconsistencies in results related to the association between power imbalance and social class, education, and income. Studies that considered the division of labour as a form of power reflect more consistent findings. Several lines of evidence suggest that lesbians who assume primary responsibility for household duties such as cooking, child minding, and managing finances, were found to be more likely to be abused (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Lockhart et al., 1994; Renzetti, 1992). Lockhart et al. (1994) found that those who sustained severe aggression reported more conflicts around cleaning and cooking duties when compared with non-victims and those who sustained milder forms of violence. Donovan and Hester (2014) argue that abusive behaviour in same sex relationships reflects processes of gendering and gender norms. For example, female respondents in their study were significantly more likely to be made to do most of the housework.174

3.4.2 Non-traditional forms of power in lesbian relationships

The inconsistencies identified by researchers in their examination of power in lesbian relationships could be attributed to attempts to measure power using items typically associated with heterosexual couples, what Ristock describes as an “unintended heterosexist bias” (1994, p. 417). Having said that, the literature reveals additional forms of power existing in abusive lesbian relationships, such as power accrued through a first-time relationship, what Donovan et al (2014) term ‘experiential power’, power using control over sexuality, and fluctuating power in relationships.

3.4.3 First same sex relationships & ‘Experiential power’

Ristock (2003) conducted eighty interviews with women abused by other women to understand the dynamics of an abusive relationship. She identified first-time relationships, as one of two emergent themes to explain power in lesbian relationships.175 Ristock found almost half (49%) of the 80 interviewees reported an abusive first same sex relationship.

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174 Heterosexual women and gay men typically reported experiencing physical violence and physically violent sexual coercion from male perpetrators. Lesbian and heterosexual men more typically reported experiences of emotional abuse from female perpetrators (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

175 Shifting power in a relationship was Ristock’s second theme. This is discussed in the next section.
Furthermore, participants reported the abuser in their first relationship as older and out for a longer period. Her study also revealed evidence of female ‘serial abusers’ who participants identified as preying on women who were just coming out. Ristock argues that this dynamic is not surprising considering the additional vulnerability lesbians face when coming out. She locates these vulnerabilities as part of the external heterosexist context where “lesbians are isolated, unable to access meeting places, and often dependent on their first lover for information about lesbian culture” (2003, p.335).

Donovan and Hester (2014) found specific vulnerabilities associated with first same sex relationships. A lack of relationship experience and knowledge resulted in participants staying in abusive relationships for prolonged periods, in addition to not recognising the experience as IPA, the abuse becoming normalised, and an assumption that their first relationship experience will be negative. The authors attribute this negative expectation to the ‘heterosexual assumption’ (Weeks, et al., 2001, p. 41), defined as the “all-embracing institutional invalidation of homosexuality, and presumption in favour of heterosexuality”. The abuse became normalised as participants did not have a reference point for a healthy relationship and so they assumed that experiencing abuse was a part of being in a relationship.

‘Community knowledges’ (Weeks, et al., 2001) is a term used to describe LGBTQ specific knowledge and resources that enable LGBTQ individuals to feel connected to communities at a local and national level. Donovan et al. (2014) demonstrated that more nuanced forms of power, accrued from having LGBT knowledge, subvert more identifiable markers of structural social power (age, income, ethnicity). For example, their UK-wide research demonstrated that respondents who were out, who had more experience either sexually or in terms of LGBT relationships, and who had connections to LGBT peer groups and social settings, had a level of social and cultural ‘capital’ which the less experienced partner is excluded from. In what the author’s labelled “experiential power”, their study provided examples of victims who were older, having more life experience, and having more financial power, being victimised by those who were younger and with less financial

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176 Community knowledges are not specific to LGBTQ communities. Culturally-mediated factors such as gender roles, familism, inter-family structures and shame have been found to influence ethnic minority women’s ability to disclose abuse, seek support, and recognise their experience as IPA. See (Asylum Aid, 2002; Bui, 2003).
resources. The younger abusers ‘community knowledge’ positioned them as powerful in relationships, especially in contexts of first-time relationships. Donovan and Hester (2014) found that a survivor’s lack of community knowledges adds to their vulnerability and isolation. Participants in their study reported more experienced partners controlling their coming out process and in effect, isolating them from LGBT support networks.

Burke and Follingstad’s (1999) review of the literature identified unique dynamics of power and violence resulting from homophobia within lesbian relationships. Internalised homophobia may be manifested by a lesbian as a hatred of herself or her partner, adding an additional tool of manipulation that is not available in heterosexual abusive relationships. Using the threat and fear of disclosure of sexual orientation to family, friends, and colleagues, a lesbian abuser has a powerful ability to intimidate her partner into remaining silent and not seeking help (West, 1998).

3.4.4 Fluctuating power

The literature on LIPA highlights that power in lesbian relationships is less predictable than the dynamics of power operating in heterosexual relationships (Ristock, 2002). Several studies demonstrate that power fluctuates in lesbian abusive relationships, and is not something that fully resides with one partner (Donovan, et al., 2014; Irwin, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Ristock, 2003). However, this is noted as the exception and not the rule (Elliot, 1996). Ristock’s (2003) qualitative exploration of abusive dynamics in lesbian relationships found the existence of traditional and non-traditional forms of power operating in relationships. Participants gave accounts of abusive dynamics that involved clear examples of a victim and perpetrator dynamic where violence was cited as resembling the “cycle of violence” found in heterosexual relationships. However, women also spoke of fluctuating power, a less predictable form of power that involved moving from a position of being abused to becoming the abuser in the relationship. Ristock highlights the link between the fluctuating power and the tendency to label this dynamic as mutual abuse.

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177 The consequences of this aspect of abusive lesbian relationships were discussed earlier in the chapter. See Section 2.2.4 ‘Outing’ as a form of abuse

178 The cycle of violence is where violence occurs in a predictable cyclical nature and intensifies over time. This includes a period of calm which follows a severe battering incident (Walker, 1979).
which wrongly assumes gender symmetry, without adequate investigation of motivation or intention to harm.

Like Ristock (2002, 2003), Irwin’s (2008) Australian study, involving interviews with 21 lesbians, revealed that traditional understandings of power as a coherent and stable set of relations did not fit neatly with their experiences. For example, Irwin (2008, p. 209) found power in lesbian relationships was experienced as “relational, and dispersed and localized, working in complex and often unpredictable ways”. Participants reported control in relationships as transitional and contexts of fluctuating power. Most women in her sample revealed they resisted, managed, and challenged the violence. A US study by Merlis and Linville (2006) explored the lesbian community response to IPA by drawing on service providers perspectives working in the DV sector. Their findings suggest that when power fluctuates in a lesbian relationship, this acts to normalise the violence for the victim, whereby the victim becomes confused about her response and does not see it as abusive. However, service providers noted that eventually this dynamic inhibits a survivor’s response as their self-esteem is worn down by their abuser.

A review of the empirical literature related to power and how power operates in abusive female-to-female relationships suggests a propensity by researchers to operationalise variables associated with power imbalances within heterosexual relationships. In accord with West (1998), definitions of power imbalance derived from studies of heterosexual male perpetrated violence against women, as applied to non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA, could legitimately explain the inconsistencies surrounding the findings connected with power in non-heterosexual female relationships. More recent studies of same sex abusive relationships signal that power is multi-layered and manifests far beyond the parameters of what is known about male power accrued from living in a patriarchal societal context. Having said that, understanding power in female abusive relationships is also context dependent. Heterosexist contexts position heterosexual relationships as a social norm where the traditional family and rigid feminine and masculine gendered norms are endorsed within a heterosexist system. This context creates distinct opportunities for the abuse and manifestation of a power imbalance in a non-heterosexual relationship. At the macrosystem level, contexts of heterosexism permeate the experience of lesbian IPA and have the potential to negatively influence a victim’s experience and understanding of abusive behaviour, and also their help-seeking decisions.
The chapter moves on now to consider a number of characteristics associated with the experience of LIPA identified from the literature, including, sociodemographic and personality characteristics, internalised homophobia/ minority stress, substance abuse, the family of origin violence, fusion, societal contexts of heterosexism and homophobia, and the public story of domestic violence.

3.5 Characteristics of lesbian IPA

3.5.1 Sociodemographic and Personality characteristics

Examining correlates of LIPA, two studies explored the relationship between sexual orientation and IPA (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Eaton et al., 2008), and reported conflicting results. Of the 226 women surveyed at a gay pride festival in the US, Eaton et al. (2008) did not find any significant differences between the bisexual, heterosexual, and lesbian women in their sample. However, Balsam and Szymanski (2005) reported significant differences between lesbian and bisexual women. Bisexual women were more likely to report LGB-specific aggression against a female partner (in the past year). Lesbians also reported more lifetime psychological aggression against a female partner.

In tandem with the individual psychological causal perspectives to understand LIPA, researchers have explored personality characteristics of both the batterer and the victim in studies of LIPA. A recent systematic review of female perpetrators of IPA toward men investigated characteristics associated with the population (Laskey, 2016). Factors that were found to be highly prevalent with female perpetrators included a high prevalence of trauma symptoms related to current or historical abuse; loss of control leading to aggression; substance abuse; unstable mood; attachment issues; and interpersonal dependency.

The first empirical US study to examine LIPA reported personality disorders as one of seven factors associated with experiencing abuse (Renzetti, 1992). Additional factors include power imbalance, dependency, jealousy, intergenerational transmission of violence, substance abuse and internalised homophobia.

179 Two studies measured personality characteristics specifically (Miller, et al., 2001; Telesco, 2004). The studies
examined low independence, need to control, and low self-esteem (Miller et al., 2001), dependence, femininity, jealousy, masculinity, and power (Telesco, 2004). Both studies reported contradictory results concerning the dependence/independence trait. Miller et al. (2001) asked 284 lesbians attending a music festival in the US to describe themselves using six personality traits reflecting independence (a higher score indicated greater independence). The study reported a statistically significant association between independence and greater use of both physical aggression and physical violence. Adapting Renzetti’s (1992) earlier work, Telesco (2004) reported a positive but not significant relationship between dependence and IPA perpetration. Using a cross-sectional design with 105 lesbians, Telesco (2004) reported measures such as jealousy, the need to control, and low self-esteem were significantly associated with IPA, with jealousy having the strongest associated with abusive behaviour. Other qualitative work from the US is consistent with this finding (Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002).

Research demonstrates that lesbian abusive partners are charming and articulate for the purposes of manipulation (Renzetti, 1992). Comparable tactics have been found in studies of male heterosexual perpetrators (Zink, Jacobson, Pabst, Regan, & Fisher, 2006, p. 642) where male partners were described as an “angel (in public) and devil (in private)”.

3.5.2 Lesbian mothers and IPA

Hardesty et al. (2011) argue that an additional sampling limitation in SSIPA research is that it overlooks the fact that women in same sex relationships may also be mothers. One of the first empirical studies with lesbian mothers, Renzetti (1998) found that 35 out of the 100 lesbians sampled were mothers. In addition to the abuse of the mother, she also reported verbal abuse of the abused partner’s children. Scherzer’s (1998) found that 14 per cent of respondents reported female partners abusing both the abuser’s children or their own. Scherzer (1998) used a modified version of the CTS (Strauss, 1979) to include items related to psychological violence and threats to out a partner, alongside open-ended questions to examine the experience of IPA for 256 lesbian respondents.

Hardesty et al. (2008) interviewed 24 lesbian mothers, examining their relationships with their children, and their children’s relationship with their partners. The study found almost half (48%) hid the violence, (26%) minimised the violence, and (26%) opening communicated with children about the violence. Abusive partner’s relationships with

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180 Scherzer (1998) used a modified version of the CTS (Strauss, 1979) to include items related to psychological violence and threats to out a partner, alongside open-ended questions to examine the experience of IPA for 256 lesbian respondents.
children were classified as co-parental, playmate, abusive, or non-parental. The study found that 21 per cent of lesbian mothers reported their partner as abusing their biological children (Hardesty et al., 2008).

3.5.3 Internalised homophobia & minority stress

The minority stress model is a conceptual framework developed for understanding the negative impact on an individual’s health and well-being caused by a stigmatising social context (Brooks, 1981; I. H. Meyer, 2003). In addition to general stressors that are experienced by all individuals, research indicates that those who are a part of a marginalised sexual minority are subjected to unique stressors associated with being LGBT (Meyer, 2003). Such stressors occur in a context where there is an assumption that heterosexuality and male/female gender identities are ‘the “normal”, right and only way to be’ (Blaise, 2005, p. 22). Meyer defined minority stress as “the excess stress to which individuals belonging to stigmatized social categories are exposed, by effect of their minority social standing” (I. H. Meyer, 2003, p. 675). The minority stress model includes internalised stressors, such as perceived discrimination, internalised homophobia, and the stress associated with concealing or disclosing one’s sexual identity, and externalised stressors, such as: experiences of violence, harassment, and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). These stressors interact with IPA to create and intensify vulnerabilities for LGBT victims. Sexual minority status has been found to increase feelings of isolation and helplessness (Merlis & Linville, 2006; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005).

IPA in same sex relationships has been described as the “double closet” as those seeking help must disclose the experience of IPA and their sexual orientation simultaneously (Kaschak, 2001; McClennen, 2005). Those who are concealing or questioning their sexuality may have trouble accessing support, as this would also involve disclosing their sexual orientation (Allen & Leventhal, 1999). Concealment of sexual identity may be related to internalised homophobia for both perpetrators and victims of LIPA, whereby perpetrators project a negative self-concept through violence toward their partners. In an American sample of 581 LGB individuals, Carvalho et al. (2011) found expectations of
experiencing prejudice and/or discrimination were significantly related to IPA perpetration.\textsuperscript{181}

Conversely, internalised homophobia impacts on victims in that they associate a sexual identity with deserving abusive behaviour. In a sample of 272 LB women living in the US and Canada, IPA perpetration and victimisation were associated with minority stress variables of discrimination and internalised homophobia (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005).\textsuperscript{182} Lesbians experiencing IPA who self-blame is consistent with other work (Balsam, 2001; Barnes, 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Turrell, 1999).

Two recent meta-analyses are relevant to this discussion. The first specifically explored the relationship between internalised homophobia and both victimisation and perpetration (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2017), while the other study examined risk factors for male and female victimisation and perpetration in same sex relationships (Kimmes et al., 2017). Both studies support earlier work that identifies the connection between IPA and internalised homophobia. Badenes-Ribera et al. (2017) examined eight studies and reported that the greater the internalised homophobia, the greater the perpetration, and the increased likelihood of physical/sexual/psychological perpetration, and victimisation. In their investigation of 24 studies, Kimmes et al. (2017) reported internalised homophobia to be the strongest risk marker for both victimisation and perpetration for women (and men) in same sex relationships.\textsuperscript{183}

3.5.4 Substance abuse

Among heterosexual couples, alcohol misuse and alcohol related problems are well established risk factors for IPA (O’Leary & Schumacher, 2003; Schumacher, et al., 2001). Relative to heterosexual IPA studies, the role of alcohol misuse in LGBT relationships is grossly understudied (Klostermann, Kelley, Milletich, & Mignone, 2011), despite the evidence that gay and lesbian individuals are more likely to drink in larger quantities and

\textsuperscript{181} The authors recruited from multiple US cities and what was described as “foreign cities”. No further information was provided on recruitment.

\textsuperscript{182} The participants ranged in age from 18-66 years. The sample comprised 85% European American, 6% African American/Black, 2% Hispanic/Latina, 1% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 1% Native American, and 4% biracial women.

\textsuperscript{183} Males and females in the sample were found to be at greater risk for the experience of psychological abuse from a partner.
experience alcohol dependency (Diamond & Wilsnack, 1978; Wilsnack et al., 2008). Studies have demonstrated that lesbian batterers frequently abuse alcohol or drugs (Lobel, 1986; McDonald, 2012). Interviews with 40 participants abused by their female partners, revealed substance abuse within lesbian couples was linked to the centrality of bars in the LGBT community where the bar was understood as a major site of socialisation (McDonald, 2012). In addition, self-medicating to deal with past abuse experience and pressures associated with heterosexism were cited as reasons for substance abuse. McDonald (2012) also reported that recently out women tended to follow their partner’s substance abuse habits.

In a US community sample of women who had been in a relationship with a woman in the previous five years, Eaton et al. (2008) reported a non-significant trend for lesbian women with a history of IPA to report alcohol misuse as compared to lesbian women without a history of IPA.\(^{184}\) Using focus groups and interviews with fifty-two participants over two phases of data collection to examine the risk for re-assault in FSS relationships, Glass et al. (2008) found relationship violence was associated with a partner or ex-partner who misused alcohol. An earlier study by Schilit et al. (1990) found a statistically significant relationship between alcohol consumption and IPA, but no relationship between drug use and IPA. One of the few US studies that included a sample of lesbian batterers found over half of their sample reported using alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine at the time of an abusive incident (Poorman & Seelau, 2001).\(^{185}\) A three-wave longitudinal study with a female heterosexual sample (n=724) reported the association of drug use with the likelihood of experiencing violence in a new relationship (Testa, et al., 2004).\(^{186}\)

3.5.5 Family of origin violence

A previous abuse history in the family of origin has proved to be a major risk factor for experiencing IPA in adult life (Whitfield, et al., 2003). Like heterosexual women, studies have found that lesbians with a previous abuse history are at risk of experiencing IPA in their adult lives (Fortunata & Kohn, 2003; Lie et al., 1991; Lockhart et al., 1994; Schilit, et

\(^{184}\) Eaton’s sampled 226 women at a gay Pride festival. The sample was not analysed by sexual orientation

\(^{185}\) The sample included 15 lesbian batterers who had voluntarily enrolled in a therapy group for lesbians who abused their partners.

\(^{186}\) Respondents consisted of a subsample of 1,014 women who participated in the ‘Women 2000’ study in Buffalo, NV. A three-wave longitudinal study of substance use and victimisation experiences was conducted between May 2000 and April 2002. Data was collated over 12 (Wave 2) and 24-month (Wave 3) periods.
al., 1991). In a sample of 100 lesbians in current relationships (33 batterers and 67 non-batterers), Fortuna and Kohn (2003) reported batterers were 50 per cent more likely than non-batterers to report having been the victim of violence or physical abuse during childhood, and 70 per cent more likely than non-batterers to report sexual abuse during childhood. Lie et al. (1991) reported that roughly every second respondent in their US sample of 174 lesbians (55.7%) had both observed and experienced aggression in her family of origin.187

Some clinical studies have found an association between experiencing violence in the family of origin and becoming an adult batterer (Farley, 1996; Lie et al., 1991). Examining intergeneration abuse patterns, Farley (1996) indicated that 81 per cent of lesbian women in his sample reported that their parent/guardians were abused as children, and 94 per cent of women reported being an abuser in a previous adult relationship.

Lie et al. (1991) surveyed 174 self-identified lesbian women to examine the frequency with which women in currently aggressive same sex relationships also report aggressive past relationships involving a female and a male partner or member of their family of origin. The research found that participants who witnessed violence in their family of origin, were significantly more likely to be victimised; or to be both victimised by, and aggressive with, a male partner; more likely to be a victim of aggression by a current female partner; to have used aggression in this relationship; or to have been both the target of aggression and the aggressor in this relationship. The researchers found that having witnessed aggression in the family of origin was not significantly associated with aggression in past relationships with a female partner.

The transmission of violence explanation for IPA perpetration and victimisation is contested in the literature, however (Coleman, 1994; Renzetti, 1992). Other researchers have not found statistically significant correlations between abuse in an individual's family of origin and lesbian battering (Coleman, 1994; Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987). Renzetti argues that the concept is flawed because it “exonерates batterers” (1992, p. 72), where victims of childhood abuse believe that they are “pre-programmed” to be violent. In her US

187 Respondents reported one incidence of sexual aggression among family members 6.3% (11), 29.9% (52) witnessed physical aggression, 55.7% (97) witnessed verbal/emotional aggression.
mixed methods study with 100 lesbians, participants who believed that exposure to violence causes violent behaviour used this concept to legitimate and to excuse both their own and their partners’ behaviours. Instead, Renzetti (1992) points to several additional variables that interact with childhood abuse and influence later behavioural outcomes, such as, the age the individual was abused, the duration and severity of abuse, the nature of the relationship between the victim and the abuser, and the adequacy of support available for the victim.

3.5.6 Fusion

The concept of fusion is used in counselling/therapy literature to explain a multitude of problems experienced by couples. ‘Fusion’ is described as the blurring of boundaries between two people, where one experiences a loss of them self as an individual (Pearlman, 1988). Fusion in couples indicates an extreme emotional need, that may, under duress, result in conflict (Bowen, 1966). An examination of the literature reveals a common theme, unique to lesbian women, as the contributory effect of lesbian fusion on violence. Initially characterised as pathological, “fusion” (Krestan & Bepko, 1980) or “merger” (Coleman, 1994) are terms to describe both intimacy and conflict in lesbian relationships. In their influential article, Krestan and Bepko (1980) interpreted fusion as a dysfunctional quality in lesbian relationships, characterised by “intense anxiety over any desire for separateness or autonomy within relationships” (1980, p. 277). According to the authors, in imposing rigid boundaries in the relationship in response to a general lack of validation and support (outside of LG communities), lesbian couples may isolate themselves from the hostility of a heterosexual society by creating an enclosed relationship which inevitably leads to conflict. If one partner is emotionally distant, dresses differently, has separate friends, or holds a different point of view, this is interpreted as a threat to the relationship.

Coleman (1994) argues that the tendency toward merger in lesbian relationships relates to belonging to a minority lesbian community, that is small in size, and is what she described as a “closed system” (p.146). She proposes that this creates the potential for dependency

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188 Other terms to describe the concept of fusion include ‘co-dependence’ (see Smalley, 1987) and ‘enmeshment’ (see Pardie & Herb, 1997).

189 The participants in Krestan and Bepko’s study had presented for therapy and thus, may not be representative of lesbian couples generally.
and the loss of individual identity to be increased. Renzetti (1988) similarly reported lesbian batterers as overly dependent on their partners and resorting to violence in order to stifle a partner’s efforts to be independent. Lockhart, et al. (1994) found that respondents who reported severe levels of physical violence (compared with non-physically abused respondents), perceived that their partners had a greater need for fusion in the relationship. Higher levels of fusion in combination with a partner being identified as controlling has been associated with an increased likelihood of physical aggression (Miller, et al., 2001). A recent meta-analysis examining risk factors for male and female perpetration and victimisation in SS relationships reported the specific risk factor of fusion was the strongest predictor for being perpetrators of IPA for men and women, respectively (Kimmes et al., 2017). In addition, fusion has been found to impact on a lesbian’s ability to end an abusive relationship (Patzel, 2006).

However, others have found closeness and interrelatedness to be a source of pride in lesbian relationships and as an adaptive response to a hostile environment (Mencher, 1997 cited in Gold, 2003). One of the first studies to examine fusion and conflict using a non-clinical sample with eight lesbian couples suggests that fusion does not characterise lesbian relationships generally, but like Krestan and Bepko’s (1980) sample, may arise with couples in psychotherapy (Hill, 1999). Hill (1999) found that while lesbian couples in her sample narrowed their circle of friends on entering relationships, this was however attributed to their own choice rather than as a response to a hostile environment. The study suggests fusion and conflict may emerge where there is resentment about isolation from the family of origin which creates a strong reliance on the relationship. Furthermore, a serious conflict was found to be avoided through communication (Ibid, 1999).

3.5.7 The larger social context: Heterosexism and homophobia

An understanding of LIPA requires an examination of the role that heterosexism plays in shaping personal values and beliefs, as well as societal institutions and resources. Heterosexism privileges the ‘natural’ superiority of traditional gender roles through heterosexual relationships and marriage (Pharr, 1998). Furthermore, heterosexism is a set of institutionalised power relations that overtly favours heterosexuality and conformity to masculine and feminine traditional gender norms (Lindhorst, et al., 2010). In the dominant
context of heterosexism, LGBT persons have had to fight for the legitimacy of their relationships.

LIPA occurs within the larger social context of both heterosexism and homophobia. The literature indicates researchers increasingly pointing to the importance of incorporating both contexts into the analysis of LIPA (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Balsam, 2001; Donovan & Hester, 2014). Weinberg (1972) coined the term “homophobia” to describe the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of homosexuality, which may also culminate in criminal victimisation, commonly referred to as hate crimes (Klinger, 1995). LIPA exists in the larger social context of homophobia which affects women on an individual, societal, and systematic level. Pharr (1986) argues that differences between the heterosexual female and lesbian experience are:

“The battered non-lesbian experiences violence within the context of a misogynist world: the lesbian experiences violence within the context of a world that is not only woman-hating, but is also homophobic” (1986, p. 204)

The term homophobia has evolved from an understanding of it as a clinical ‘phobia’ to a form of oppression of one group by another based on a trait or characteristic. As such, researchers tend to view homophobia as linked with other social dimensions such as sexism, racism, and classism (Balsam, 2001). Bograd (1999) argues that such social dimensions are not simply abstract descriptions, but instead create real-life consequences. While sexuality is understood as a continuum, with a dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality being the formal ends of the spectrum, heterosexuality is hierarchically valued over the other. Acknowledging that these two systems are not mutually exclusive, static or abstract, Bograd asserts that “the dynamics of each may exacerbate and compound the consequences of another” (1999, p. 276).

Other researchers propose that “heterosexism” is a more appropriate term. Herek (1990) defines this term as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatises any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, and community” (p.316). Those researching LIPA tend to opt for the term heterosexism to account for the societal context in which LIPA exists (Hardesty, et al., 2011; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Renzetti argues that the “pernicious effect of heterosexism…pervades everything from the research in this area to the legal responses” (1994, p. 417). Others define
heterosexism as a form of cultural victimisation operating at an individual, institutional, and societal level that oppresses LGB persons by obstructing individual growth and development by instilling shame (Neisen, 1993). Drawing parallels between the effects of physical and sexual violence, Neisen purports that heterosexism is a form of victimisation and abuse for non-heterosexuals.

3.5.8 Domestic violence – the heterosexual ‘public story’

In their national UK study exploring LGBT IPA, Donovan and Hester (2014) operationalised Jamieson’s (1998) concept of ‘pervasive public stories’. Jamieson (1998) proposed that ‘public stories’ are separate from actual lived lives. They can inform life style choices, a social role, or a set of relationships. They can be aspirational, educational, cautionary; public stories name experiences that inform individuals on what is acceptable and unacceptable, or criminal behaviour. Jamieson (1998) argues that pervasive public stories are not ‘truths’, describing them as necessary fictions. In order to be impactful in the public domain, these stories are simplified drawing on the obvious to be recognisable. A social or political agenda for change complete with arguments, ideas, and goals can be recycled into simplified public story for public consumption. Crucially for Jamieson, these public stories are rarely neutral and ‘invariably have an interest in telling a particular version of events’ (Ibid, 1998, p. 10-11), which Jamieson argues has become more powerful with the advent of mass media, making their influence harder to avoid.

Using Jamieson’s concept, Donovan & Hester (2014) argued that a public story has emerged about DV that constructs DV as heterosexual and gendered, and primarily concentrated on the experience of physical violence. They assert that the public story of IPA, generated by feminist activists, emphasises physical abuse, and “locates the phenomenon inside heterosexual relationships within a gendered victim/perpetrator dynamic (the stronger/bigger man controlling the weaker/smaller woman)” (Ibid, 2014, p.9). The feminist heterosexual construction of DV has implications for those experiencing lesbian IPA. A strong theme to emerge from the literature was the lack of recognition of behaviour as abusive, especially where non-physical forms of IPA exist.

190 In contrast to Donovan and Hester’s adaptation of the concept, Jamieson originally argued that pervasive public stories typically originate with people in powerful positions in powerful institutions. See Jamieson (1998).
(Bornstein, et al., 2006; Donovan et al., 2014; Irwin, 2008), and where coercive controlling behaviours is obscured (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Donovan et al. (2014) argue that the lower visibility of SSIPA and the pervasiveness of the DV public story means that “the language of DVA is less readily applicable” to LGBT survivors (p.27).

Moreover, studies that examine LIPA from a service provider perspective, identified gendered theory, largely constructed through a heterosexual lens, practiced in DV services and refuges, as limiting staff recognition of lesbian IPA (Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Donovan et al. (2014) found that in cases of SSIPA where the identity of a victim/perpetrator was less straightforward, (e.g., a victim had fought back); practitioners had difficulty recognising the victim. The author’s attribute this difficulty to their reliance on the public story of IPA which prevents recognition of IPA in relationships that do not fit that story.

Having reviewed the empirical literature concerning LIPA, the next chapter will focus on the help-seeking strategies non-heterosexual women engage with in response to IPA, and further identify the known barriers for this population to disclosure, and to seeking formal supports.

3.6 Help-seeking strategies & Barriers to service provision

3.6.1 Informal supports

A review of the empirical literature suggests that, similar to what is found among heterosexual female victims (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014), LGB victims are more likely to disclose IPA to informal support (e.g. friends and family) than formal support options (e.g. DV, police or healthcare services) (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Donovan & Hester, 2011; Irwin, 2008; Renzetti, 1989; Turell, 1999). An empirical review of nineteen quantitative studies examining IPA in lesbian and gay (LG) relationships (Burke & Follingstad, 1999), found the average percentage of lesbians who sought support from any source was approximately 60 per cent increasing to 80 per cent when informal sources were included.

Among lesbian victims who seek help, there is wide consensus that friends are generally rated as more helpful than formal supports (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Donovan, et al., 2014; Irwin, 2008; Renzetti, 1989; Turell, 1999). However, victims report the reactions
from informal supports (e.g., friends and family) as varied. Some studies report informal support as helpful in terms of offering practical and emotional support, including advice on how to leave an abusive relationship, and support with access to medical attention (Barnes, 2009; Irwin, 2008). Other studies found a lack of support from informal sources (Patzel, 2006; Walters, 2011), or minimal support where friends and family minimised the abuse and rationalised the behaviour of abusive partners (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Lobel, 1986; Merlis & Linville, 2006). Additional unhelpful informal reactions include being complicit in maintaining silence around the abuse (Hardesty, et al., 2011), siding with the abusive partner (Turell & Herrmann, 2008), divided loyalties among shared friends (Duke & Davidson, 2009), being encouraged to leave an abusive relationship but offered no practical assistance to do so (Turell, 1999), and finally, not fully understanding the trauma associated with experiencing IPA (Irwin, 2008).

3.6.2 Formal supports

Several lines of evidence suggest that lesbian victims choose counselling and therapy type services in response to the experience of IPA, rather than the police, DV services, the criminal justice system, or the healthcare services (Bornstein, et al., 2006; Renzetti, 1989, 1992; Scherzer, 1998; Turell, 1999). Renzetti (1989) found that lesbian victims cited seeking support from friends most often, but the majority (58%) reported counselling support as most helpful. Studies also report negative experiences with counselling and couple counselling support that includes, failing to recognise abusive tactics, minimising violence, and making survivors feel responsible for the abuse (Bornstein, et al., 2006). In focus groups with 70 feminist counsellors, Ristock (2001) found that counsellors relied on heterosexual gender-based frameworks to understand LIPA which she argues impedes both their understanding of and an effective response to, LIPA. However, it has been demonstrated that services are adjusting their DV practice in response to LIPA. For example, running support groups for lesbian victims, creating services for lesbian batterers, and conducting couple assessments, to determine who is abusing whom in the absence of a gender marker (Goddard & Hardy, 1999; Istar, 1996).

Turell (1999) is critical of the LGBT trend for counselling support because she suggests they understand IPA as a personal problem to be fixed rather than identifying the societal and institutional definitions of IPA. Turell argues that by not accessing legal, medical,
police, and shelter support, this permits the problem to continue in secret on a community basis. Furthermore, she claims a propensity for counselling support has the potential to perpetuate self-blame and fails to hold the partner responsible or accountable. However, regarding female perpetrators, a recent systematic review exploring the effectiveness of treatment options for this population, found that in terms of treatment delivery, women seemed to benefit more than men from therapist empathy (Laskey, 2016).191

Among lesbian victims who sought formal support for IPA, Turell (1999) reported that 75 per cent of the 265 lesbian, bisexual, and gay women in her sample, preferred help from another woman. Furthermore, 68 per cent of lesbians and 67 per cent of bisexual women reported a preference for help from those with the same sexual orientation. Reasons for not seeking formal support reported by lesbian victims are reported to include a lack of civil protections (e.g. protective orders and access to treatment services) (Elliot, 1996); a lack of services tailored to lesbian victims (St Pierre & Senn, 2010); fears related to children (Hardesty et al., 2011); distrust in the police (Donovan & Hester, 2011); protecting their partner from criminal proceedings (Bornstein et al., 2006); not being out about sexual orientation (Irwin, 2008; St Pierre & Senn, 2010); shame related to IPA (Walters, 2011); self-defence mistaken for IPA (Giorgio, 2002); perception of a homophobic, unsympathetic response (Renzetti, 1989); fear of adding to community stigma (Irwin, 2008); fear that violence will not be taken seriously (Turell & Herrmann, 2008); silence from the LGBT community (Merlis & Linville, 2006); the perception the abuse must be physical to be believed (Wolf, et al., 2003); where the victim has a larger physical stature (Ristock, 2002);192 and non-recognition of behaviour as abusive (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Irwin, 2008; Turell, 1999).

Among lesbian victims who sought formal support, victims reported unhelpful and harmful responses such as, service providers lack of awareness of LIPA (Bornstein et al., 2006); providers not tailoring services for lesbian victims (Bornstein et al., 2006; Irwin, 2008; St Pierre & Senn, 2010); assumed heterosexuality (Turell & Herrmann, 2008); homophobia of staff members (Renzetti, 1996); using heterosexist language in intake or assessment

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191 Laskey (2016) reviewed 8 articles in relation effectiveness of treatment programmes for female perpetrators of IPV and 9 articles reviewed characteristics associated with the population. The review further highlighted the lack of research around characteristics and treatment of female perpetrators of IPA.

materials (St Pierre & Senn, 2010), or heterosexist promotional literature and advertisements (Donovan et al., 2014); the misidentification of the victim as batterer and wrongful arrest (Wolf, et al., 2003), or dual arrest (West, 1998). However, when services were tailored to lesbian victims they were perceived as helpful (Irwin, 2008; St Pierre & Senn, 2010). Helpful service responses reported include demonstrating an awareness of SSIPA, ‘being queer-specific’ (Bornstein et al., 2006); empowering and life-changing responses (Irwin, 2008); and providing a non-judgemental, non-homophobic, and non-heterosexist response (St Pierre & Senn, 2010). For example, St Pierre and Senn’s (2010) Canadian sample (n=280) with gay, lesbian, and queer respondents reported knowledgeable and resourceful service providers as a helpful response. Service provider’s knowledge about the differences between the same sex and the heterosexual experience of IPA, where they demonstrated an awareness of programmes available for victims of SSIPA and were able to make a referral for their clients, was cited as a helpful service response. Considering the DV services heterosexist ‘public face’ (Donovan et al., 2014), not surprisingly, studies repeatedly demonstrate that such services are the least frequently used by lesbian women (Bornstein et al., 2006; Donovan & Hester, 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Renzetti, 1992).

In addition, research demonstrates that living in a metropolitan area can increase the chances that lesbian survivors may receive a more appropriate response from the police (Walters, 2011). However, studies have also demonstrated that location does not guarantee that the police will take claims seriously or act accordingly (Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). One of the only longitudinal studies examining LIPA conducted in the US “Bible Belt” found that living in a rural setting contributed to challenges with help-seeking that include, a conservative culture, religious fundamentalism, low levels of anonymity, small lesbian communities, and geographical isolation (Wang, 2011).

3.6.3 Barriers to help-seeking

To understand the help-seeking strategies of lesbian women, one must first acknowledge the heterosexist and homophobic context in which help-seeking occurs. Data from several studies suggests that dominant heteronormative assumptions about domestic violence,

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193 The author interviewed one participant three times over a four-year period.
female aggression and violence, and lesbian relationships, shape, produce and limit understandings of LIPA, and further influence policy and practice responses (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2006; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005).

Consequently, a conceptual framework developed by Liang et al. (2005) to understand the processes of seeking help for heterosexual women, has been utilised by researchers exploring help-seeking in same sex couples (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hardesty, et al., 2011; Hardesty, et al., 2008; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Liang and her colleagues identified three stages of seeking help in an IPA context: defining the problem, deciding to seek help, and selecting a source of support. The ways these stages unfold vary by individual, interpersonal, and socio-cultural influences. The authors stress that the three stages are in no way a linear process and that women may revisit the various stages many times. Within this framework, a woman’s social positioning in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, faith, language, and immigrant status shape ideas about gender norms, divorce and/or separation, privacy, and loyalty, and ultimately influence help-seeking.

3.6.4 Barriers to help-seeking for lesbian and bisexual mothers

Hardesty et al. (2011, 2008) interviewed 24 lesbian and bisexual (LB) mothers to explore their help-seeking processes. The study found that individual, institutional, and sociocultural factors can be understood in specific ways related to having a sexual minority status. The authors argue that lesbian women may experience unique stressors in their help-seeking processes, due to living in a heterosexist society where they may have felt stigma. At the individual and interpersonal levels, a lesbian mother’s out status, the degree to which she is open and confident in her sexuality, was found to be a factor in her decision to seek help from informal and formal support options. However, this may or may not include being open about the IPA they are experiencing. As such, the researchers identified three variations of help-seeking, overt, covert, and trying to solve it alone. Those who overtly sought help did not hide their sexuality, the IPA, or the fact that their abuser was a woman. In terms of their individual and interpersonal characteristics, they were fully out as lesbians and felt positive about their sexual identity and described family and friends as supportive of their sexuality and their relationship.
In contrast, covert help-seekers did not disclose the violence in their relationships when seeking help. Although they reported a positive and out lesbian identity and having strong support networks with family and friends, they differed from the overt help-seekers at the individual level. Covert help seeker held stereotypical beliefs that lesbian relationships are not supposed to be violent, or that women are weak if they allow another woman to abuse them. Consequently, covert help-seekers felt stigma that the authors argue, emerged from the intersection of IPA and a lesbian sexual identity (Hardesty et al., 2011). Mothers who tried to ‘solve it alone’ made attempts to end or manage the relationship without disclosing the abuse to anyone or reaching out for support. This group differed from the covert and overt help-seekers, in that, most of this group were ‘closeted’ and ashamed of their sexuality, thus, having no recognition or support from family and friends.

3.6.5 Individual barriers

Studies show that individual barriers result from the attitudes, concerns, and actions of individuals. Previous work suggests that at the individual level, barriers to accessing services include, internalised homophobia (Merlis & Linville, 2006), where a connection is made between deserving the abuse and sexual orientation (Patzel, 2006); fear of a homophobic response (Balsam, 2001); fear of retaliation from partner (Hardesty et al., 2011); fear and shame around sexuality (Irwin, 2008); non-recognition of IPA (Turell & Herrmann, 2008); isolation from support networks (Irwin, 2006); being young and older in a first same sex relationship (Donovan & Hester, 2014); assumptions about lesbian relationships as egalitarian and women as non-violent (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008), and a reluctance to report violence to the police due to a previous negative history with law enforcement and the legal system (Donovan & Hester, 2011). Lesbians have often resisted discussing the issue of IPA for fear of adding further stigma to this group, where speaking out about violence in relationships is interpreted as ‘airing dirty laundry in public’ (Hart, 1986; Ristock, 1994).

3.6.6 Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers result from policies, training, and resources of service providers (Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). The literature indicates that heteronormative assumptions
about IPA pervade service delivery practice guidelines and service providers perspectives (Irwin, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Institutional barriers identified in previous studies that impact help-seeking include, a lack of civil protection in law where victims of SSIPA report exacerbated discrimination and limits to their legal rights (Elliot, 1996). This includes the omission of SSIPA language in domestic violence statutes and no option to apply for a protective order against a same sex partner (Burke et al., 2002) and a lack of SSIPA training among police officers, medical and mental health professionals (Alexander, 2002). A previously indicated, a lack of awareness and training may result in medical and mental health professionals and the police, assuming an individual is heterosexual (Turell & Herrmann, 2008), using heterosexist language in intake or assessment materials (St Pierre & Senn, 2010), using heterosexist promotional literature and advertisements (Donovan & Hester, 2014). With regard to healthcare providers, studies demonstrate that emergency and primary health care service providers conduct screening for IPA using heterosexist language that alienates lesbian victims (Ristock, 2001). In the case of the police, studies highlighted the misidentification of the victim as batterer and wrongful arrest (Wolf et al., 2003), or dual arrest (West, 1998).

Multiple barriers are associated with DV service provision, that include promoting a heterosexist public image (Donovan et al., 2014); the use of heterosexist language, literature, DV theory, training, and practices, and a lack of awareness, training, and visibility of SSIPA (Helfrich & Simpson, 2006; Merlis & Linville, 2006). Furthermore, because DV shelter support targets females, with LIPA, both victim and perpetrator could be given access to shelter services at the same time (Giorgio, 2002; Stiles-Shields and Carroll, 2015). Moreover, DV service providers identified both their own discomfort with working with lesbian clients and homophobia as prevalent in the shelters, which they stated restricted their ability to reach out to lesbian women (Merlis & Linville, 2006). The LGB community responses includes a reluctance to acknowledge the problem (Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Taylor & Chandler, 1995), and instead relabel the violence as mutual abuse (Merlis & Linville, 2006), in order to avoid perpetuating further community stigma (Hart, 1986).
3.6.7 Systematic barriers

Systematic barriers exist within society, and its prevailing cultural attitudes and its cultural systems (Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Systematic barriers that impede a lesbian’s access to services are derived from the societal context of heterosexism, the ideology that maintains heterosexuality as the dominant form of sexuality (Ristock, 1994). Previous research (Barnes, 2008; Brown, 2008; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001) has identified numerous barriers acting at the systematic level that impact access to services for a lesbian victim or perpetrator. These include social and cultural attitudes toward gender, same sex relationships, and the DV movement’s construction of what constitutes IPA.

Societal constructions of men as aggressive and women as non-violent and nurturing, shape societies response to LIPA and create challenges for lesbian victims seeking support (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). Stereotypical views about gender have created discourses about who can be a victim or perpetrator of IPA (Brown, 2008), and contribute to discourses suggesting lesbian relationships are egalitarian, loving and never violent (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001). Barnes (2008) argues that victim and perpetrator are gendered terms, where being a perpetrator is viewed as masculine behaviour and being a victim is viewed as feminine behaviour. Such gendered assumptions create challenges for women understanding and identifying their partner’s behaviour as abusive. Hassouneh and Glass (2008) highlighted that the belief that women are non-violent contributed to non-recognition of IPA, the inability to name the violence, self-blame, impacting negatively on seeking support from DV services. Moreover, the researchers demonstrated that the influence of gender role stereotyping on LIPA, permits female perpetrators to exploit traditional female roles to avoid arrest and that support networks interpreted the violence as a mere ‘cat fight’, being less serious than male perpetrated violence.

Research suggests that most services are unable to respond adequately to SSIPA because of mainstream heterosexually approaches and assumptions (Ristock, 1994; Russo, 1999). DV theories that guide the response of service agencies, and assumptions of the DV movement regarding what constitutes IPA, have been identified as creating systematic barriers to help-seeking for lesbian women, from both service provider (Merlis & Linville, 2006; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005), and victim perspectives (Donovan & Hester, 2014). For example, Simpson and Helfrich (2005) found that the pervasiveness of heterosexism affects agency
practices and individual bias whereby IPA is understood as not possible between two women, as occurring only between men and women, and that same sex violence is mutual. Furthermore, the ‘public story’ (Donovan & Hester, 2014) of DV as a heterosexual phenomenon further isolates lesbian victims who cannot relate their experience of IPA to the pervasive public story (Donovan et al., 2014).

Overall, societal assumptions about the female gender, and the female capacity for violence, lesbian relationships as egalitarian, and the heterosexist public story of DV, serve to reinforce traditional gender role stereotypes of women as being non-violent, and incapable of violence. This acts to maintain the DV status quo and impacts on a lesbian survivor’s ability to seek an appropriate response from services.

This study engaged with an interpretative phenomenological analysis to analyse the participant’s accounts of their experience of IPA. The next chapter provides a comprehensive description of the research methodological approach, and the analytical framework applied to the current study.
4 CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As previously indicated, there is a dearth of research on non-heterosexual women and LGBT people in general within Ireland and significant gaps in knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the experience of intimate partner abuse, and the impact of this phenomenon on women abused by women. This research set out to explore lesbian women’s experiences of intimate partner abuse from a female partner with the specific aim to:

1. Document participants’ experience of IPA from a female partner;
2. Capture how women made sense of their abusive experience;
3. Illuminate the support services lesbian women access in response to an abusive relationship; and
4. Identify barriers and opportunities for lesbian women accessing and using support services.

This chapter begins by outlining the foundational research paradigm in which the study is set. The rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach and the specific strand of interpretative phenomenological analysis to the study of lesbian intimate partner abuse (LIPA) is discussed. Methodological issues identified by previous researchers that informed the conduct of the current study are described along with the research and sampling strategies adopted for the study. Consistent with an interpretative phenomenological analysis, the methodological description includes, an explanation of the formulation of data collection instruments, a description of the interview process, and the researcher’s interview techniques (Smith, et al., 2009). Furthermore, the sequence of analysis of data is elucidated by providing illustrations of devices constructed over the course of the data analysis phase, such as annotated transcripts, examples of tables of themes, and a schematic representation of themes (Ibid, 2009). The chapter then acknowledges the ethical considerations and the study’s limitations, also, some challenges that arose over the course of the study for the participants are expanded upon with the view to assist future studies examining LIPA. The chapter concludes by including a critical reflexive section which critically analyses the dynamics of the researcher involvement in the research process informed by the existing literature in this area.
4.1 Qualitative Systematic Approach: Phenomenology

4.1.1 Foundational research paradigm

This research is grounded in an interpretive constructionist epistemology. The interpretive constructionist school, argues that ‘the core of understanding is learning what people make of the world around them, how people interpret what they encounter, and how they assign meanings and values to events and objects’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). Interpretive constructionism is a fellow of the naturalist paradigm. In contrast to the positivist epistemology, the naturalist paradigm emphasises the importance of context, of complexity, and of examining situations in which many factors interact. Naturalists do not believe in a single, objective reality that can be observed and measured without bias. Rather, naturalists understand reality as constantly changing, that there are multiple versions of reality, and that reality can only be known indirectly, through the interpretation of people and their lived experiences (Creswell, 1998). The researcher is not absent or neutral from a naturalists account; researchers acknowledge that they have influenced results, they describe their own role in the research, and they accept the subjectivity of what they report.

Phenomenology is often considered central to the interpretive paradigm (Clarke, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Koch, 1995). The rational for engaging with this systematic approach to a qualitative inquiry is discussed in the next section.

4.1.2 A phenomenological approach

This study does not involve, nor is it concerned with, the extensive life experience of a single individual (narrative research), the generation or discovery of theory to explain the occurrence of abuse in lesbian relationships (grounded theory), the immersion of the researcher in the day to day lives of participants (ethnography), or the analysis of multiple participants over time involving multiple sources of information (case study) (Creswell, 1998). Social Constructivism (SC) is not applicable to the current study. SC is not concerned with individual minds and cognitive processes; rather SC turns attention to
shared intersubjectivity in the construction of meaning and knowledge, with an emphasis on social exchange. The focus of SC is not meaning-making activity but on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes (Gergen, 1991).

This study is concerned with describing the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences surrounding intimate partner abuse. Therefore, a phenomenological systematic approach is adopted for the current study.

Some researchers consider the approach as a philosophical discipline and a research method (Geanellos, 1998; LeVasseur, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004), that is fundamentally about understanding (Dukes, 1984). Other researchers claim, ‘it may be more appropriate to understand a phenomenological analysis as “a ‘stance’ or perspective from which to approach the task of qualitative data analysis, rather than as a distinct ‘method’”’ (Larkin, et al., 2006, p. 104). Dukes maintains ‘in some sense, it is not a methodology at all, but a perspective on what constitutes knowledge in the human sciences’ (1984, p.202). According to Eberle (2014, p. 189), the phenomenological approach “has proved seminal for elucidating how sense and meaning are constituted in subjective consciousness”, with researchers employing phenomenological methods of inquiry in a variety of experiences related to intimate partner abuse across different social contexts (Ayyub, 2000; Hamby, 2000; Oliver, 2000).

Phenomenological investigations are aimed at generating awareness and understanding about lifeworld experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). Their value lies in the descriptive, subjective accounts that give the researcher insight into the meaning of one aspect of human existence. The phenomenologist aims to “reveal any subject –matter on its own terms (i.e., not according to the imposition of any preconceived set of assumptions and expectations” (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108). Garko (1999, p. 168) traces the lines of compatibility between a feminist research perspective and existential phenomenology, suggesting that such descriptive methods contribute to a deeper understanding of women’s lives by “[giving] women the opportunity to talk about their experiences in their own voices”.

The classic reference point for phenomenology is the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl is considered the founder of phenomenology and the descriptive approach
An important tenet of the Husserlian approach to science was the belief that the meaning of lived experiences may be unravelled only through one-to-one transactions between the researcher and the objects of research. These transactions must involve attentive listening, interaction and observation to create a representation of reality more sophisticated than previous understandings (Husserl, 1970).

Another central tenet of Husserl’s phenomenology was that human beings are free agents responsible for influencing their environments. The converse, however, that the environment influences lived experiences and individual freedom was a peripheral concept to Husserl’s teaching (Deutscher, 2001). It is at this point that Heidegger (1889-1976), a student of Husserl’s, takes phenomenology a step further with his concept of Dasein (the human way of being in the world). Heidegger believed that humans are hermeneutic (interpretive) beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives (Draucker, 1999). Herein lays a pivotal difference between descriptive (Husserl) and hermeneutic (Heidegger) phenomenology. For Husserl, the context was of peripheral importance; for Heidegger, the context was a central concern. Heideggerian phenomenology is based on the perspective that the understanding of individuals cannot occur in isolation to their culture, social context, or historical period in which they live (Draucker, 1999; Geanellos, 1998). Consequently, the qualitative approach in this study is informed by Heidegger’s phenomenology, and his concern with a contextual position.

The current research is concerned with exploring participants’ personal and lived experiences of abusive relationships with a female partner; how they make sense of the abuse; and how they apply meaning to their experiences in a form that is understandable to them. Smith (2004) suggests that it is these exact characteristics that influence the application of an interpretative phenomenological approach. As with SSIPA, phenomena that are not well understood or researched and that are central to the lived experience of human beings are appropriate for phenomenological research (Carpenter, 1995).

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194 Dasein means ‘there being’ (or ‘being there). See Larkin et al., 2006

195 Husserl’s ‘descriptive’ phenomenology involves the practice of ‘bracketing’ whereby the researcher can set aside prior understanding or preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation via the use of field notes as a reflective diary to track assumptions, observations, and confusions; by seeking critique from experts in the field; and maintaining an ongoing sense of caution about personal bias. The notion of bracketing did not sit well with the researcher. The current research embraced the interpretive strand that emphasises pre-understanding and co-creation by the researcher and the participants as necessary for making interpretations meaningful.
An interpretive phenomenological perspective has been chosen as the framework for this research. This approach to qualitative research is informed by debates and concepts from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the study of experience, especially in terms of things that matter to us. Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation with a focus on the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole e.g. to understand any part you must look at the whole, to understand the whole you must look at the parts. Ideography is concerned with the particular rather than attempting to make claims at a population level. An interpretative phenomenological analysis is committed to understanding how a phenomenon (event, process, or relationship) has been understood from the perspective of an individual in a particular context. It is concerned with how individuals experience, describe, interpret, and understand a phenomenon under investigation (Duffy, 2011), while simultaneously providing an approach that is conducive to flexible designs (Robson, 2011).

The following section examines common methodological challenges identified by previous SSIPA researchers.

4.2 Researching Female SSIPA: Methodological challenges

Beginning with the work of Kerry Lobel (1986), the study of IPA within same sex relationships has a relatively recent history. Since her inaugural paper, multiple methodological challenges have been identified by researchers examining SSIPA which also detect the concomitant challenges associated with researching sexual minorities (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; McManus, 2003). The research strategy outlined in the next section was prepared with due regard to the following methodological and ethical considerations.

Previous researchers have identified several methodological limitations with studies that examine SSIPA. Common methodological limitations identified across studies included 1) the lack of a standard definition of the phenomenon; 2) a focus on child abuse and hate
crime to the exclusion of IPA; 196 3) not accounting for the inclusion of partners in the same relationship in study samples; 4) a failure to examine violence across different stages of life; 5) failing to account for social desirability; 6) not describing the inclusion criteria, 7) an over reliance on lesbian samples; 8) the underreporting of violence and abuse, and most challenging; 9) and the use of unrepresentative samples (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Balsam et al., 2005; Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Murray & Mobley, 2009). Each of these challenges is now discussed in further detail as far as they apply to the present study.

4.2.1 Definitional issues

The lack of a standard definition of the phenomenon has been attributed to limiting the accuracy of reported rates of violent or abusive behaviours within same sex intimate relationships (Burke & Follingstad, 1999).197 Definitional issues hinder SSIPA research in that, “the results of studies can be misleading because they probably do not assess the same aspects of same-sex domestic violence” (Potocznia, et al., 2003, p. 253). Previous researchers have failed to distinguish between the various forms of abuse (such as emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, and economic) by offering specific definitions and examples of specific behaviours. For example, the first systematic review of IPA in self-identified lesbians found most studies (57.14%) used their own definitions, or a checklist of abusive behaviours based on standardised measures, lists developed by other authors, lists from battered women’s shelters, or a community survey to access the needs of lesbian and gay people, or researchers focused on a specific type of violence. The most frequently used scale was the Conflict Tactics Scale (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015).198 Such practices limit the accuracy and interpretation of the research whereby findings cannot be compared across studies (Burke & Follingstad, 1999).

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196 Two recent large-scale national studies in Ireland examining aspects of LGBT lives (Higgins et. al, 2016 and Mayock et. al, 2009) found evidence for physical and emotional abuse. The research made no attempt to ascertain if the abuse occurred within an intimate relationship.


198 Different versions of the CTS were used (original scale, modified scale, and revised scale) to define IPV in self-identified lesbian relationships.
4.2.2 Obtaining representative samples

Obtaining representative samples has been described as the most significant challenge for researchers studying SSIPA, resulting in samples based on self-identification of sexual orientation, with many researchers recruiting through LGBT publications, events, and agencies (Murray & Mobley, 2009; Owen & Burke, 2004). The ‘hidden’ nature of the population because of stigmatisation of homosexuality and same sex relationships contribute to difficulty with obtaining representative samples (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015). There are no descriptive statistics about the characteristics of this population because the LGBT population has never been appropriately enumerated (Blair, 1999). Consequently, researchers in the field have largely relied on small convenience samples to explore the issue of SSIPA, meaning that research findings are impossible to generalise beyond the study’s participants, and difficult to replicate studies (Alexander, 2002; Balsam et al., 2005; Walters., 2011). Furthermore, published research on lesbians who have experienced IPA has been criticised for comprising of all white, middle class, educated samples who are open about their sexual orientation and engaged with LGBT networks (Donovan et al., 2014; Leventhal & Lundy, 1999).

4.2.3 Underreporting of violence & abuse

Statistics regarding same sex IPA may not be comprehensive. Like the heterosexual experience (Watson & Parsons, 2005), it is expected that violence in same sex relationships remains under-reported as victims of same sex IPA may be reluctant to seek help (Alexander, 2002; Donovan & Hester, 2011). Previous work has established a number of reasons why lesbian women are not reporting the experience of IPA, such as, community silence around IPA because of fear of perpetuating further community stigma, fear of a homophobic response, a lack of trust in formal support services, and a perception they will not be believed or their claims taken seriously (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Elliot, 1996; McClennen, 2005).

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199 In Ireland, Census data does not include information on sexual orientation.
200 Only 29% of women who had experienced severe abuse had reported it to An Garda Síochána.
201 This point relates to the historical criminalisation of same sex sexual behaviour, and sexual minorities being regulated and controlled by legislation. See Donovan and Hester (2011).
Violence and abuse in lesbian relationships may not be coming to the attention of formal support services because women in abusive same sex relationships are not recognising the abuse as such. Previous research in Ireland and the UK has established that the dominant approach to understanding IPA which is based on a heterosexual model, impacts on a lesbian victims ability to recognise their experience as IPA and not reporting to the police or other formal supports (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Miner, 2013).

4.2.4  Researching sensitive topics and vulnerable populations

With sensitive research topics, researchers need to be constantly aware of participants’ well-being during the research process (Dickinson-Swift, et al., 2008; Liamputtong, 2007). IPA is a sensitive topic primarily because of the potential threat it poses to the women who agree to share their experiences with the researcher, in that, the topic has the potential to arouse emotional responses (Cowles, 1988) and to evoke emotional distress with some participants (Dickinson-Swift et al., 2008).

In previous studies of SSIPA, the research process offered to study participants, their first opportunity to speak about the abuse and define it, which resulted in recognition of relationships as abusive, and the first steps on the road to recovery (Barnes, 2011; Donovan, et al., 2014; Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1988; Ristock, 2003; Taylor & Chandler, 1995). For example, Taylor and Chandler’s seminal study, the first to explore lesbian intimate partner abusive behaviours in the UK, discussed the importance of naming the abuse: ‘Developing a vocabulary that defines and describes the experience of abuse at the hands of another woman is an integral part of our recovery process’ (1995, p.12).

Research demonstrates that while participants become upset during an interview, they also report that most women still actively choose to proceed, after being given a moment to become calm (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). Several lines of evidence suggest that women who chose to participate in studies examining IPA and sexual violence, cite wanting to help others, to help themselves, putting an end to their silence, participation as part of a healing process, and to support research on rape/sexual assault as reasons for engaging with the study (Campbell & Adams, 2009; Girshick, 2002; Ristock, 2002).

202 Both authors describe themselves as survivors of abusive lesbian relationships.
203 Women in the current study suggested similar reasons for their participation.
The methodological challenges outlined are problematic. An incomplete statistical assessment of SSIPA may impact upon policy and practice decisions to address this issue and how extensive the service response should be (Poorman et al, 2003; Renzetti, 1996).

Having drawn attention to the common methodological challenges identified by previous SSIPA researchers, this chapter now moves on to describe the research strategy adopted by the current study.

4.3 Research Strategy

4.3.1 Service Providers Forum

Previous research examining SSIPA has acknowledged that including service providers in the research process assists with maximising the sample, and with obtaining expert insider knowledge in the construction of data collection instruments (Bornstein, et al., 2006). To begin the fieldwork phase, a Service Providers’ Forum to promote the study was organised with eight key stakeholders from the LGBT community organisations, the Domestic and Sexual Violence support services, and from counselling and therapy type professional services. The Forum was used as a platform to network with key stakeholders, to obtain expert opinion on interview questions, and to procure feedback on a research promotional poster designed for the study. In addition, permission was sought and granted from stakeholders to promote the study’s poster via staff emails and advertising the poster within their workspaces.

4.3.2 Qualitative in-depth interviews

To the researcher’s knowledge, in Ireland, no published research has specifically investigated the experience of intimate partner abuse for non-heterosexual women. This absence of previous knowledge suggested that an exploratory approach would be best suited to establish what the experience of IPA is like for this population.

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204 See Appendix 3 – Service Providers Forum invite.
205 See Appendix 4 – Research promotional poster.
206 Susan Miner’s (2003) unpublished doctoral thesis is the only research in Ireland to exclusively examine lesbian IPA. Miner’s study is predominantly quantitative.
4.3.3 Data collection

Research on a sensitive topic that truly examines the experiences of people is more likely to be undertaken by qualitative methodologies (Liamputpong, 2007). A primary concern of the current research is to give voice to women who have experienced intimate partner abuse from a female partner. Therefore, the core research method to be employed is the in-depth, semi-structured interview. In-depth interviews have the potential to yield rich, detailed information pertaining to an experience (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Evidence-based Irish research on female same sex IPA could be described as embryonic. Qualitative research methods are particularly well-suited to investigate voices and perspectives of unstudied groups (Schutt, 2012). As previous SSIPA researchers found, qualitative interviews enabled the participants to speak using their own terms of reference and to explore the contexts, complexities, and trajectories of their experiences (Barnes, 2013).

4.3.4 Designing the interview schedule

Participants were asked to complete a brief demographic survey at the end of each interview. Personal Information’ incorporated questions to decipher if participants were currently in a same sex relationship and if this was their first same sex relationship. Ristock’s (2002) interviews with a lesbian sample indicate that first same sex relationships may provide a heightened risk for IPA. Individuals in same sex relationship may enter these relationships later in life and sometimes after having heterosexual relationships. Thus, questions are needed to ask both about the age of respondents and when someone entered a same sex relationship, and crucially, questions had to establish the gender of the perpetrator and if the abuse happened in a same sex relationship.

4.3.5 Establishing the gender of the perpetrator

Asking questions to identify the gender of the perpetrator and the sexuality of the victim is a crucial factor to take into account when determining ‘prevalence’ of IPA (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2011). This is an area where

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207 The dearth of knowledge surrounding SSIPA is described by the author as embryonic following a comprehensive review of the Irish literature examining female SSIPA.
208 See Appendix 5 – Demographic survey data.
national crime surveys attempting to measure IPA have failed previously.\textsuperscript{209} Waldner-Haugrud et al. (1997) argue the fact that lesbian women may have had relationships with men, it is necessary to exclude their heterosexual experiences when measuring lesbian IPA. Although the current study makes no attempt to generalise findings as with prevalence data, the researcher incorporated questions to confirm the gender and sexuality of the participant’s abusive partners. Through these questions, it was established that participants in the study had experienced previous abusive relationships with heterosexual male and heterosexual female partners. This allowed the data to be analysed separately and according to the gender of the partner, a recommendation made by Burke and Follingstad (1999) in the first review of the empirical literature examining gay and lesbian IPA.

4.3.6 Inclusion/ exclusion criteria

Not describing the exclusion criteria for study participation has been noted as a methodological limitation when researching same sex IPA (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Murray & Mobley, 2009). A minimum requirement for inclusion in the sample was the recognition that participants self-identified as a lesbian woman. The criterion of lesbian self-identification formed the basis for defining the target ‘lesbian community’ of the study.\textsuperscript{210} No other shared characteristics of members of the sample are implied or assumed by the term community. Other criteria for exclusion included participants living outside the Republic of Ireland, those currently engaged in an abusive relationship, and those recently removed from abusive relationships.\textsuperscript{211}

4.3.7 Questions related to children

As previously mentioned, Hardesty et al. (2011) argue that an additional sampling limitation in SSIPA research is that it overlooks the fact that women in same sex

\textsuperscript{209} Janice Ristock (2011) drew attention to a serious omission with the data from the Statistics Canada research on violence and victimisation. The report indicated that IPA was more widespread in same sex (15 per cent) relationships than in heterosexual (7 per cent). However, questions had not been asked whether the abuse occurred in a same sex relationship. Similar issues have been identified with the main prevalence data on DV in the UK derived from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) – see Donovan and Hester (2014).

\textsuperscript{210} Self-identified lesbians are understood to be women who classify themselves as lesbian or gay women (through self-report data; typically described using distinct categories such as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or through sexual orientation measures).

\textsuperscript{211} Women had to be 6 months removed from an abusive relationship to qualify for an interview.
relationships may also be mothers. In heterosexual relationships, the existence of children has been proven to be important across many different contexts with respect to IPA (Hester & Pearson, 1998; Holt, et al., 2008). Therefore, participants in this study were asked questions related to their parenting status, specifically, their relationship to children in the household, and if they were the biological parent. Studies demonstrate that where children are present in a same sex lesbian relationship, this can contribute to those who are abused remaining in the relationship, and for longer periods of time (Hardesty et al., 2008; Richman, 2002). Research also highlights that where the abused female is not the biological mother, those women remained to protect the children from the aggressive partner and to remain close to the child in the absence of legal guardianship rights (Richman, 2002).

Legal standing in relation to children has also been found to influence help-seeking (Hardesty et al., 2011). Susan Turrell (2000) found that women in her sample reported higher frequencies than men for the use of children by an abusive partner to control.

Moreover, in Ireland and internationally, there is a paucity of research about children living within same sex headed households where the adults are experiencing IPA (McClenen, 2005).

4.3.8 Distinguishing between the abused and the abuser

The methodology for this present study needed to be flexible to distinguish between behaviours used to intentionally physically harm and behaviours used in self-defence. Previous research has established that women who were abused in one relationship, go on to be the abuser in their next relationship, that victim and perpetrator roles are not distinct, and that women report being both victim and perpetrator (Donovan et al., 2014; Irwin, 2008; Ristock, 2003). Thus, participants were asked questions in relation to their experience of abuse as well as questions about their own behaviours. The current study asked questions related to the motive, context, and the impact of abusive behaviours. To establish who was perpetrating in the relationships, questions were asked about the frequency of

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212 Richman’s study revealed evidence of female aggressors threatening to ‘out’ their partners to the father of the children from previous heterosexual relationships. This results in a fear of having children removed by social services should the matter be referred to the court system, and therefore, abused women remained for longer in the abusive relationship.

213 The sample (n=499) consisted of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender participants from south-east Texas.
abusive experiences and how an abusive episode would arise. Participants who disclosed that they fought back during their relationships were asked questions about their motivations for fighting back and how they felt in the aftermath of their response.

Researchers suggest that understanding the motives behind a woman’s use of physical aggression is a critical factor in understanding abuse dynamics in lesbian relationships (Marrujo & Kreger, 1996; Renzetti, 1992). Goddard and Hardy (1999) assert that to establish the abuser from the abused in female same sex relationships, an examination of context is critical to an accurate assessment. Researchers have established that social and cultural contexts such as living in a heterosexist society inform the experience of IPA within same sex relationships (Donovan & Hester, 2014). The exploration of the impact of abuse in same sex relationships has been largely absent from SSIPA studies (Barnes, 2013). To address this gap in knowledge, in the current study, participants were asked questions about the impact of abuse during and post-relationship, and the long-term impact of experiencing an abusive relationship.

In keeping with the methodological descriptions found with interpretative phenomenological studies, the next section outlines the development of the study’s promotional research poster as a tool to recruit participants.

4.3.9 Research poster design

When this research was first initiated, the term ‘intimate partner abuse’ was chosen as an appropriate terminology to engage with a non-heterosexual female sample. The definition was the preferred term as, at that time, a large UK national community survey found that LGBT people do not frame the abuse happening in their relationships as 'domestic violence', rather, they associate DV as something that happens in heterosexual relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Prior to the recruitment stage, the researcher was in contact with service providers in the LGBT, domestic violence, sexual violence and those in counselling and therapy type services to generate awareness of the study. Following a conversation with an LGBT
service provider,214 she noted that research LINC conducted with a lesbian sample to establish their health needs found the term intimate partner abuse did “not sit well” with the participants.215 She stated participants preferred the term 'domestic violence'. Taking account of this feedback, a decision was taken to consult with individuals working in the LGBT, counselling and therapy, and the domestic and sexual violence organisations, and those members of the Service Providers Forum, to ensure the correct terminology was applied during the recruitment phase of the research. Contact was made via email. Professionals were asked to give their thoughts on an “appropriate terminology” to accompany a recruitment poster for the study. 216 As the following examples articulate, the consensus was that domestic violence would be the most suitable term to recruit non-heterosexual women:

“Don't see why there should be a different term for homosexual couples”

“No, as I don't see a reason to change the term. The Gay community needs to embrace the idea of domestic to include them”

“It is clear in its definition and is universally understood and puts gay relationships on the same standing as heterosexual relationships”

“It is also the terminology already readily understood by professionals like police, AND it focuses on the unacceptable behaviour, NOT the nature of the relationship”

Consequently, the term domestic violence was utilised during the fieldwork phase and incorporated into the study’s recruitment poster. However, during the interviews, participants identified issues with the terminology for the research. Two participants, who had experienced abusive behaviours from a female partner said that they were uncertain about participating in the study because they were not living with their partners over the course of their relationships. The use of the term domestic violence seen on the poster led the participants to infer that the criteria for participation in the study were based on having experienced an abusive relationship within a domestic context. In addition, participants spoke about the strong association, as they understood it, between domestic violence and

214 LINC is a community development working exclusively with lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, with over 1200 members.
216 See Appendix 4 – Research promotional poster.
heterosexual relationships. The association of domestic violence with heterosexuality influenced some participants understanding of their abusive experience and further, influenced their help-seeking behaviours in response to the abuse. Taking this feedback on board, the decision was taken to return to the original definition of intimate partner abuse.

The next section describes the sampling strategy employed for the current study that includes the study’s inclusion criteria, how the researcher located the sample, the limitations with the recruitment approach, and some challenges encountered during the recruitment phase.

### 4.4 Sampling strategy

#### 4.4.1 Community venues sampling

The most frequently used method for recruiting LGBT individuals is through sources in the LGBT community. Community venues sampling (CVS) refers to methods ranging from samples of convenience, snowball, and purposive sampling within LGBT community organisations (Rothblum, 2007). This approach to sampling has a long history in LGBT research, as researchers used contacts in the community to access a population that was otherwise impossible to locate (Rothblum, 2007). One of the strongest critiques of CVS is that researchers using this approach can only reach individuals who are engaged with the LGBT community. Consequently, individuals who are not ‘out’ in their communities are overlooked.

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was employed to recruit adult women for in-depth interviews from not only LGBT services and organisations, but also from counselling, DV, and SV support services. A convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility (Bryman, 2004), and has been shown to increase opportunities to access hard-to-reach populations (Flanagan & Hancock, 2010). Purposive sampling enables the researcher to identify participants who are likely to provide data that are detailed and relevant to the research question (Oliver, 2006) so that the specific aims of the research are met (Robson, 2011).

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217 This point is discussed in Chapter 7 [The influence of the DV ‘public story’](#).
Due to the highly sensitive nature of the study, a decision was taken that it would be inappropriate to ask participants to suggest others for an interview. IPA is a sensitive topic, primarily because of the potential threat it poses to the women who agree to share their experiences (Cowles, 1988). For this reason, the primary focus during interviews was on the participant and their unique experience of IPA. Participants were not asked if they knew of other women with a similar experience as this would create a distraction and pull the narrative away from their personal experience. Although snowball sampling has proven popular with sensitive research concerning hard-to-reach populations (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), this is not the case in the current study. Like previous Irish research (Miner, 2003), this study found that snowball sampling was not an option. 218 One participant had never disclosed the abuse occurring in her relationship with anyone, apart from the researcher, and most women were not aware of others in the same position.

As previously indicated, attempts were made to access interviewees through contacts established through the Service Providers Forum, that included professionals from LGBT, DV, SV, and counselling support services. However, only one participant was recruited from a DV service using these sampling techniques. 219 As will be shown, recruitment of participants occurred mainly via online resources, such as LGBT social groups members mailing list (four women), LGBT social media platforms (three women), and a Facebook advertisement campaign (1 woman).

4.4.2 Inclusion criteria

The study population belong to a historically marginalised group (Higgins, et al., 2011). In addition to being part of a sexual minority, participants were recruited based on having a previous experience of IPA. There would be a certain degree of vulnerability associated with those experiences. Therefore, the study’s inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to minimise additional harm. Only adult women who were no longer involved in an abusive relationship were recruited for an interview. Like previous same sex IPA research, the criteria for inclusion was based on a woman being at a minimum of six months

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218 Susan Miner’s (2003) unpublished doctoral thesis examining lesbian IPA also found that snowball sampling was not an option during the recruitment phase of the research.

219 One participant contacted the researcher after she saw the promotional poster in a domestic violence refuge.
to one year removed from an abusive relationship (Barnes, 2011; Donovan & Hester, 2014). Women were eligible to participate in the study if they were over 18 years of age, identified as lesbian, bisexual, or queer, and had experience of intimate partner abuse with a female in a previous same sex relationship.

4.4.3 Locating the sample

Recruitment by a trusted service provider has proven to be effective in previous same sex IPA studies in terms of access and the referral of participants (Bornstein et al., 2006; Hardesty, et al., 2011; Irwin, 2008). A multipronged recruitment strategy was used to promote the study and increase the potential to access a hard-to-reach population. In addition to the previous recruitment strategies outlined, a promotional research poster was designed and advertised within LGBT, domestic and sexual violence services, and within office spaces providing counselling and therapy type support options. The poster was also advertised on LGBT social media platforms and within LGBT print/online media. Finally, permission was granted by the main administrator of an online Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) social networking group to email over one-thousand of their members.

An extensive effort was made to contact LGBT organisations throughout Ireland. These support groups assisted with the promotion of the study poster. While no LGBT organisation could directly refer a participant for an interview, the organisations proved very supportive with promoting the study poster on their available media platforms, and within their monthly newsletter. One LGBT group provided a quiet space to conduct an interview. Overall, three women were recruited after seeing the promotional poster on LGBT organisations Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Contact was made with a non-heterosexual women’s social networking club that operates online. The network has over one-thousand members. Permission was obtained to email members of the site, to make members aware of the study and to seek assistance with recruitment. Four women contacted the researcher and were interviewed following this recruitment strategy.
Finally, one participant was recruited to the study via Facebook (FB). During the recruitment phase, a period of eight weeks passed where no contact was made to participate in the study. A decision was taken to bolster the recruitment of participants via a promotional advertisement option within FB. The internet has been found to be a fertile ground for scholars (Gill & Elder, 2012). As the world’s largest social networking site, FB has two major advantages which make it an appealing platform for social science research: 1) its massive international user base presents a large pool of potential participants, and 2) the social nature of FB encourages users to share content which can assist with ‘viral’ participant recruitment (Rife et al., 2016, p. 70). However, conducting research using FB presents challenges related to the degree which the results obtained through this medium can be generalised to the population (Ibid, 2016). Moreover, internet access has been found to be more heavily concentrated among middle and upper-class individuals (Jones & Fox, 2009) and the young (Jansen, 2010). Having said that, Rife et al, (2016) assert that these issues are not unique to research conducted over the internet, and as with the make-up of the current study’s sample, non-representative samples while a consistent feature in social research, is not preoccupied with the parameters of probability sampling techniques.

The FB page to promote the research was created in November 2015 and remained live until June 2016. The promotional page was used a vehicle to promote the research in a variety of ways. For example, a member of the Service Providers Forum, a counsellor, wrote a blog about the study which was uploaded to the FB page. Other strategies to promote participant engagement using FB included: promoting the study’s research poster, two participants provided testimonials covering their experience of engaging with the study, a promotional piece to assist with recruitment written by an LGBT online

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220 At this point, the researcher had completed 2 interviews.
221 See Appendix 6 Illustration of FB promotional page. Also, link to study’s Face book promotional page: https://www.facebook.com/Female-Same-Sex-Domestic-Violence-779502758821269/
222 As of April 2012, 475 Facebook-related articles were published in the social sciences (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012) cited in (Rife et al/, 2016) Retrieved 29th May 2017 from http://psych.wustl.edu/robertwilson/index.html
223 See Appendix 7 History of published posts connected to the Facebook page. See link below: https://www.facebook.com/Female-Same-Sex-Domestic-Violence-779502758821269/publishing_tools/?section=PUBLISHED_POSTS&sort[0]=published_time_descending
224 See Appendix 8 Illustration of a Service Providers blog to promote the study. See link below: http://www.erichkellercounselling.com/news/2015/12/8/same-sex-domestic-violence
Despite all of the above-mentioned promotional strategies to increase participation, this recruitment strategy was not successful. The one participant recruited via FB occurred when the researcher created a FB advertisement, using the study’s promotional poster, which targeted non-heterosexual adult women, living in Ireland. The research engaged with various promotional advertisements to try to recruit younger women to the sample. On two separate occasions, non-heterosexual women between the ages of 18-25 years were targeted via an FB advertisement. This strategy proved unsuccessful. Research demonstrates that violence and abuse is an issue for young dating adults, both heterosexual (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006) and non-heterosexual (Halpern, et al., 2004). Reasons for non-participation of young Irish women in the current study could be explained by studies that demonstrate, young (and older) adults in first time same sex relationships may not recognise their experience as abuse, or due to a lack of relationship experience, may consider the abuse to be a ‘normal’ part of being in a relationship (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2003).

In tandem with an interpretative phenomenological analysis, the following section discusses aspects of the interview processes that include the research techniques both during and post-interview, and data analysis.

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225 See Appendix 9 Illustration of Eile magazines promotional online article. See link below: https://eile.ie/2016/02/20/irish-females-needed-for-same-sex-domestic-violence-study/

226 On June 30th, 2016, the researcher organised a lunchtime seminar to present preliminary findings from the research.
4.5 Interview process, techniques & data analysis

4.5.1 Interview process

The interview data was collected over a seven-month period from December 2015 to June 2016. In total, 9 participants contributed to the in-depth interviews. Participants were interviewed at a time and location convenient to them. Prior to the meeting, they were asked to suggest a location for the interview so that they could choose a setting where they felt comfortable enough to be able to talk about their experience. Before the interview began, participants were asked if they consented to the interview being recorded. They were informed about the nature of the questions they were to be asked such as questions around emotional, physical, financial, and sexual abuse. They were assured of confidentiality and the limitations of same if they disclosed either themselves or a child to be in danger. They were also told that at any point they could stop the interview and the researcher suggested that if a question was asked and they didn’t want to answer, they should raise a hand to indicate a non-response.

4.5.2 Interview techniques

Time was taken to establish some rapport with participants before the formal interview process began. During this period, women disclosed that they felt nervous before an interview and they expressed the opinion that they didn’t know where to start in talking about their experience of abuse. One woman described her attempts to disclose details of her abusive experience as scattered like “throwing paint onto a wall”. Efforts were made to put participants at ease, such as talking through the interview and what to expect, telling participants there was no need to feel nervous, and during the first interview, the researcher disclosed that she too felt nervous. Once both the researcher and the participant were comfortable, the recording of the interview began.

In alignment with the guidelines suggested for conducting interview using an interpretative phenomenological perspective, at the start of each interview, participants were given some guidance on what to expect. They were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions as the researcher was interested in their individual experiences. Participants were advised that the interview was similar to a “one-sided conversation” (Smith et al, 2009, p.64) in which the researcher would say little, but they were assured I was listening
attentively. They were informed that some questions may seem self-evident but that this was necessary to obtain their understandings of their abusive experience. These interview techniques were engaged with to focus solely on the participant’s words and illicit their experiential expertise of an abusive experience.

An interview schedule with a list of questions was used in the first three interviews, whereby the researcher held the schedule and referred to the document when asking questions. For the remaining six interviews, the interview schedule became less visible in the interview process. The reasons for this change of approach by the researcher during interviews were connected to the experiences garnered during the first three interviews of the study. These interviews were intense and emotionally laden. Referring to a schedule seemed inappropriate and distracting while women were visibly upset and disclosing intimate and detailed aspects of their abusive relationships. Before this change in interview technique, the researcher had familiarised herself with the key questions associated with the main areas under investigation. Rather than referring to the schedule, the researcher used a notepad where the key areas were listed in bullet point format thus ensuring that each participant was asked the same set of questions. During the interview process, and following the format of an interpretative phenomenological analysis, notes were taken of keywords and topics participants referred to during interview to act as a reminder for the interviewer and to inform follow up questions. This technique was engaged with when participants were in full flow and the researcher did not want to disrupt their narrative (Smith, et al., 2009).

Throughout each interview, considerable attention was paid to the participant’s well-being. Many women became visibly upset while talking through their experiences. One participant broke down emotionally during the interview as she had not talked about her experience for many years. She explained that engaging with the interview was bringing back memories that she had not thought about in a long time. A decision was taken to stop the interview and let the participant take a break to decide if she wanted to continue. The participant left the room and returned some fifteen minutes later. She explained that she wanted to finish the interview because she wanted to help other women in similar circumstances.

227 See Appendix 10 – Interview schedule.
Sensitivity and care was taken to ensure that the interview did not come to an abrupt ending. After each interview, participants were asked how they felt having contributed to the interview, they were given the opportunity to add something to the discussion that the researcher didn’t cover and that they felt was important. The researcher also discussed what to say if we met in a public place post-interview. At this debriefing stage, participants were asked to fill in a demographic form, they were provided with aftercare information and they were asked if they wished to receive a copy of their transcript (via post/ email).

Further, at the end of interviews, the participants asked the researcher a series of questions about her personal life, and her reasons for conducting the study. They also asked to be kept informed of events associated with the research. On average, the interviews lasted 90 minutes. However, one interview lasted over three hours due to the depth of the experience shared by this participant.

4.5.3 Notes on the transcription of interview data

Transcribing qualitative data is a time-consuming practice and it is understandable when researchers choose to procure others to assist with the completion of this phase of data analysis. However, by removing oneself from the transcription phase, you are removing yourself from a key stage of the research process – familiarity with a participant’s way of being. Meeting a participant for interview typically involves encountering someone for the first time, where there is no familiarity with their ways of expressing themselves, or how they sound when they are comfortable/ uncomfortable.

In the current study, the transcription phase provided another layer of analysis by permitting the researcher to become more familiar with, and aware of, a participant’s way of being. For example, transcription affords familiarity with a participant’s use of language and their terms of expression, tone, hesitancy, nervousness, when they are feeling uncomfortable/ comfortable, and their use of silence. This familiarity helped the researcher to identify sections of the interview that the participants found challenging. This difficulty was not

\[228\] See Appendix 3 – Demographic participant survey.
\[229\] See Appendix 11 – Aftercare supports.
\[230\] Two women requested copies of their interview transcript.
apparent to the researcher during the interviews except in cases where participants became visibly upset. As mentioned previously, we are not familiar with participant’s ways of being prior to a meeting. During the transcription phase, the researcher could hear the anguish and pain reflected in the tone of the participant’s voices even though this anguish was not evident during the interview. The intimate nature of transcription involving only the researcher and the recorded voice of the participant enabled the development of familiarity with an individual’s way of being, a familiarity that is demanding to achieve whilst engaging in the formality of an interview process.

4.5.4 Interview data analysis

Key to an interpretative phenomenological analysis is providing both a descriptive account of how participants make sense of their experiences and an account of the analyst’s interpretation. The analysis is a “joint product of the participant and the analyst” Smith et al., (2009, p. 80). The conduct of analysis involves five distinct phases to bring an interview to its completion. Phase one is where the researcher immerses them self in the data. Transcribed interviews are read and re-read whilst listening to the original recording of the interview. This phase allowed errors in the original transcript to be corrected. Segments of the interview that were deemed inaudible when first transcribed were understood and transcribed by the researcher during this phase.

Phase two involves the initial noting where the researcher begins to draft exploratory comments on the data. There are no rules to the note-taking, the researcher notes anything of interest or memory from the recording of the interview. Familiarity with the transcript begins to grow in this phase, as do awareness of how the participant uses language, talks about, and understands their experience, and what aspects of their experience have been sources of pain, joy or upset to them. The aim at this phase of the analysis is to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of comments and notes on the data that will assist the researcher in the following phase.
There are three processes of exploratory commenting, descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual, each with different focuses that are useful analytical tools to approach data.\textsuperscript{232} Firstly, descriptive comments have a focus on the content of what the participant has said, it is basically the subject of the talk. These types of comments have a clear phenomenological focus and are likely to describe things that matter to the participants, such as key experiences in their lives and the meaning they associate with these experiences. Secondly, linguistic comments explore the participant’s use of language. The researcher notes any changes in tone, fluency (articulate or hesitant), pauses, laughter, tears, silences, and any metaphors used by the participants. Finally, conceptual comments focus on engaging at a more interpretive and conceptual level. Conceptual commenting represents a move away from the claims of the participant toward an overarching understanding of the issues being discussed. As mentioned previously, you are attempting to understand the part by looking at the whole. This type of comment is more difficult for the researcher. You can draw on your own experiences, understandings and perceptions, and/ or professional knowledge to interpret the participant’s data, what (Smith et al 2009, p. 89) describe as “personal reflection to conceptual coding”.

\textit{Phase three} initiates the process of developing emergent themes. The exploratory comments containing the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual data are the focus for this phase of analysis. There is an analytical shift to working with initial exploratory comments rather than the transcript data. Again, the whole of the interview becomes a set of parts for analysis. The main aim of this phase of analysis is to transform the exploratory comments into themes by creating a concise word to describe what was important in the participant’s comments.\textsuperscript{233} It is crucial that the researcher captures what was important for the participants in the telling of their experience and the themes need to reflect both the participant’s words and the researcher’s interpretation. Essentially, themes should capture the participant’s understanding of their experience.

\textit{Phase four} involves a search for connections across themes. The analyst brings together the emergent themes into clusters to group together patterns and connections, ultimately

\textsuperscript{232} See Appendix 12 – Three processes of exploratory commenting. Descriptive (Blue), Linguistic (Red) and Conceptual (Green).
\textsuperscript{233} See Appendix 13 for an example of the development of emergent themes (emergent themes left-hand column).
aiming to respect convergences and divergences, and commonality and individuality (Ibid, 2009). In Phase five, the researcher devises a graphic representation of emergent themes (table of themes). Each theme is annotated with a page and line number, and keywords from the participant’s transcript. Finally, themes identified are utilised to create a superordinate theme from the participant’s data.

Superordinate themes are developed using abstraction or subsumption. Abstraction is where the analyst puts like with like and develops a new name for the cluster of emergent themes. Subsumption follows the same process as an abstraction but the emergent theme itself acquires a superordinate status (Ibid, 2009). In the current study, abstraction was used to develop three superordinate themes, 1) power, context, and impact of an abusive relationship; 2) making sense of an abusive relationship; and, 3) the experience of help-seeking.

This five-stage analysis process was repeated for each of the nine interviews. Each interview was approached on its own terms in keeping with the idiographic focus of an IPA analysis. What the researcher learned from the previous interview had to be ‘parked’ as she engaged in analysis with the next case. This task proved difficult as inevitably one is influenced by what you have already discovered. However, by systematically following the five distinct phases of the analysis process, each case was analysed on its own terms, thus allowing for the emergence of new themes, and the development of existing themes with each case. When the analysis was completed for the nine interviews, the recurrence of themes was measured across cases. Emergent themes (and the subsequent superordinate themes) were classified as recurrent if it was present in at least a third of the sample.

The next section moves on to describe the ethical considerations, obtaining informed consent, and the lengths taken to protect participants over the course of participation in the study.

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234 See Appendix 14 for an example of the process of clustering themes.
235 See Appendix 15 Table of emergent themes.
236 Appendix 16 Developing superordinate themes.
237 See Appendix 17 Schematic representation of the superordinate themes.
238 See Appendix 18 Identifying recurrent themes with theme 2: Making sense of an abusive relationship.
4.6 Ethical considerations, consent & protection of participants

Ethical approval to conduct the study was sought and granted by the Research Ethical Committee (REC) at Trinity College, Dublin. All participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study prior to their participation. When a participant made contact, and expressed an interest in volunteering for an interview, the researcher suggested they take time out to read the study information sheet which was then forwarded via email. Information sheets included the aims of the study, study procedures, potential risks and benefits of participation, mechanisms to maintain confidentiality, details of research dissemination, the freedom to withdraw, and informed consent. Interviewees were provided with a list of aftercare support services post interview.

4.6.1 Protecting confidentiality

To protect confidentiality, audio recordings, the demographic profile survey, and transcripts were given code numbers. Each participant was asked and agreed to sign a consent form prior to the interview. This included consent to be interviewed and recorded. Consent was understood as a process and was negotiated throughout the interview. Before starting the recording, participants were asked again if they agreed. At the start of each interview, participants were informed that the research was confidential; however, should a participant disclose that they themselves or a child is at risk, the researcher would have to discuss this further with the participant.

Care was taken to ensure that no information cited in interviews (e.g. biographical and geographical data) identified the study’s participants. Data was anonymised to remove any identifiers that could potentially connect data to a specific person. For example, information about the number of children and geographical location were changed to protect participant confidentiality. The participant consent forms, demographic profile survey, and their transcripts were coded to identify participants with the following identifier: [01236FL].

239 See Appendix 19 Ethical approval.
240 Participants were informed from the outset that the researcher intends to disseminate the study findings at relevant conferences and workshops, for training purposes and other opportunities that arise that will promote the issue of same sex IPA.
241 See Appendix 20 Study consent form & Appendix 21 Archive consent form.
242 Geographical data was anonymised using the Nuts 3 statistical regions of the Republic of Ireland. There are 8 regions classified by population, units of local government, and the counties and cities of Ireland. An example, Region 1: Border region (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, Sligo).
The codes applied to the data identify participant’s interview number, their age, their gender identity, and sexual orientation.243

4.6.2 Protecting participants

For a plethora of reasons, participants that make up the study constitute an extremely vulnerable group. In terms of the cultural context of being LGBT in Ireland, a recent Irish study on elderly LGBT highlighted that participants had grown up in an environment where they were pathologised, criminalised and faced stigmatisation, prejudice, and exclusion (Higgins, et al., 2011). Due to the silence and shame that surrounds IPA, SSIPA has been described as the “double closet” (Kaschak, 2001). There was considerable risk that potential participants would become distressed during the interview when asked to reflect on difficult periods of their lives. Taking account of this, the researcher, and a counselling professional from the Service Providers Forum designed a safety protocol to ensure that the researcher was equipped to deal with an interviewee that became distressed.244

Following an expression of interest to engage with the study, typically via email, participants were sent an information pack outlining specifically what participation entailed.245 At the initial point of contact, the researcher established firstly, that the potential participant was over 18 years and secondly, that women were no longer involved in an abusive relationship. If women indicated they wanted to proceed after reading the information leaflet, attempts were then made to negotiate a convenient time to meet for the interview.

Ethical tension and obligations are increased within studies exploring sensitive topics with vulnerable populations who may have experienced discrimination (Higgins, et al., 2011). Engaging in an interview process has the potential to invade a person’s psyche and may involve recalling painful emotional experiences (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). Survivors who have come to terms with their experiences and moved on from abusive relationships are asked to potentially reopen old wounds. Those who are still suffering emotional trauma may experience heightened anxiety and misery by speaking in detail about rape for example

243 Gender identity codes include ‘F’ for female, sexual orientation codes include ‘L’ for lesbian, ‘B’ for bisexual and ‘Q’ for queer.
244 See Appendix 22 Study’s safety protocol. The counselling professional was knowledgeable about SSIPA and his service contact details were included on the aftercare support material.
245 See Appendix 23 – Study information document.
(Russell, 1990). The researcher was therefore very cognisant of the significant personal effort that participants were making by agreeing to be interviewed. In response to this effort, a great deal of care was demonstrated to show respect and appreciation for the participants for telling their stories and giving up their time. The researcher listened without judgement and displayed sensitivity to the participant’s when they became anxious and upset.

At the start of each interview, participants were informed that they were in control of the interview and it was up to them how much they wanted to share, and for how long the interview should last. During the interviews, participants were provided with signposts where the researcher made them aware of questions related to sexual violence, and participants were afforded the choice to answer such questions. When a participant became upset, the interview was stopped, and time was allowed for the person to decide if they wished to continue (they did in all cases). A helpful intervention for participants who became upset was to be assured that they were under no obligation to continue. All participants were contacted the following day by telephone to talk through their experience with the interview process. The researcher also acknowledged some of the challenges associated with their participation and expressed her gratitude for their involvement.

The following section looks at some of the limitations and challenges that arose over the course of the study, such as, the limitation with the recruitment strategy, and some of the challenges that participants encountered due to their involvement with the study.

### 4.7 Limitations and challenges

There are problems inherent in this style of recruitment strategy. To begin, participants’ self-defined whether they had experienced IPA; also, participants provided accounts of a previous partner’s abusive behaviours. The study made no attempt to interview partners described as abusive by interviewees.

#### 4.7.1 Recruitment limitations

There are problems inherent with this style of recruitment. Limitations for this study include extensive variations in the length of time for having been out of the abusive
relationship prior to the time of interview that ranged from 2 to 20 years. As will be further explained, for some participants, this variation in the time out of the abusive relationship affected their memory of events related to an abusive experience. The most serious weakness is the limitations on the generalisability of findings. As part of the sampling strategy, LGBT agencies and services were targeted to assist with recruitment. Consequently, participants may differ in significant ways from individuals who do not participate, in that they may be better integrated into an LGBT community. This would imply the sample may be more “out” about their sexual orientation than non-participants (Meyer & Wilson, 2009). Having said that, the recruitment strategy employed can be viewed as a response to overcoming the problems associated with sampling concealed populations (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). The findings should be interpreted cautiously, as they are not indicative of the lesbian population existing in Ireland.

4.7.2 Challenges encountered during recruitment

Following extensive consultation with service providers (SPs) during the recruitment phase, it became apparent that the original research design, involving a gatekeeper function, could prove restrictive in accessing this hidden population.246 There were two distinct aspects to this flaw in the research design that comprised both a SP perspective and a participant perspective. Firstly, when asked about assisting the researcher with the recruitment of participants, SPs strongly advised that they could not provide direct access to a woman with a previous experience of IPA from a female partner. In the context of client confidentiality policies, this response was particularly pertinent from supports that provide LGBT helpline services, and counselling services that include one-to-one and/or group peer support. However, similar to previous SSIPA findings, service providers expressed a willingness to assist with the study (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008) and advised that they could advertise the study poster within their organisations and centres, on their websites, monthly newsletter, and social media platforms.

Secondly, from a participant perspective, using a gatekeeper function to recruit interviewees removed their anonymity and had the potential to act as a barrier to

246 The original research design included the advertisement of a poster within LGBT, DV, SV, and counselling type services that incorporated the name of the organisation’s manager as a contact point (gatekeeper) for the study.
participation. Specifically, regarding LGBT agencies, potential participants may wish to engage with the research but not necessarily want to expose their experience to members of, a typically small, LGBT community organisation, where members may know their abusive partner. Consequently, an emphasis was placed on promoting the research poster via agencies online formats to access participants. It was hoped that this recruitment pathway could remove the risk of participants feeling exposed in their communities, within contexts of low levels of anonymity (Wang, 2011).

4.7.3 Negative and positive experiences with participation

The conduct of this research created a series of challenges for both the researcher and the participants. To begin with the participants, when drawing interviews to a close, the researcher arranged a follow-up call with participants to ‘check-in’. These phone calls typically took place the following day, (some participants were called a second time a few days later), and the calls lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. The information provided by participants during the phone calls was recorded by the researcher by hand in a journal. In general, feedback was provided concerning their experiences prior to and post interview. For example, women talked about feeling anxiety in the run-up to doing the interview, feelings of panic, feeling they wouldn’t know what to say or how to tell their story. Post interview women spoke about sleepless nights, nightmares, waking in sweats, waking early in the morning, and reflecting on the interview, feeling anger for remaining in abusive relationships, and having flashbacks around their abusive experience. Lesbian victims like heterosexual victims of IPA have been found to exhibit similar symptoms (Hammond, 1988).

Following this feedback detailing their experiences prior to and post interview, the researcher started to incorporate this knowledge into the interview process. At the end of an interview, participants were made aware that other participants had both negative and positive experiences following participation in the study.

Ciara was the only participant in the study to be interviewed twice. She requested a second interview as she explained she had muddled up the experience of IPA in three relationships
During her first interview, she had great difficulty remembering specific dates and time periods connected with her abusive relationships. When speaking on the phone, Ciara expressed the anger she felt post-interview. Following an experience of a sexual assault, she abstained from sexual activity. In the aftermath of the interview, she calculated that she remained this way for approximately six years. Ciara expressed her anger at the impact of her abusive experience that had resulted in a significant period where she abstained from sexual intimacy. Through her participation in the interview, for the first time, she acknowledged the length of time she had abstained from sexual intimacy.

Participants also described having a positive experience post interview. Three to four days after the interview, women described “feeling lighter”, “Like a load had been lifted”. They used words like “re-energised”, “revitalised”, “unsilenced”, and “feeling good”. One participant, Eabha, had never disclosed the abuse to anyone and although she cried intermittently throughout her ninety-minute interview, she expressed the sense of relief she felt during her follow up call that she had the opportunity to discuss her abusive experience at length.

Two participants in the study were in monogamous relationships at the time of interview. They gave accounts of the interview process acting as a catalyst to discuss their previous abusive experiences with their current partners. Both Saoirse and Ciara spoke about their inability to broach their abuse histories with their current partners. While both women acknowledged that their partners were aware of their previous abusive experiences, they suggested that their involvement with the interview had provided an opportunity to talk about the abuse in more detail as partners queried what the interview entailed and what the experience was like for them.

The two quotes below reference emails received by the researcher post interview. As Aoife’s quote demonstrates, engaging with the interview validated her experience of abuse with a female, she explains,

Thank you for your follow up, I appreciate it…I felt a renewed commitment to 'unsilence'. I also felt heard and visible, and for that, a giant thank you (Aoife)

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247 See section – Retrospective accounts and memory loss.
Like previous research findings (Campbell & Adams, 2009; Girshick, 2002), Saoirse maintained her participation with the study was prompted by a desire to help others,

*It [the interview] also gave me a sense of achievement that I am contributing to a very important study where there is very little information out there* (Saoirse)

In one post-interview phone call, Caoimhe expressed the opinion that she had merely ‘skimmed the surface’ on the extent of the sexual violence she experienced. Her analysis of her interview became more apparent to the researcher during the transcription phase. Whilst listening back to the recorded interview, the researcher became more familiar with Caoimhe’s ways of speaking and not speaking – her silences (especially around sexual violence). Grace Giorgio (2002) describes lesbian women’s silence around the violence they experience as a ‘definitional dialogue’\(^\text{248}\) which she argues enables us to decipher the abused from the abuser in the absence of gender as a marker to understand violence. Like the 11 participants in Giorgio’s study, Caoimhe’s definitional dialogue of silence to encapsulate the ongoing sexual violence and rape in her relationship, suggests that dominant definitions of IPA that foreground male perpetrated violence, coinciding with the absence of a narrative to explain female perpetrated sexual violence, acted to prevent her from speaking about her experience.

Additional challenges arose in the context of retrospective accounts of violence and abuse, this is discussed in the next section.

### 4.7.4 Retrospective accounts & memory loss

Other challenges that arose during the fieldwork phase included participants struggling to remember aspects of their abusive experience. Ciara was fifty years old at the time of interview and approximately thirty years old when she encountered her first abusive relationship. She alluded to a history of drug taking and prescription medication which she stated impaired her memory. She grappled with remembering exact dates, i.e. the duration of relationships, and age at the time of the abusive relationship. She described experiencing

\(^{248}\) Definitional dialogues are ongoing negotiations and assessment that each partner internalises and expresses about the relationship and its violence (Giorgio, 2002, p. 1236).
three abusive relationships with females in total. As previously indicated, in the aftermath of her first interview, Ciara contacted the researcher to request a second meeting. At the second interview, she clarified her account of abuse by focusing on one relationship only.

4.7.5 Non-participation – practical and personal reasons

A total of nine women were interviewed face-to-face for the study, including one Skype interview. In total, 16 women contacted the researcher during the recruitment phase. In seven cases, women made contact via email, two participants called the researcher directly on her mobile telephone. For these additional seven non-participants, their reasons for non-participation varied for personal and practical grounds. For example, because of the study’s poster being advertised online, one woman made contact from the UK and two women from Australia. The researcher found it difficult telling these women that they were not eligible to participate in the study. Following their initial contact, the researcher engaged in a brief exchange of emails where the women had the opportunity to relay their abusive experiences.

Others initially stated that they felt able to volunteer for the study but when it came to the meet up for the interview, they never showed up at the meeting place or they stopped all contact with the researcher. In later correspondence, one woman who didn’t show up for interview explained that she feared her partner would find out she had engaged in the study. These latter examples of reasons for non-participation proved to be a great learning curve as the researcher began to fully comprehend the personal difficulty and the challenges associated with disclosing details of an abusive experience.

The following section reflects on the researcher role in the study and will critically analyse the dynamics of that involvement in the research process.

4.7.6 Researcher involvement in the research process – a critical reflection

The conduct of an interpretative phenomenological analysis is concerned with the subjective rather than the objective accounts of individual’s (Flowers, Hart, & Marriott, 1999), with the aim of capturing and exploring the meanings that participant’s assign to

249 The Skype interview was not incorporated into the final analysis because of a fragmented recording due to a poor internet service connection.
their experiences (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Thus, interpretative phenomenological analysis tends to focus on the exploration of participant’s experience, understandings, perceptions, and views, whereby understanding experience is the “bread and butter” of this methodological approach (Ibid, 2005, p. 20). Coupled with the exploration of the participants self-reflection of their ‘lived experience’ is the subjective and reflective process of interpretation in which the researcher enters during the research process. Described as the double hermeneutic (Smith, et al. 2009), the analyst endeavours to make sense of the participant’s interpretation by emphasising and questioning their meaning-making (Vicary, Young, & Hicks, 2017). As will be demonstrated further in this section, interpreting, and making sense of participant’s data creates specific challenges for the analyst when the topic under study is trying to understand the meanings associated with intimate partner abuse.

To address the issue of researcher bias and influence in qualitative research, what Denzin (1994, p. 501) refers to as “the interpretative crisis”, a reflexive approach to the research process is now widely accepted in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008). According to Gilgun (2008) who has worked extensively with both victims and perpetrators of male violence, reflexivity centres around the notion of awareness whereby researchers are being reflexive when they examine and take into consideration the many influences they have on research processes, and how in turn, research processes affect researchers and their participants. Gilgun notes three examples of reflexive processes that include firstly, participant and researcher experience of the research process, secondly, relationships between researchers and participants, and lastly, changes both parties may experience during participation in the research.

This chapter proceeds to examine the reflexive processes set out by Gilgun (2008) from the perspective of the researcher.

*The researcher's experience of the research process*
In the absence of a professional services background working with victims and survivors of intimate partner abuse, the principles of an interpretative phenomenological analysis guided my research with the participants. I opened myself up to each narrative on a case by case basis and reflected upon the personal meanings of their stories. This reflection by the researcher was captured during the analysis phase of data collection where transcripts were annotated creating an audit trail (Vicary et al., 2017) of the researcher's reflections. In retrospect, not having a professional background in either social work or the domestic and sexual violence support services worked to my advantage during the research process. I didn’t approach the interviews with a pre-conceived idea of what a ‘domestic violence’ relationship should look like. At the stage when I was interviewing participants, I had very much immersed myself in the literature around female-to-female intimate partner abuse and I had come to the knowledge that the experience of being in an abusive relationship could affect any person, irrespective of their biological sex or their sexuality. However, the interview questions and the specific themes explored during interviews were developed by the researcher and did influence the types of data that was gathered during the research process.

I developed a deep sense of respect and admiration for the participants as I acknowledged their previous abuse histories and their strength in overcoming multiple adversities and subsequent negative impacts, in some cases, with little or no support from their families. I was amazed by the participants and their willingness to share their experiences of abuse. Not only did they want to share their experiences, they hoped that the telling of their stories would help others in similar circumstances. This latter point has been found to be a motivating factor in disclosures of abuse and sexual violence in previous work with both heterosexual and non-heterosexual women (Campbell & Adams, 2009; Girshick, 2002; Ristock, 2002). When I conveyed what I had learned to both student and professional audiences, I witnessed the impact their stories had. For these mixed audiences, the participant's stories appeared to have contributed to new ways of thinking about ‘domestic violence’, new understandings of what constitutes ‘domestic violence’ and what constitutes sexual violence in terms of who can and cannot perpetuate this form of violence.

One of the main emotional impacts I experienced was around disclosures of sexual violence. I was aware of this aspect of abuse in lesbian relationships from the existing literature, however, this does not prepare you for hearing of such experiences first-hand,
and the severe long-term impacts of this type of abuse on women’s lives. During interviews, some participants provided intimate details of the experience of sexual violence. However, others disclosed their experience of sexual violence, but they found it extremely difficult to articulate precisely how the sexual violence had manifested. Based on the participant’s behaviour during the interviews, the difficulty with disclosing this form of abuse was very evident to the researcher. Consequently, in some cases, I was unable to probe the participant about this specific aspect of their abusive experience. To probe further felt too intrusive, like I was over-stepping a line. Having reflected on this experience, I came to understand that in not probing the participants further about their experiences of sexual violence, I was protecting myself first as such details of this type of abuse were too much for me to hear and absorb. In agreement with Gilgun’s (2008) experiences and her inability to probe a sexually violent male perpetrator, I had not the stomach to ask for these details during the interview process.

The relationship between researcher and participant

Gender is a significant dimension of the reflexive process (Gilgun, 2008). In research concerned with female victims of female perpetrated violence, my position as a lesbian-identified woman assisted in my ability to connect with the participants. Our experience of being non-heterosexual was the starting point of conversation before the formal interviews began. I have a keen interest in Irish LGBT social and cultural history and this interest was shared by the older participants in the study who would have been a part of both the Women’s and the lesbian and gay movements of the early 1980s. This shared interest, connected by our sexualities, contributed to building rapport with participant's both prior and after the formal interviews. Furthermore, my position as a lesbian woman growing up in Ireland during a period when being a non-heterosexual male was a criminal offence, allowed me to empathise with the participants and their experience of concealing a lesbian sexual identity. In this instance, I felt like what feminists describe as a ‘connected knower’ as I used my emotions, cognitions, memories, and personal experiences as a strategy for understanding (Gilgun, 1982).

Changes experienced by the researcher during the research process
Similar to the experience of Gilgun (2008) in her exploration of male perpetrators of violence, the participant’s narratives allowed the researcher to understand that their female partners, who were perpetrating violence against them, had multiple dimensions to who they were. This resulted in the researcher experiencing first anger and then sympathy for their aggressive partners. For example, there was a period during the transcription phase when I felt anger toward the participant’s abusive partners but as the research progressed and my knowledge of the topic expanded, I found myself feeling sympathy for the partners. On reflection, I experienced sympathy because they were unable to love themselves for who they were and because they had grown up in contexts where their sexuality was pathologised and stigmatised. There is also an acute awareness now at the end of four years of study that there are very limited support options available in Ireland for female perpetrators. Any attempts to tackle the issue of female same sex IPA needs to be inclusive of women who are abusive in relationships.

**Conclusion: Chapter four**

This research set out to explore the experience of lesbian IPA (LIPA) for Irish women. Ethical approval to conduct the study was received from the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work & Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin. The research design was exploratory in nature and involved the collection of qualitative data using semi-structured in-depth interviews. A multi-pronged approach to recruitment was engaged with to generate awareness of the study and participation involving both convenience and purposive sampling strategies. The focus of the interviews was on exploring the experience of IPA, as well as help-seeking behaviours in response to IPA. Interviews were analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analytical approach. In total, nine women volunteered and were interviewed for the study.

Having outlined the methodological approach, the thesis now moves on to describe the key findings from the study. Research examining IPA has tended to be over-reliant on quantitative methodological approaches that lack the detailed and contextual information necessary to understand the complexity of the phenomenon (Corbally, et al., 2016). At the present time, little is known about the personal experience of LIPA. This study provides an in-depth insight into the experience of LIPA for nine women. The shame and
embarrassment associated with being a survivor of IPA coupled with being a part of a historically marginalised group create challenges with access to LGBT samples (Owen & Burke, 2004; West, 2002). Regardless of the size of the sample, it is the voices of survivors of lesbian women that are crucial to expanding knowledge of this phenomenon (Giorgio, 2002; Walters, 2011).

The findings of the present study are drawn from the voices of nine survivors of lesbian partner abuse. In recognition of the small sample size, it is not claimed that these accounts are representative of all women who have experienced intimate partner abuse from another female. Notwithstanding this limitation, the study’s findings are in accord with the findings of previous research as will be demonstrated in the following chapters.
CHAPTER FIVE: PARTICIPANT ACCOUNTS OF IPA

This chapter, which charts the beginning of a total of four findings chapters, describes the experience of intimate partner abuse (IPA) for the nine participants in the study. The participants’ accounts provide evidence of the experience of multiple forms and combinations of abusive behaviours. The participants provided accounts of experiencing emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and identity abuse, and abuses that are also found to continue post-separation.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, recent empirical evidence in the UK by Donovan and Hester (2014) suggests that ‘practices of love’ (POL) enacted by victims and abusers form part of the abuse in relationships because they serve to confuse, manipulate, and cement the couple together. The findings from the current thesis concur with the role of POL found in recent UK research, as such, the concept is utilised in the current thesis to describe the complexities of violence and abuse in lesbian relationships, and to further expand knowledge on the dynamics of power in an abusive lesbian relationship.

The chapter proceeds by providing a synopsis of the demographic and relationship profile of the study’s participants. The section that follows considers the concept of practices of love, as enacted by both the participants and their partners. A more detailed account of both the coercive controlling non-violent and the physically violent behaviours experienced by the participants is presented thereafter. The final part of the chapter examines the distinct experience of identity abuse as experienced by participants to show how abusers in female same sex relationships use a person’s lesbian identity and their out status to abuse and control.250

250 Although this research has adopted the framework of Coercive Control to understand abusive behaviours in the participant’s relationships, the chapter will list the abusive behaviours, similar to typologies of an abusive experience. The researcher felt this was necessary due to the paucity of LIPA research in Ireland.
5.1 A profile of the participants

The profiles presented here represent information that the participants volunteered during their interview. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identities. Nine white women took part in the study, ranging in age from 31 – 64 years (average age 49.9 years). Eight participants were Irish, one woman was originally from the UK. Five were living in a rural location, one in a city and the remaining three lived in suburban areas. Most women stated they were employed, one unemployed and another retired. No participant listed any form of disability. In response to being asked if they had ever received a formal mental health diagnosis, one participant respectively listed chronic fatigue, bi-polar disorder, and clinical depression. This study is open to the same criticism as previous IPA research with lesbian samples in that, the sample consisted of white, educated women who were open about their lesbian sexual identity (Miller, et al., 2001). More than half the sample stated they had completed a third level degree, two out of the five completed a postgraduate degree including a master’s and a PhD, and the remaining four completed their leaving certificate. Seven women indicated they were cohabiting with abusive partners during relationships, four of those stated the abuse began before they moved in with partners.

In terms of the participant’s relationship status at the time of interview, four identified as single and not dating, two stated they were in a monogamous relationship, and three indicated they were single and dating. Two participants were biological parents, one woman had a dependent child. Participant’s reported ‘coming out’ about their sexual orientation between the ages of 17 – 48 years. At the time of the interview, the nine participants indicated their out status as ‘out to all’. Women stated they experienced a first same sex relationship between the ages 17 – 34 years. For two participants, the abuse was said to have occurred in a first same sex relationship. Four women indicated that they had experienced abuse in more than one same sex relationship. The duration of

251 See Appendix 24 for a comprehensive participant demographic and Appendix 25 ‘relationship profile’.
252 The Leaving Certificate Examinations, which is commonly referred to as the Leaving Cert is the final examination in the Irish secondary school system.
253 Aoife’s had an adult child who was no longer living at home with her.
254 Coming out is the process through which a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person accepts their sexual orientation or gender identity as part of their overall identity. It not only refers to the process of self-acceptance but also to the act of sharing your identity with others. http://www.belongto.org/resource.aspx?contentid=2339 Accessed 12/04/2017.
255 The average age was 25.5 years.
256 The average age was 23.8 years.
relationships ranged from six months to twenty-six years. Eight women identified as lesbian, with one identifying as queer. The participant who identified as queer used the terms lesbian and queer interchangeably in her narrative.

5.2 Practices of love in abusive relationships

As previously mentioned, findings from the current thesis concur with the concept of practices of love (POL) developed by Donovan and Hester (2014). In this study, the participant’s love, commitment, and loyalty to partners ensured they remained in abusive relationships, all the while hoping their partner would change their behaviour. POL enacted by the abusive partner acted to confuse the participant about the abusive behaviour occurring in the relationship as abusers made participants feel at fault and responsible for the abuser’s behaviour. Abusers were reported to use their substance misuse to rationalise their violent behaviour. At the same time, abusers promised to change behaviour, seek help, and end the violence and abuse. They made participants feel sympathy for them, resulting in the participants primarily blaming themselves, or their partner’s substance misuse on the abuse occurring.

Table 1 below highlights the main POLs that were described by the participants as being utilised by the participant and their partner.

Table 1 Practices of love (participant & partner)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices of love (by participant)</th>
<th>Practices of love (by partner)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt committed to partner (4)</td>
<td>Promising abuse won’t happen again (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believed partner would change behaviour (3)</td>
<td>Declaration of love/neediness (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting partner/concealing abuse (3)</td>
<td>Promising to change behaviour (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love for partner (3)</td>
<td>Convincing participant to remain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for partners care (3)</td>
<td>Questioning participants love (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for the relationship (2)</td>
<td>Promising to seek help (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing care &amp; support after violent incident (2)</td>
<td>Seeking help (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing partner would accept her sexuality (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.1 Commitment to, and responsibility for, an abusive relationship

Donovan and Hester’s (2014) research suggests that the victim/survivor in an abusive relationship is positioned in a caring role, and made responsible for the maintenance of the relationship, the abusive partner, and her abusive behaviours. Aoife gave an account of her six-year relationship which started with emotional abuse before she moved in with her partner. Throughout her relationship, she reported experiencing multiple forms of abuse including emotional/psychological, physical, financial, and sexual violence. The quote below highlights her sense of responsibility to try and make her abusive relationship work, as she explains;

*I went to the relationship counsellor because I couldn’t fix it and after, after four years of not being able to fix it I decided it’s time to get somebody else, and after three sessions she didn’t want to continue.*

Niamh described how her three-year partnership began with emotional abuse before she moved in with her partner. Over the duration of her relationship, she experienced both emotional/psychological and physical violence. The quote below highlights the complexity of abusive relationships, in that, they are not experienced as negative all the time. Often, relationships can have ‘happy’ periods where the participant feels a sense of love for their partner, thus adding to a sense of confusion, as Niamh explained:

*Well for a long time I wanted the relationship, I still wanted the relationship to work and you know that when she kind of was in her, what I kind of called, rational headspace and she took responsibility for what she did, you know then she was like the person that I had met you know what I mean in the first place. So, for a long time, I was hoping that you know, that she would get help and get it sorted, and that we could work the thing out.*

The latter end of the previous quote by Niamh illustrates a common thread across the interviews of participant’s sense of hope that their partner would change their behaviour. Again, this was cited as a reason for remaining in the relationship. The following quotes confirm this finding;

*My confidence was so low I stuck it out and kept on hoping that she’d change, kept on thinking that like that’s the last time you know (Saoirse)*

Like the heterosexual female experience of IPA (Patzel, 2006), the participant’s sense of hope that partners would change their behaviour and stop being abusive were bolstered by
the abusive partner making promises that they would change their behaviour, seek professional support, alongside declarations of love and expressions of need or neediness. Similar to Walker’s (1979) cycle of violence perspective to explain heterosexual women’s experience of IPA, participants described periods without violence following a severe physical assault whereby the abusive partner would buy them gifts, take them for meals, and promise holidays abroad.

5.2.2 Gendered understandings of roles in abusive relationships

Donovan and Hester’s (2014) UK research demonstrates that relationship rules set by an abusive partner, reflect gendered understandings of roles in dominant constructions of adult heterosexual love, such as the decision maker (masculinity) and carer (femininity). In the current study, participants spoke of their role in the relationship as being one of a carer with responsibility for their partner, and for the relationship. In some cases, women felt as though they embodied a mothering role within the relationship, which clearly illustrates the level of responsibility they felt they had for both their partner and the relationship in general. These quotes from Saoirse and Clodagh explain:

*I felt that what myself and [partner] had was just, it was ridiculous, it was like living with a child in some ways do you know, kind of constantly looking after her in certain ways* (Saoirse).

*It was like me looking after a child, having a teenager in the house you know* (Clodagh).

Donovan and Hester’s (2014) research indicates that ‘relationship rules’, as set by the abusive partner, dictates who does what in the household if the couple is cohabiting. In the current study, participants were asked if they thought that their relationships were equal. They identified several inequalities. Seven out of the nine participants were cohabiting with abusive partners, among them, four women spoke of an unequal contribution to household chores, as these quotes illuminate:

*She never done anything in the house, I did everything for her you know. I done her washing, I changed the bed, I done the cleaning* (Clodagh).

See Chapter 6 discussing ‘Relationship dynamics’ for a review of the inequalities in the relationship identified by the participants.
That [cleaning] was all down to me and if I didn’t do it right that was an argument (Caoimhe).

5.2.3 Playing by and negotiating the ‘relationship rules’

According to Donovan and Hester (2014), employing the concept of ‘relationship rules’ as a mechanism to understand power in abusive relationships, has three advantages. Firstly, the concept of relationship rules implies that rules can be imposed by one partner on the other, where rules are not mutually agreed upon but are deliberately enforced. Secondly, using the concept of rules implies that should they be broken, and that there is likely to be punishment. Finally, a victim/survivor’s knowledge of the consequences of breaking relationship rules acts to prevent the rules from being broken. In the current study, there was evidence of participants having knowledge of the rules that governed their relationships, as the quote from Caoimhe explains:

She just didn’t want me doing anything without her permission that was it you know...and then I kind of, I just found a way around things, I would start asking her opinion on stuff you know because I found that was easier if I asked, if I wanted to read a book I’d say, “Oh have you any suggestions?” then she would suggest something to me and then she would be all excited because I was reading what she wanted me to read...things kind of levelled out then a bit when I kind of realised that I can kind of keep her sweet, you know if I ask her things and that’s what I did. I just completely forgot who I was.

The last quote from Caoimhe demonstrates how she negotiated the rules in her relationship. Caoimhe provided additional examples of asking permission to do things that included what and how to clean and cook. By asking her partner’s permission, Caoimhe’s experience of abuse “levelled out”. In this example, she was playing by the relationship rules set by the abusive partner. Complying with the rules and keeping her partner “sweet”, translated into a reduction in the level of physical violence she was experiencing during her three-year relationship. However, as Caoimhe’s quote highlights, playing by relationship rules had the undesirable outcome of her losing her sense of self.

In this next example, Caoimhe’s breaking of the relationship rules in her relationship, lead to her managing to escape her violent relationship. Caoimhe described a situation toward the latter end of her three-year abusive relationship where her partner’s mental health had deteriorated, and she recalled that this coincided with increased frequency and severity of physical violence. She explained that she was her partner’s only source of support as her
partner’s family did not accept her lesbian sexual identity. She interpreted the breaking of her responsibility of care for her abusive partner, in effect, the breaking of the relationship rules, as enabling her to leave the abusive relationship. Although she had made the decision to leave her partner, Caoimhe stated she was still concerned and felt responsible for her partner’s care, as she explains here:

_I was trying to distance; no, I didn’t want to be involved in any of her care at all. I thought this is my way out... But I wanted to make sure that I had put the help in place for her so that I could walk away and plus I was probably being selfish too because I thought, “If she’s getting help, she’s not going to be looking to hound me as well”_

On the other hand, abusive partners were reported to set the terms of the relationship, establishing the ‘relationship rules’ which were primarily for their benefit and advantage. Table 1 highlighted the practices of love enacted by abusive partners identified from the participant accounts. Practices of love by the partner served to encourage women to remain in relationships, return to relationships, and to elicit sympathy and concern. Partners were reported to make promises that the abuse would stop, make declarations of their love and neediness for partners, promise to change their behaviour and seek professional help, and question their partner’s love for them, typically after a violent assault. The outcome of these tactics used by partners led to several impacts upon the participants. They reported wanting to fix their relationships, to protect their partners from outside criticism; feeling confusion about the ongoing abuse; and either remaining in or returning to the relationship.

Donovan and Hester (2014) highlighted two sets of relationship practices which they describe as establishing and enforcing relationship rules, the first, the abusive partner establishes herself as the key decision maker in the relationship. Sources of conflict associated with power imbalance in lesbian relationships emerge around who has the right to make the major decision in relationships (Lockhart, et al., 1994). As the following comments demonstrate, participants in the study were in no doubt about who was in control of their relationships and who the key decision maker was:

_There was nothing negotiated it was absolutely categorically not negotiated (Aoife)_

_It was always [partners] way or no way. I just always just went along with it (Saoirse)_
The second practice relates to what the researchers termed, expressions of need or neediness that are utilised by abusive partners to provide rationales for the behaviour and to elicit sympathy and concern from their partners. Similar to Walker’s (1979) ‘cycle of violence’ model to explain heterosexual IPA, lesbian partners also make declarations of love especially when the partner has left the relationship to have them return or to remain. In the current study, both practices were evident in the participant’s accounts. Following a serious assault, Caoimhe gave an account of attending A&E with broken ribs and additional injuries to her face and body. After the physical assault, she explained that she did not return home for three months and stayed at her parent’s home. She explained her injuries to her family as “I rang my Mum and I told her that I’d been in a car accident”. She returned to the abusive relationship following the constant declarations of love she received from her partner, Caoimhe recalls;

My folks arrived and put all the stuff in the car and took me back home to [Region 01], and I stayed for three months and I didn’t see my partner, she rang me every day, messaged me every single day [with niceties or?] awe niceties you know, “So sorry”, “I love you” all this kind of stuff

Saoirse provided examples of the ways in which her partner would attempt to rationalise her behaviour to elicit sympathy and concern from her, as she explains:

“This is the shit she used to say like, “Oh two days I ran out of my medication, it’s my medication doing it to me”. I’m sorry but two days of anti-depressants and not taking them is not going to drive you to that”

Reading the quote above, one would get the impression that the partner’s attempts to rationalise her behaviour were lost on Saoirse. However, this is Saoirse looking back on her experience retrospectively and was not her understanding at the time of the relationship.

5.2.4 Practices of love - impact on disclosure

Participants spoke of protecting their partners from the negative reactions of others by concealing the abuse. Scherzer (1998) reported similar findings in her cross-sectional study with a lesbian sample (n=256). By protecting their partners, participants in this study remained silent on their abusive experiences and further, this silence closed off any potential options for support. The following quote by Saoirse exemplifies the multiple ways
practices of love employed by an abusive partner can act to manipulate, silence, and confuse a victim about what’s happening in the relationship:

*I never told anyone the real truth because stupidly I didn't want [partner] to get into trouble...I protected [partner] as she told me so many times she would change, seek help, never lay a finger on me again, and I did believe her even though she continued to deal with her anger via violence. I get so annoyed now when I think of all the times when I lied to protect HER. I never reported it to anyone as I was afraid she would get into trouble and then also [partner] had a way of making me feel sorry for her when she would have an outburst. She would nearly make me believe that I provoked her for her to react in that way*

Saoirse’s quote provides some clear concrete examples of Donovan and Hester’s (2014) concept of POL developed to understand abusive same sex relationships. In the example above, Saoirse’s account suggests her partner shifted the responsibility of her behaviour onto Saoirse, and in doing so, ensured that Saoirse felt sorry for her, and felt to blame for the behaviour. Feeling sympathy for an abusive partner and responsibility for their abusive behaviour acted to confuse Saoirse about the ongoing abuse in her relationship. This finding is supported by previous research (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2008). These feelings Saoirse found led her to protect her partner from outside criticism from family, friends and from formal support options.

The next section describes the different forms of abuse experienced by the participants that served to dominate and control them, that include, ongoing non-violent and violent controlling behaviours.

### 5.3 The experience of coercive controlling behaviours

An objective of the current study was to describe the experience of IPA for participants. This section begins by providing an overview of the types of abusive behaviours experienced by the participants. The chapter then moves to describe the non-violent controlling behaviours, followed by the controlling physically violent behaviours reported during interviews.
The participant accounts reflected diverse forms of abuse experienced in their relationships. Table 2 provides an overview of the abusive behaviours reported by interviewee’s that include emotional/psychological, physical, severe physical, sexual, financial, identity, and post-separation abuse. In all cases, participants reported experiencing a combination of these behaviours. The most common forms of abuse identified by women were emotional/psychological, physical, severe physical violence, and post-separation abuse. This was followed by sexual, financial and identity abuse. These abusive behaviours were utilised to control, monitor, intimidate, isolate, and subordinate participants.

### Table 2 Overall types of abuse experienced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall abuse experienced by participants</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe physical</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-separation</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.1 Controlling behaviours: emotional/psychological abuse

Consistent with the literature on lesbian IPA (LIPA), emotional/psychological abuse was the most frequent form of abuse cited by participants in this present study, and was reported by the nine women in the sample (Barnes, 2009; Miner, 2003; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). Typically, this form of abuse was described as a precursor to experiences of physical violence, although in some cases, the abuse was reported, to begin with a physical assault. Women’s experience of emotional abuse varied greatly, but the main categories identified in the analysis were 1) verbal abuse, 2) jealousy and possessiveness and 3) using isolation.

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258 This study’s definitions of violent and non-violent abusive behaviours were adapted from the COHSAR (Comparing Heterosexual and Same Sex Abuse in Relationships) Power and Control Wheel devised by Donovan and Hester (2014). Janice Ristock (2002) identified 3 categories of sexual assault, 1) forced sex or rape, 2) sexual coercion, 3) emotional sexual abuse. These categories were also used to classify sexual violence reported by participants in the current study. See Appendix 26 for a full list of definitions of abusive behaviours and sexual assault.

259 Physical violence was classified as severe when women reported broken bones, head injuries, knife injuries, and cuts and bruises. Severe violence often involved weapons such as knives, glass, kitchen utensils and included being strangled, suffocated, beaten, and beaten unconscious. (Ristock, 2002).

260 Identity abuse is discussed further in the chapter. See section 5.5.
Table 3 below illustrates the main forms of emotional/psychological abuse experienced by participants. 261

Table 3 Main types of emotional/psychological abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional/psychological abuse experienced by participants</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>undermining value as a partner</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being put down/ humiliated</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shouting &amp; screaming</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blamed for partners abusive behaviour</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name calling</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undermining physical appearance</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being told what to do</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threats to physically harm</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploiting vulnerabilities</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing mind games</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>using children</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to other work (Turell, 1999), participants recalled that the experience of emotional/psychological abuse had a detrimental impact on their self-worth. Turell (1999) argues that the lack of knowledge this population have about what constitutes IPA contributes to self-blame and isolation for LGBT victims. The disruption and undermining of their relationships with their children, friends, and support networks, impacted negatively on their mental and physical health. Two women described attempting suicide, and one described feeling suicidal and self-harming. Irwin (2008) reported similar findings in her Australian study. Furthermore, participants described the existence of emotional/psychological abuse as “subtle”, thus, making it difficult for participants to identify the behaviour as abusive. This type of non-recognition was further exacerbated when there was an absence of physical violence. Studies from a DV service provider perspective, demonstrate that members of the LGBT community only acknowledge the physical abuse, minimising other forms of abuse such as emotional, sexual and financial (Merlis & Linville, 2006). These non-violent behaviours used by female abusers are best understood as coercive controlling behaviours used to assert fear, and control in relationships, and position abusers as dominant (Stark, 2007).

261 See Appendix 27 for a comprehensive list of emotional/psychological abuse experienced by participants.
5.3.2 Verbal abuse

As previously indicated, women gave examples of verbal abuse that typically involved their partners shouting and screaming at them, calling them names, undermining their physical appearance, their value as a partner, and their ability as a mother. Participants described this form of abuse as constant and occurring daily. The following extracts exemplify their experience of verbal abuse:

*Then just the name calling was the biggest part, it was just the things she’d call me like, “You repulse me”, I could write a book like on the things* (Saoirse)

*...she really undermined me a lot in a lot of separate ways. You know she was critical of you know me physically* (Aoibhinn)

Stark argues that the routine dimensions of CC inflicted on victims, “allow perpetrators to affect a level of subjugation that is more devastating than a physical assault” (2006, p.1022). Participants in the present study similarly cited verbal abuse such as name-calling and the routine undermining of their physical appearance as posing the greatest challenge to their sense of self, and self-worth. Women spoke of the long-lasting effects of this type of abuse and the pervasive impact it had upon their lives, as Saoirse and Caoimhe explain:

*It’s funny the physical abuse I’ve got over, now I have scars and all that but it’s more, like even now what I deal with is the emotional abuse she called do you know. It was just such a disgusting level* (Saoirse)

*I suppose it took me a long time you know even looking in the mirror you know, I’d look and go, “Awe you know”; you remember where you got the scars from* (Caoimhe)

5.3.3 Jealous and possessive abusive behaviours

The second form of emotional/psychological abuse identified from participant accounts relates to abusive partners jealousy and possessiveness. Feminist perspectives on male violence against women assert that jealousy and possessiveness reflect the idea of male ownership over women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This is a key component of the gender-based analysis of IPA with women being subordinated by men in a patriarchal society. Within the DV literature, jealousy and possessiveness are frequently linked to battering behaviours that are associated with low self-esteem and negative self-concept (Walker,
1989; White & Mullen, 1989). Jealousy and possessiveness operating within abusive lesbian relationships has been found to exist in previous studies (Barnes, 2009; Giorgio, 2002; Turrell, 2000). Table 4 provides an overview of the abusive partner’s jealous and possessive behaviours identified by participants. Like the participants in Barnes (2009) qualitative study, women reported being isolated from friends, were accused of being unfaithful, had their mobility controlled, and their mobile phones monitored. Participants also spoke about their partner’s jealousy of relationships with their biological children, and jealousy around their out status.

### Table 4 Abusive partners jealous & possessive behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jealousy &amp; possessiveness</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isolated from friends</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accused of being unfaithful</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitoring mobile phone</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controlling mobility</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitoring participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jealous of relationship with child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jealous of out status</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four participants spoke about their partner’s jealous and possessive behaviour which included isolating them from friends and being accused of having an affair, mostly with a friend, as the comment from Saoirse highlights:

...she always had this kind of jealousy thing with myself, I just could never have friends, female friends, she always thought I was going to go off with them. It was ridiculous (Saoirse)

Not only did participants report their partner was jealous of friends, they indicated partners were jealous of their out status and jealous of their relationship with their children. Caoimhe’s first abusive relationship occurred when she was eighteen years old and her partner was two years older. At the time, her partner was not out to family and friends and only came out about her sexuality over the course of the relationship. Caoimhe felt her partner was jealous of her ‘out’ status and the fact that her family were supportive of her, as she explains in this next quote:

I was thinking maybe she is realising she’s gay and maybe that’s hard too you know because I suppose she was kind of worried how people were going to react to her as well...I think she was kind of jealous that I was out and happily out. I had no issues with being gay

262 Participants in the current study attributed their partner’s abusive behaviours to a negative self-image. Chapter 7, see section 7.2.1.
Saoirse gave an account of starting a three-year relationship with her partner shortly after becoming pregnant from a previous heterosexual relationship. A major impact on Saoirse during her relationship was what she identified as \textit{“she’d [partner] stopped me bonding with [child’s name]”}. Below she explains the jealous dynamic that was present in the relationship concerning her young child:

\textit{Yeah, it was like she’d [partner] be jealous then do you know [getting agitated], she’d be jealous then, say if [child’s name] was sitting with me, then she’d started talking like saying, “Awe I want to be with Mammy” and she’d [partner] say “but you don’t want to be with me? You know things like that}

Participants also reported having their whereabouts monitored and their mobile phones regularly checked. Ciara talked about being thirty years old and being in an abusive relationship with a woman who was fifteen years older than her. She explained that her abusive partner had left a heterosexual marriage with children and had come out late in life. The constant monitoring of Ciara’s whereabouts became unbearable, as she recalled:

\textit{I just found it too overwhelming and always around and you know always there [higher voice tone] and em [in terms of your movements?] Yeah, yeah and then I kind of thought mmm don’t like this, don’t like being cramped} (Ciara)

In one of the most extreme cases reported of participants being monitored, Caoimhe explained the level of monitoring and control she experienced during her relationship:

\textit{Well, she controlled everything really, she controlled what I did, when I did it you know, where I worked. In fact, she got, she left her night-time job and I was working in a [convenience store] you know in the evening time, she got a job in the same [convenience store] so that we were in college together, we were working together, and we were living together so that she could keep an eye on me all the time.} (Caoimhe)

Despite this level of control through the constant monitoring of Caoimhe’s whereabouts, her abusive partner regularly checked her mobile phone, as this quote illustrates,

\textit{...she had complete access to my phone that was another thing, she controlled my phone basically, she’d take my phone and she’d check it.} (Caoimhe)

The overall aim of the jealous and possessive behaviours exhibited by abusive partners was understood by participants as their partners attempt to isolate them from friends and family support networks, as well as to control and monitor their activities. These findings concur with the literature, where studies demonstrate that isolation is a key form of emotional/psychological abuse in both heterosexual (Kirkwood, 1993) and lesbian
relationships (Barnes, 2009; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). Kirkwood (1993) found that isolation from family and friends leaves women with no one to offer them an outsider perspective on their abusive experiences. Irwin (2008) found that isolation in lesbian abusive relationships permits the abuser to shape how a victim feels about themselves.

5.3.4 Isolation tactics used by abusive partners

Isolation has been shown to be a significant tactic used by a female abuser to gain and maintain control in a relationship (Bornstein, et al., 2006; Irwin, 2008). Female abusers have been found to isolate partners by claiming victimisation (Giorgio, 2002; Poorman & Seelau, 2001). Donovan and Hester’s (2014, p.94) found that when female abusers claimed that they were the victim in relationships, this created a “skewed/warped context of coercive control”. Table 5 illustrates the main isolation tactics used by abusive partners. Five women spoke of their partners claiming victimisation during their relationships. This was said to involve abusive partners threatening to tell or telling neighbours and friends in the LGBT community that they were the one who was abused in the relationship. Participants who experienced this tactic remained silent on their abusive experiences and in some cases, they removed themselves from the LGBT community for fear of being labelled abuser. Being labelled the abuser in the relationship by the abusive partner was experienced as contributing to further isolation felt by participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolation</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>claiming victimisation</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>isolated from friends</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isolated from LGBT community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controlling mobility</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>claiming infidelity by participant</td>
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</table>

Aoibheann spoke about her eight-year relationship that involved a combination of emotional/psychological and severe physical abuse. She explained how her abusive partner, who was ten years younger, told friends Aoibhinn was the one who was abusive after the relationship ended. As the quote below highlights, her abusive partner’s claim of victimisation contributed to further isolation. The fear of being labelled an abuser and the
feeling of powerlessness to do anything to correct this claim, further isolated Aoibhinn, as she recalls;

...that also isolated me, cut me off from a lot of support as well then because you know being part of like even you know [Women’s Social Club] whatever which she [partner] got involved with, then I just didn’t feel I wanted to be involved with and I’m sure that she told people you know, and it’s one of those things how can you prove that? (Aoife)

Another dimension of isolation identified by Aoibhinn was the impact of being isolated from her friends, friendships she had established before the relationship had started. As the quote below illustrates, Aoibhinn found herself dependent on friends that were primarily friends of the abusive partner:

Well the way our relationship had gone I had pretty much kind of been isolated from a lot of people who had been my friends beforehand you know because she didn’t like them, or they didn’t like her and, so it ended up really that it was people that she knew that we socialised with more.

This second quote from Aoibhinn demonstrates the significance of friendship within the couple when she went looking for support:

Whereas I would have really hoped that they [partner’s friends] would you know come out in support of me – I didn’t feel I got that support. So, I was disappointed about that

During Aoife’s six-year relationship, she wondered why she was being excluded from social events organised by her neighbours in her small rural community, especially as her partner would be invited to events without her. When the relationship ended, she described how she found out the reason behind her exclusion:

[LC: Did you ever find out what she was saying to the neighbours?] Yes, I did, I did, that I was abusing her, that I was abusing her and that I was sleeping around with other women (Aoife)

The next section highlights experiences reported in the women’s narratives where they felt partners exploited vulnerabilities that included having a previous sexual abuse history, a history of depression, being self-conscious about body weight, and exploiting vulnerabilities associated with experiencing the menopause.

5.3.5 Exploiting vulnerabilities

Martha Fineman argues that “vulnerability is - and should be understood to be – universal and constant, inherent in the human condition” (2008, p. 1). Fineman suggests that we are all vulnerable at some point in our lives, that this is what we have in common as human beings. Although all the examples of emotional/ psychological abuse experienced by the
participants could be interpreted in some guise or another as the exploitation of vulnerability, four participants reported specific aspects of their personal vulnerability which they felt abusive partners exploited and used as part of their abusive repertoire. For example, Aoife had experienced both emotional/psychological and physical abuse in her family of origin as a young child, and sexual violence as an adult, which contributed to her experience of bouts of depression and a diagnosis of clinical depression as an adult. The extract below occurred on the day Aoife’s partner was graduating from college with a postgraduate degree. Aoife stated she had financially funded her partner’s education and living expenses over a period of six years in a relationship context where her partner had no financial income. Below she explains how her previous mental health history was used as part of her partner’s abusive tactics:

…she said to me that I was nothing but a boring, pain-in-the-ass depressive and that I would do the world a great favour if I just went and killed myself (Aoife)

Aoibhinn described how her partner would undermine her and be highly critical of her physical appearance. During her eight-year relationship, she started menopause and this development was used to further undermine and critique her, as she explains here:

…it’s part of her control thing and whatever she perceived as a weakness in me, you know whether it was the tooth thing or the hot flushes or anything that she could see you know she would just kind of like niggle at, you know like rub salt in the wound type thing (Aoibhinn)

Saoirse was the only participant in the study who reported being a biological mother to a dependent child. She recalled experiencing emotional/psychological abuse during her pregnancy, escalating to a violent physical assault two days after she gave birth. She spoke about her partner of three years exploiting vulnerabilities concerning her body weight:

The name calling was nearly from like when I was pregnant…maybe seven months pregnant that started. She knows I’m really paranoid about my weight, always have been always will be, it’s just part of me and she would really feed upon that, and really make me feel bad like that I was fat and ugly and all stuff like that. Like “How do you even look in the mirror”. (Saoirse)

Caoimhe talked about her experience of sexual abuse as a young child by a male family friend. She recalled formally reporting the abuse to the police at seventeen years old. However, her reporting did not result in any prosecution as she stated the abuser denied her claims. One year after reporting the sexual abuse, at the age of eighteen, Caoimhe found herself in a violent relationship with a female who was two years older than her. Below,
she describes how her previous abuse history was used as part of her abuser’s tactics to control her:

*I had been sexually abused as a child and she knew that and I was in therapy at the time for it and I was totally, you know I was kind of getting to the stage where I was you know, I could cope with it...and she, I felt like she was kind of using that against me in a way you know, I felt like in a way she was using it to control me too you know* (Caoimhe)

5.3.6 Re-enacting a previous abuse history

Female abusive partners using a previous abuse history to control and subordinate female partners has been reported in the existing research (Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002; Walters, 2011). For example, Walter’s (2011) qualitative study found that a female abusers’ knowledge of a prior abuse was used to both emotionally and sexually abuse participants. Moreover, Walter’s (2011) argues that a previous experience of abuse combined with socially supported beliefs that only males are batterers impedes recognition of IPA in lesbian relationships. Two participants in the current study talked about a previous abuse history that included, being sexually abused as young children by family members, abused by a family friend as an adolescent, and experiencing rape by a male in their adult lives. Their previous abuse history became a part of their abusive experience in their relationship with female partners. Participant’s described their female partners re-enacting aspects of their childhood sexual abuse experience, both verbally and physically. This form of sexual abuse was viewed by participants as the ultimate act of betrayal, as this next quote by Caoimhe illustrates;

“I told her what he’d [childhood abuser] said [pause]. So, when she was with me that night she used the exact same words, and I thought, you know what and I just started bawling uncontrollably”

Aoife stated that as a child, her female abuser would urinate on her. In her interview, she gave evidence of her partner repeating this behaviour in the final year of her six-year relationship, she explains;

...she urinated in my mouth one night when I was asleep... This was the year that I was working up to leave her.

263 One participant recalled being physically and sexually abused by a male and female family member.
5.3.7 Disruption of eating & sleeping patterns

In agreement with Scherzer (1998), participants in this study described the experience of abuse that consisted of the deliberate disruption of eating and sleeping patterns. Being kept awake at night to loud music, not being allowed to go to bed or to sleep and being forced to eat unhealthy foods were some examples provided by participants to best describe their experience of this type of abuse. The following cases indicate the nature of this type of abuse from women’s accounts:

*I put on about three or four stone... she worked in a chipper at night time and she’d wake me at three or four in the morning with food and if I didn’t eat it she got annoyed with me, so I’d have to eat it and then go back to sleep. You know it was the little things like that she would do* (Caoimhe)

*I would also like to add that her speciality was playing music until about half three in the morning so that I couldn’t sleep because I would have to leave the house at half five... That was probably the worst; I think that was probably one of the worst that I couldn’t sleep. I was going off my fucking head* (Aoife)

The participants also reported some unique aspects of the non-violent controlling behaviours they experienced and their potential detrimental impact on them. This is discussed in the next section.

5.3.8 Coercive control; unique individual experiences

Table 6 provides an overview of some of the non-violent coercive controlling behaviours employed by abusive partners where ultimately, participants were threatened and controlled. As will be demonstrated, the threat posed by such behaviours had real-life negative consequences for the participants regarding their educational outcomes, their professional careers and business interests, and their physical and mental wellbeing.

**Table 6 Coercive controlling behaviours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coercive control</th>
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<th>P2</th>
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<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>claiming victimisation (during)</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claiming victimisation (post)</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>monitoring mobile phone</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coerced drug taking</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>instigating arguments before an exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>threats to jeopardise business</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>threatening to prosecute</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some aspects of this form of abuse have been expanded upon in previous sections, for example, claiming victimisation (during and post-relationship) and the monitoring of participant’s mobile phones. Additional forms of controlling behaviours identified included, coerced drug taking, instigating arguments the night before a third level examination, making threats to prosecute, and threats to jeopardise a participant’s business interests. The experience of coerced drug taking was also referred to by Renzetti (1988). The following examples demonstrate this type of controlling behaviour as reported by participants:

...she would always insist, “Let’s have a joint” and kind of “No, no, no” then “You said you like it”, “Yeah you know now and again but not seven days a week you know, every evening” type thing...she was saying, “But this is what you want, you said and...Oh for fuck sake leave me alone yeah, yeah whatever, I’ll agree to it just shut the fuck up” (Ciara)

I always felt when I came to exam time, she’d fucking start rows – for no reason. Like I had an exam one morning and the night before we’d spent all night fighting...I always felt it was times like that she’d nearly, it’s like she on purpose would pick a row to just, I don’t know why, was it to stop me succeeding to get where I want to be? (Saoirse)

In her interview, Roisin reflected on her second abusive relationship with a woman at the age of thirty-two, with this relationship lasting six months. Roisin described being subjected to both verbal and severe physical violence in a non-cohabiting relationship. She described ending the relationship following a severe violent assault in her home. After the relationship ended, Roisin recalled that her partner would not accept the relationship was over and started to make false accusations that she was the violent partner. Alongside false accusations, the partner made the following threats, as Roisin explains;

Then she started getting thick, “Like I could prosecute you for this”. I was going like, “Seriously, seriously are you even listening to yourself. Like just go away, just go away”.

Roisin felt that the threats to prosecute her caused her a considerable amount of distress, considering her professional position as a police officer. The assault that Roisin described during her interview was one of worst accounts of violence recorded over the nine interviews and could be best described as a ‘frenzied’ attack. In the context of committing a violent assault against a police officer, the counterclaims of being assaulted by the abusive partner served to silence Roisin and further ensure she did not prosecute for the physical assault she experienced.
Technological advances, such as social media, mobile phone, and geo-tracking capability have introduced ‘digital stalking’ as another means to perpetrate violence (Corbally, et al, 2016), where the control, monitoring, and intimidation continue after the relationship has ended (Stark, 2006). Participants reported being subject to online abuse after relationships ended. Examples given included negative comments being posted on social media via private emails and on participants Facebook homepage. Saoirse recalls:

*...she mentioned me on Facebook then, saying that I don’t deserve [child’s name] and I’m an embarrassment and all this.*

Other forms of controlling and monitoring behaviours, and intimidation experienced by participants post-relationship included receiving harassing phone calls and texts, ex-partners calling to their homes uninvited, stalking, both the participants and their friends being physically assaulted, being outed against their wishes, and having money and property stolen from their homes, and having their property damaged. Similar to the heterosexual female experience, for those with children, partners pursued visitation access post-separation as a means to continue their control (Radford & Hester, 2006).

The participants provided further accounts of the exploitation of their financial resources during relationships, this is discussed in the next section.

5.3.9 The experience of financial abuse & exploitation

Lesbian women report financial abuse and exploitation as a factor in their experience of IPA (Patzel, 2006; Ristock, 2003). The first systematic review on IPA in self-identified lesbians (Badenes-Ribera, et al., 2015) found that this type of abuse was the least evaluated aspect of IPA for this population. The main types of financial abuse reported by participants in this study included partners creating debt and expecting the participants to financially support them in all facets of their lives. Two participants spoke of their partners having no financial income over the duration of their relationships. Participants also reported having money and property stolen, and credit cards and bank accounts used without their permission. Two women spoke of losing their homes and remained entangled in legal

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264 See Appendix 28 for a comprehensive list of post-separation abuse.
processes to try to extricate themselves from previous lives with an abusive partner. Table 7 provides an overview of the main types of financial abuse identified by the participants.

Table 7 Main types of financial abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of financial abuse</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expected to pay for nights out etc</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating debt</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>full financial dependency</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>participant paying all household bills</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>refusing to take paid employment</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>unauthorised use of credit card</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>unauthorised use of bank account</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>theft of money</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>theft of property</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>withholding financial support</td>
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<tr>
<td>refusing to go to work</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of financial resources used to control</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Together with the experience of financial abuse, participants also reported being subjected to physical violence from their female partners. This type of abuse is discussed next.

5.4 The experience of physical & sexual violence

5.4.1 The experience of physical violence

Studies report that physical violence in lesbian relationships is the most frequently measured type of abuse, however, the frequencies reported are dependent on the various time periods utilised during studies (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016). The experience of physical abuse was diverse across the nine interviews, with eight out of nine women recalling their experience of being physically assaulted. Table 8 illustrates the main list of physically violent behaviours experienced by participants, including, being kicked, punched, pushed, and shoved, being slapped, having their hair pulled, and being locked out of their homes.265

265 See Appendix 29 for a comprehensive list of physically violent behaviours experienced by participants.
Participants described experiencing the violence predominantly in their homes, but some participants stated they were physically attacked in public spaces that included their place of work, on public transport (taxi, bus), and at social events. They further asserted that at no point did any person intervene to assist them when they were assaulted in public. Aoife recalled her experience of assault in public:

She punched me in the stomach and said, “Fuck you” [on the bus?] On the bus, and that was probably since I was fifteen, seventeen, of having an experience of that level of violence.

Throughout their twenty-six-year relationship, Clodagh described being violently beaten by her partner. Following these frequent physical assaults, Clodagh recalled how she would not return to their shared home, instead choosing to sleep in a bed and breakfast. In the following quote, she describes the consequences for her of not returning home:

I was terrified of going home, and where we worked, one day, she was coming in, in the morning time, she came down and found me in the premises and she’d an umbrella and she beat me in the lady’s toilets with the umbrella, even in me job

5.4.2 Severe physical violence

Similar to the physically abusive tactics categorised as severe by Ristock (2002), six participants in this study described the experience of severe physical violence. As Table 9 illustrates, severe physical violence encompassed being hit with a weapon, incurring head injuries, black eyes and bruising to the body. Other forms of severe physical violence cited
less frequently by interviewee’s included suffocation, strangulation, being beaten and strangled to the point of unconsciousness, being stabbed, bitten, and having bones broken.

Table 9 The experience of severe physical violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severe physical violence</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hit with an object/weapon</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head injuries</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black eyes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bruising to the body</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scars</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strangulation</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suffocation</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stabbed</td>
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<td>attempts to aggravate an asthma attack</td>
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<td>kicked into the vagina</td>
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<td>loss of hair</td>
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<td>broken bones</td>
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<td>bitten</td>
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Two women reported attending their general practitioner (GP) and accident and emergency (A&E) departments on two separate occasions with the injuries they sustained. Participants stated they remained silent on the source of their injuries and in one case, the woman described how she was accompanied to the hospital by her abusive partner. Following a violent physical assault, Caoimhe attended an A&E department with broken ribs. She recalled how a nurse encouraged her to report the assault. The following quote describes the scene;

*Then a nurse came into me and asked my friends to wait outside and the nurse said, “Tell us his name, we can help you, you know, you don’t have to deal with this”. And then I was like, “Do I say it’s a woman?” and I thought, “If I say it’s a woman she’s going to judge me”, she’s going to think you know, “Ah it’s only a woman like, she should be able to fight back with a woman”.*

This quote from Caoimhe highlights some of the challenges experienced by Irish lesbian women when accessing healthcare supports (Duffy, 2011; Gibbons, et al., 2008; Power, 2002). The assumption that Caoimhe was heterosexual closed off the opportunity for disclosure as Caoimhe was already concerned with receiving an unsympathetic response. In this instance, having to disclose your sexual orientation as well as the experience of IPA proved too large an obstacle for Caoimhe. Sexuality disclosure issues as a barrier to help-seeking are well documented in the literature (Girshick, 2002; Irwin, 2008; Merlis &
Linville, 2006; Renzetti, 1992), described as the ‘double bind’ by researchers (Walters, 2009). Additionally, the quote draws attention to the dominant heterosexual story of IPA (male abuser/female victim) and stereotypical gender norms about women that informs both the nurse and Caoimhe’s understanding of IPA.

Participants also recalled how nurses in A&E departments demonstrated awareness of IPA and encouraged them to disclose the nature of their injuries. However, Saoirse chose not to reveal the true nature of her condition;

_There was one particular nurse she did say to me, "If there’s anything you need to tell us, to tell me now" like they were there to help this one particular nurse. But I just kept on saying "no I fell"._

5.4.3 The experience of sexual violence

One of the first empirical studies to examine LIPA found that almost half (48%) of the sample (n=100) reported forced sex, with 16% reporting it happened frequently (Renzetti, 1992). In this study, there was evidence of sexual violence in the women’s accounts, a form of violence that the participants found extremely difficult to explain and describe. They struggled with a lack of language to explain their experience, as the quote by Caoimhe highlights;

_Who is going to believe a woman would rape another woman? I mean how do you explain that?_

This struggle with articulation was manifested during the interviews with silences, hesitancy, and participants becoming visibly upset. However, participants did name and recognise this type of abuse as rape. Similar to previous LIPA research (Barnes, 2009; Ristock, 2002; Walters., 2011), women reported being repeatedly raped by their female partners, being touched in a manner that caused distress, being hurt during sexual activity, having their requests to stop ignored, and partners re-enacting aspects of a previous sexual abuse history. Three-quarter of Barnes (2009) sample (33 out of 40) reported some form of sexual abuse, with the most prevalent forms recorded as forced sex; sexual coercion; verbal abuse and humiliation related to sex; and withholding affection to punish. Table 10 highlights the main types of physical sexual abuse captured in this study.
Previous research has documented that women in same sex relationship experience forms of emotional sexual coercion (Barnes, 2009; Girshick, 2002; Ristock, 2002). For example, recent UK research suggests that lesbians experienced more emotionally abusive sexual coercion than heterosexual men and women, and gay men (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Concurring with these findings, there was evidence in participant’s narratives of forms of sexual abuse which could be described as more emotional than physical. Table 11 draws attention to this type of abuse.

Table 10 Main types of sexual abuse (physical)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of sexual abuse (physical)</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>touched causing distress</td>
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<td>rape</td>
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<tr>
<td>hurt during sexual activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>ignoring requests to stop</td>
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<tr>
<td>re-enacting previous sexual abuse experience</td>
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</table>

Table 11 Main types of sexual abuse (emotional)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>sexual coercion</td>
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<tr>
<td>withdrawing sex to punish</td>
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<td>had to ask for sex</td>
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<td>critical of her body</td>
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<tr>
<td>critical of her lesbian sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>rejecting to humiliate</td>
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<tr>
<td>made to feel sexually inadequate</td>
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Eabha described being in a long-term relationship with a partner who was concealing her lesbian sexual identity. Echoing Barnes (2009) UK findings, she described experiencing predominantly emotional sexual abuse where her partner would reject, humiliate, and make critical remarks about her body and her lesbian identity following sexual intimacy. This ultimately left her feeling sexually inadequate and she explained that she never engaged in another relationship following this experience. Concurring with the qualitative findings from Barnes (2009), this quote by Aoife draws attention to the way in which withdrawing sex in the relationship was used to punish and control by her abusive partner;
She used it as a means of control, cause I used to have a very, very high sex drive so she would not do it if she had a moment yeah, she would withdraw sex, does that make sense? (Aoife)

The experience of IPA for the lesbian participants demonstrates striking similarities with victim/survivor accounts of heterosexual IPA regarding their experience of emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, and financial abuse (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). However, in addition to these abusive experiences, LIPA has a unique element that is not an issue in heterosexual IPA, namely, control over sexual or gender identity by an abusive partner. This part of the chapter moves on to discuss the experience of ‘identity abuse’.

5.5 Identity abuse: A distinct experience of IPA

Data from several studies suggest that perpetrators in same sex relationships use sexuality or gender identity as a way of controlling, isolating and undermining a victim (Barnes, 2009; Bornstein, et al., 2006; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Lobel, 1986; Pharr, 1986; Ristock, 2002; Scherzer, 1998). For example, lesbian respondents (n=256) in Scherzer’s (1998) study reported ‘threats to out sexuality’ as constitutive of an abusive lesbian relationship. Donovan and Hester (2014) operationalised the term ‘identity abuse’ as threatening to out or outing sexuality. It also includes behaviours that undermine a sense of self as a lesbian, gay, bisexual man, or woman, controlling what she/he looks like, clothes she/he wears, threatening to, or withdrawing medication or hormones, and refusing money for gender transition. Researchers argue that this type of abuse is available, and made possible, by a victim’s position of living in a heterosexist and homophobic society, whereby the stigma associated with a non-heterosexual identity, forces an individual to conceal their sexuality (Hart, 1986; Lobel, 1986; Pharr, 1998). As Table 12 illustrates, in the current study, identity abuse encompassed control over appearance, threats to out, ‘outing’, and undermining sexual identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of identity abuse</th>
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<th>P7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>control over appearance</td>
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<td>forced to conceal lesbian identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>outing sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>undermining her sexual identity</td>
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Table 12 The experience of identity abuse

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266 The definition also includes birth gender, gender identity or HIV status.
Power and control using sexuality or gender identity can manifest in abusive same sex relationships where a) one or both partners are not out to key people in their lives; or b) when the survivor is not out, an abusive partner can use this knowledge to control their partner’s behaviour with threats to reveal their sexuality/ gender identity; and c) if the abusive partner is not out, this can be used to control the victim/survivors behaviours, where the victim is responsible for keeping the partner’s identity hidden. Within the current study, Clodagh’s experience relates to the first example where both she and her partner were concealing identities. Aoibhinn’s experience relates to the second category. Her partner would out her against her wishes at social events after her relationship ended. Finally, Eabha’s experience relates to the third example of identity abuse where her partner was closeted, and Eabha was coerced into not only denying and abandoning her lesbian identity, but this also required that she was complicit in ensuring her partner’s sexual identity remained hidden.

Eabha described being forced “back into the closet”. She expressed the view that she had been very much a part of, and connected to, the LGBT community prior to this relationship. As a consequence of Eabha’s partner not being ‘out’, she stated she was forced to conceal both her and her partner’s sexual identity, refrain from taking career developing employment in the LGBT community and remove herself from all LGBT community events and activities.

Eabha provided further examples of the ways in which her partner would abuse her using her lesbian identity. She recalled being made to feel guilty and blamed for her partner not having a child. In the DV literature, children are often used by perpetrators to spy on partners, relay messages, undermine parenting, and used during visitation to harass partners (Holt, 2009, 2015). However, in this study, there was evidence of other ways in which children (or the lack of children) was used by female abusers. In relationship contexts where partners were concealing their sexual identities, Eabha’s partner used her lesbian identity as a reason to blame, and to account for her not having a child. Eabha explained that this would be brought up regularly during her relationship, as she explains;

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267 There was evidence of this type of post-separation abuse in Saoirse’s narrative.
...she said that it was my fault because she hadn’t had children because if she’d been in a straight relationship, she would have had a child by now...But yeah it was my fault (Eabha)

Another example of identity abuse encompassed being ‘outed’ by an abusive partner. Aoibhinn described being outed by her ex-partner after the relationship ended. Being ‘outed’ against her wishes, contributed to a sense of powerlessness for Aoibhinn, as her next quote illustrates,

...you know there were places where I felt comfortable to be out and there were others that I didn’t, and in any case, it was my decision, my choice as to when and if I told someone, where she would just take that power away from me and just do it you know, and just out me

For Aoibhinn, the fear of being outed led her to remove herself from social activities and engagements, especially those involving the LGBT community. At the time of interview, she had not managed to re-immers herself in any organisations or social events associated with the LGBT community. Aoibhinn stated she felt “less connected with the lesbian and gay community in Ireland because of that relationship”. To emphasise the impact of this type of abuse, it should be noted that Aoibhinn’s relationship was over for almost ten years at the time of interview.

Like previous research exploring LIPA (Barnes, 2009), identity abuse manifested in relationships where contested identities existed between the couple, with the abusive partner reported as controlling the appearance of the participant. In this study, this form of abuse was reported where the abusive partner identified as ‘butch’ and understood the relationship as having a butch/femme dynamic. However, the participant did not see herself as a femme and further, did not identify with any label to describe her sexuality-identity. In such cases, women described being pressured into wearing feminine attire and not being allowed to dress in clothes of their own choosing. The following quotes from Caoimhe’s interview confirms this finding;

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268 Being ‘outed’ refers to having your gender or sexual identity revealed to key others (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) without your consent.

269 During the 1950s and 1960s, the term butch/femme was popularised among lesbians to describe their relationships. During this period, butch/femme not only described masculine/feminine lesbian couples but also commonly referred to some lesbians’ choices to adopt traditional masculine or feminine gender roles. See O’Brien (2009).
The participants reported forms of isolation that are a direct result of living in a heterosexist and homophobic societal context, this aspect of their experience is discussed next.

5.5.1 Isolation in contexts of homophobia & heterosexism

Researchers argue that understanding contexts of relationship violence is key to understanding LIPA so that cases of IPA are not treated interchangeable and equivalent, and furthermore, so that we acknowledge the social inequities that put people at risk (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2002; Walters., 2011). For example, there are social contexts that can create isolation and invisibility for lesbians such as contexts of heterosexism and homophobia where non-heterosexual individuals live lives ‘in the closet’, concealing their sexual identity rather than risk exposure and a potential homophobic response (Giorgio, 2002; Ristock, 2002).

Clodagh described leaving her family home as a young adult. She attributed her mother’s suspicion about her sexuality, and the arguments that ensued, as the motivation for her leaving home. At the age of twenty-two, she reflected on beginning a relationship that would last for twenty-six years, a relationship in which both partners were concealing their sexual identities. Beginning their relationship in Ireland during the 1970s, the quote beneath provides some insight into the challenges of living openly as a lesbian couple at this period, as Clodagh describes;

*I didn’t come out until I was 48, in the 70s when I met my first partner, and it was very...it was, I mean male homosexuality was illegal then even, so it was very difficult to, to come out and I was terrified.* (Clodagh)

Throughout their relationship, Clodagh described how her partner would not accept and routinely denied her lesbian sexual identity. In the next quote, Clodagh explains the length’s her partner would go to conceal her identity;

*...she used to flirt with guys and then she bought a false engagement ring to wear [laughs] so as that people would think that she was engaged to someone.*

This next quote from Clodagh conveys the impact on the participant’s lives when partners are not accepting of, and resisting, their sexual identity:
...we never had any gay friends, we never had any kind of friend’s other than the people we worked with, or we went out with her family, that’s all, and near the end I wanted to start having gay friends and people our own age and going out, and she told me I was perverted [laughs]. So, because I wanted to have friends, gay friends, yeah, she told me I was perverted.

Eabha described how when at twenty-eight years old, she began a thirteen-year relationship with a woman who was two years younger than her. Eabha spoke about experiences of emotional and sexual abuse. Like Clodagh, Eabha described the homophobic context in which the women found themselves. Her next quote illustrates the invisibility of their relationship even with their immediate family:

I’d say her [partner’s] sister’s not stupid she knew perfectly well we were in a relationship, but it was taboo, and it wasn’t mentioned, and it never came up

For the duration of the relationship, Eabha recalled how her partner denied her lesbian sexuality and as a consequence of this Eabha felt that she was made to conceal her sexual identity and disconnect from the LGBT community. Eabha stated she found this especially harrowing as she had very much been a part of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community of the time. To conceal her lesbian identity, Eabha stated that her partner consistently orchestrated her isolation from LGBT community events and interfered in her friendships.

The participant’s experience of isolation was reported as being either orchestrated by the partner as part of their abusive tactics to control and monitor participants and to conceal their own lesbian identities. However, the overall experience of isolation was largely connected with living in a heterosexist society where partners and participants were concealing their sexual identities and thus, isolated from support networks. Researchers argue that the chronic and cumulative effects of homophobia is unique to lesbian relationships (and same sex relationships in general), and imposes a significant strain on the process of developing a healthy relationship and a healthy sense of self (Lobel, 1986; Scherzer, 1998).

It is apparent from some of the participant accounts that dominant values reinforcing heteronormativity impacted upon how participants and their partners felt about their lesbian sexual identity, and their relationships. For example, the shame Clodagh reported experiencing about her sexuality, resulted in a situation where she became silenced about the abuse. Not being open about her sexual identity meant that Clodagh had no contact with other lesbians or the LGBT community, and crucially, being closeted meant that she could not articulate her experience of abuse. Moreover, the negative reaction from her mother...
connected with her sexuality meant that family support was also limited. The fear associated with exposing her lesbian identity resulted in her remaining in an abusive relationship for almost three decades of her life.

For Eabha, similarly, concealing her sexual identity within the relationship and the invisibility this created, also meant that her options for support were limited, as she recalls;

I wasn’t in a relationship because my “friend” [being sarcastic] was straight, because that’s what she wanted to project, and I had let that happen, and I had gone along with that so how could I talk about a relationship breaking up when there wasn’t a relationship? (Eabha)

The examples of identity abuse and the concomitant isolation that ensues, highlight the additional control and isolation tactics available to lesbian abusers. Concealing sexual identity renders relationships, and relationship abuse invisible. This invisibility creates and sustains situations whereby participants find it increasingly difficult to reach outside the relationship for support. Moreover, isolation from support networks permits the opportunity for an abuser’s constant negative messages to be absorbed by participants and was often cited as the reason for a negative sense of self, while further ensuring that an abusive partner is not held accountable for their behaviour.

**Conclusion: Chapter five**

Similar to the heterosexual female experience of IPA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014), the participant’s narratives indicated that they experienced multiple forms and combinations of abusive behaviours such as emotional/psychological, physical (including severe physical), sexual, and financial abuse. The differences that occur with heterosexual women’s experiences are found in the experience of identity abuse. Eight participants described the continuation of the abusive behaviours after the relationship had ended.

Mirroring the existing literature, emotional/psychological abuse was cited most frequently by participants (Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002; Scherzer, 1998) and physical violence was the second most cited abuse experienced (Balsam, et al., 2005; Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). Like the participants in Ristock’s (2002) study, women gave accounts of experiencing severe physical violence that encompassed violence involving an object or a weapon and result in injuries to the body and the head. The experience of physical sexual
violence and emotional sexual violence formed a part of the participant’s experience of IPA.

In accordance with Donovan and Hester’s (2014) concept of ‘practices of love’, participants gave accounts of female abusers positioning themselves as key decision makers in relationships where relationship rules were set by abusive partners on their terms, and for their advantage. There was further evidence of the participant’s relationships being influenced by norms in heterosexual relationships whereby both partners adopted stereotypical masculine and feminine roles within relationships.

Participants experienced combinations of the diverse types of violence and abuse outlined. They acknowledged the frequency of abuse as occurring daily and weekly. Coercive control was employed in the current study to understand the ongoing patterns of violence and non-violent behaviour experienced. Most participants explained that they experienced combinations of the abusive behaviours where control was used as a primary means of their subordination. Although eight women recalled the experience of physical and severe physical violence, it was the tactics used to control that created the greatest challenge for the participants’ during their relationships.

The next chapter focuses on the relationship dynamics, power, retaliation, and the impact of IPA. Chapter six outlines the participant’s response to the abusive behaviours during their relationships, the motivation for their response, and the context in which their response took place. Impacts of an abusive relationship are also examined over three tiers, impact during, impact post-relationship, and the long-term impacts of experiencing an abusive relationship.
6  CHAPTER SIX: ABUSIVE DYNAMICS, RETALIATION & IMPACTS

The findings presented in the preceding chapter have graphically demonstrated the multiple forms of abuse experienced by the participants in the study. This chapter will examine the participant’s relationships more closely to understand more about the relationship dynamics between the couple, and how the dynamic of power operated in relationships. The first part of this chapter highlights the relationship dynamics that influenced the participant’s experience of IPA. In the section that follows, some specific inequalities identified by participants that they perceived as contributing to a power imbalance in relationships are discussed. The chapter then moves to provide a more detailed account of power in lesbian relationships, including similar findings to previous work with regard to ‘shifting power’ in lesbian relationships (Irwin, 2008; Ristock, 2002).

Previous research has established that women in same sex relationships report ‘fighting back’ as a response to the abusive behaviour (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Irwin, 2006). Similarly, participants in this study described incidences of fighting back against abusive partners. Their motivations, the context of their retaliation, and the impact upon participants of that retaliation will be discussed.

6.1  Relationship dynamics

During interviews, the participants were asked questions about their relationships so that the researcher could get a sense of what their experience of being in their relationships was like for them. Several relationship dynamics emerged from their narratives. Table 13 below provides a comprehensive list of the relationship dynamics identified by the participants that they perceived as influencing their experience of intimate partner abuse (IPA). As the table demonstrates, the main themes to emerge were: (1) the role of physical stature; (2) the influence of contexts of heterosexism on relationships; and (3) shifting power within relationships.
Table 13 Relationship dynamics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship dynamics</th>
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<th>P4</th>
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<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>role of physical stature*</td>
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<tr>
<td>shifting power roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>forced butch/femme role</td>
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<td>concealing sexual identities in the relationship</td>
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<td>ascribed butch/femme roles</td>
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* 5 women stated partners were physically bigger (with report of 2 smaller and)

Five participants alluded to the physical stature of partners in comparison to themselves when discussing IPA in relationships. This aspect of the relationship dynamic is discussed next.

6.1.1 Participant relationships and the role of physical stature

In contrast to previous research findings (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Ristock, 2002), in this study, greater physical strength did appear to be an indicator of who the abuser was in the relationship. As can be seen from Table 14, five of the nine participants reported their partner as being physically bigger. However, where the participants reported being larger in stature than partners, this created unique challenges for them. For example, participants spoke of the challenges they experienced of not being believed or being ashamed and embarrassed because of an assumption made by others, based on having a larger physical stature, that they must be the one who is abusive. The following quote from Aoife relays the personal shame and embarrassment that she experienced, being abused by a partner who was significantly smaller than her;

_Honestly, I would probably say for the first three years I was probably embarrassed not because she was a woman but because she was petite and small, and perception is, I’m very strong, I’m very big and I should have been well able to handle it._ (Aoife)

Although size is not the only determining factor in upholding patriarchal values, Aoife’s comments allude to the influence of dominant constructions of IPA that involve a gendered victim/perpetrator dynamic (stronger, larger male abusing a smaller, weaker female) (Barnes, 2008; Ristock & Timbang, 2005). Aoife’s larger physical stature in the context of the abusive relationship was a source of embarrassment to her because of society’s dominant ideas about masculinity (being big and strong) suggesting that she should have
been able to defend herself. Her sense of shame was further exacerbated by experiencing violence from a smaller female. This finding concurs with previous work suggesting lesbian women feel shame and embarrassment being abused by a female partner (Turell & Herrmann, 2008). Shame in lesbian relationships has also been found to impact negatively the ability to recognise the abuse as not your fault, increase isolation, and the ability to find a way out of an abusive relationship. Moreover, studies have shown that victims with smaller abusive partners do not formally report to the police due to fears of not being believed (Turell & Herrmann, 2008) or being arrested in the wrong based on a larger physical stature (Giorgio, 2002). As will be shown in the next section, such concerns are warranted. Studies confirm that smaller lesbian abusers play on their partner’s fears of police homophobia and butch/femme stereotyping (Wolf, et al., 2003), and exploit stereotypical female norms to avoid arrest (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008).

6.1.2 The influence of heterosexism on participant relationships

Researchers argue that the context of heterosexuality (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008) and associated patriarchal and heteronormative values (Donovan & Hester, 2014), are likely to infuse and form a backdrop for abusive same sex relationships. Mirroring previous work, there was evidence in this study of the influence of heterosexism on relationships which positioned the participants and their partners in gendered stereotypical roles. The women’s narratives suggest that both they and their partners were using dominant scripts associated with heterosexual adult relationships and stereotypical constructions of gender to inform their relationship roles and experiences with each other. To emphasise this finding, the quote below from Caoimhe demonstrates the expectations that she had about her second abusive partner based on her physical size and her butch identity, as she explains:

*I’d never been with anybody really butch...I don’t know, maybe I felt like she could you know, because she was bigger than me, maybe I felt I needed [pause] looking after, I thought you know she would be someone that would be stronger and more, look after me a bit more* (Caoimhe).

270 Similar findings are reported in studies that examine male victims of female abusers (Corbally, 2011) and gay male IPA (Finneran & Stephenson, 2012).

271 This finding was previously discussed in Chapter 5, participants spoke of their role in the relationship as being one of a carer with responsibility for their partner and responsibility for the relationship. See section 5.2 called ‘Practices of love’.

272 Scripts are cognitive structures that shape how knowledge is categorized and used to understand and remember events (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979).
Caoimhe associated her partner’s ‘bigger’ and ‘stronger’ personal characteristics, traits typically associated with masculinity, with her being taken care of in the relationship. Her expectations of her partner’s relationship role could be interpreted as being informed by stereotypical constructs of masculinity, that regularly position males as leaders in relationships, as powerful, and as the provider (Gerber, 1991).

This following quote draws attention to Caoimhe’s partner’s expectations of her role in the relationship. The quote highlights the negative, and what could be interpreted as a traditional attitude toward women by her partner. In the situation described, she humiliates and demeans Caoimhe in front of a group of her friends. Rather than confront her partner on her behaviour, Caoimhe alludes to the fact that she gives in to keep the peace;

She was just, it was like [higher tone of voice] dating a man to be honest with you, you know her attitude about women like she just. If her friends came in she’d be like, “Go and make tea” and I’d be like, “No I won’t” and she’d be like, “Go and fucking make the tea now” and so I would because I wouldn’t want to start a row in front of everybody (Caoimhe)

Similarly, in the following example, Saoirse’s partner also enacted her role in the relationship based on the influence of heterosexual adult relationships. Saoirse stated that her partner explicitly understood her role as the male and Saoirse’s as female in their three-year relationship:

...she’d say to me, “Oh I only go for femme women” and you know “I’m the butch in the relationship, the man role, and you’re like the female role” you know that kind of way (Saoirse)

The next quote from Saoirse further suggests that her understanding of being in a relationship was also infused by dominant ideas that surround heterosexual adult relationships, and what could be construed as an almost fundamentalist Christian version of heterosexual love. Studies examining heterosexual male and female IPA victims (n= 345, 239 female, 106 male) reasons for remaining in abusive relationships (Eckstein, 2011) found that one of the highest scoring items recorded to assess reasons for remaining in abusive relationships was ‘my children needed both parents’ (86.6% men, 72.9%
women). Similar to heterosexual relationships, Saoirse places importance on maintaining a family environment for her child as the motivation for staying in the abusive relationship, as this quote explains:

*I think [child] did keep us together, when the violence happened like there’s just so many times, it’s just unreal like, and it was in front of [child] as well and I’m not proud of that either, I should have just kept going then. But then like we had a house together, then we bought a house...We had a house together, I thought that this was the right decision, you know to have a family environment.*

The previous extracts from Caoimhe and Saoirse clearly demonstrate how patriarchal and heteronormative values permeated their relationships. Resonating with Saoirse’s account, Weeks et al. (2001) argue that there are parallels in the meaning of family practices across heterosexual and same sex relationships in terms of the language of commitment and the ‘doing of family’. Also, evident from the previous quotes, the participants claimed that partners positioned themselves in masculine gender roles in relationships. Liz Kelly (1991) asserts that lesbian communities are not free from the influence of heterosexism. She argues that in rejecting traditional femininity, lesbians may borrow from, or identify with, aspects of heterosexual masculinity to construct a sense of self. Kelly suggests these masculine identities may work toward explaining lesbian partner abuse.274 In contrast, in their examination of same sex family relationships, Weeks et al. (2001) argue that rather than being submerged by heterosexism, same sex families are resilient to what they term the ‘heterosexual assumption’ and construct their own identities and viable ways of life by rejecting implicitly the heterosexual assumption.275

Participants also alluded to the existence of butch/ femme identities in their relationships. One participant stated that her relationship conformed to butch/femme roles. Two participants expressed the opinion that their partner was attempting to force a butch/femme dynamic in the relationship and essentially assert control over their appearance.276 There is

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273 The study examined the reasons provided to the self and to others. The percentages provided represent the male and female respondent’s reasons communicated to the self.

274 Kelly stressed the point that her analysis of violence in female same sex relationships was not specific to women who identified as butch. However, she also suggests that styles, presentation, and roles are also about power.

275 The heterosexual assumption describes an all-embracing institutional invalidation of homosexuality, and presumption in favour of heterosexuality (Weeks et al., 2001, p. 41).

276 Examples of this dynamic in the relationship were developed in the previous Chapter 5, section discussing Identity abuse: A distinct experience of IPA ‘.
a stereotypical idea surrounding lesbian relationships that they comprise a masculine (butch) woman and a feminine (femme) woman. Although there was evidence of abusive partners attempting to force their partner into femme roles by controlling their appearance, this does not reflect the diversity of the sample as a whole. Most participants were explicit in saying that they did not conform to any roles associated with sexual identity categories.

This section has explored the relationship dynamics operating between the couple that were influenced by heterosexist norms about gender, heterosexual relationships, and the heterosexist construction of IPA. Such norms shaped how each partner positioned themselves within relationships and how they felt about the abuse they were experiencing. The next section looks at gender more closely in the relationships to demonstrate how abusive partners exploited female gender norms to their advantage.

6.1.3 Participant relationships and the role of gender

Researchers have pointed to the importance of gender and how it can be constructed and manipulated in lesbian relationships. For example, Hassouneh and Glass (2008) discovered that female perpetrators played the feminine victim and used gender role stereotypes of women as being hysterical and emotional to manipulate the police and avoid arrest. This essentially demonstrates that female perpetrators have access to a whole different range of manipulative behaviours by effectively exploiting norms associated with heteronormativity. Echoing Hassouneh and Glass (2008), participants in the present study provided further evidence of the context of heterosexism operating as an influential backdrop to their relationships. Aoife gave an account of calling the police to her home on the day she was leaving her relationship. Following an escalation of violence that involved her partner using a knife, Aoife recounted how she retaliated against her partner for the first time in her six-year relationship. Below she describes what could be interpreted as her partner attempting to play the feminine victim when the police arrived at their shared home;

[Partner] was sitting there and she was shaking, crying, emotional, she was actually shaking... So [partner] was red and you could see her shaking but only I knew she was shaking with anger (Aoife)

The next example highlights how abusive partners used gender role stereotypes of men and women to manipulate others and conceal their abusive behaviour in the relationship.
Participants expressed the view that partners performed a feminine gender role to manipulate colleagues and family members about who was the abuser in the relationship. These findings confirm earlier findings in the field (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Giorgio, 2002; Ristock, 2002). As Clodagh’s next quote illustrates, having a bigger physical stature typically associated with masculinity, in a relationship context where your partner is presenting as feminine, provides further opportunity for the abusive partner to manipulate others;

*She portrayed that she was very feminine, she was thin, that she was very meek and mild and that I was a bully...the whole thing was twisted right around because I was a bigger person [Who would she portray this to?] to the people that we worked with, even my family (Clodagh)*

Evidence from survivors accounts of IPA suggests that a partners ‘extreme passivity’ described by other survivors in the literature as “the other side of her violence” can be employed as a tactic to obscure controlling behaviour (Crall, 1986, p. 33). When asked about inequalities in the relationship, Aoife described her partner’s behaviour as ‘passive viciousness’. She provided examples of her partner acting passive and helpless – two personality traits firmly embedded in the social and cultural construction of femininity (Gilbert, 2002). However, in this relationship context, adopting a feminine gender stereotype by acting passive and helpless, was described as a tactic used by the partner to disguise their control in the relationship, particularly concerning control over finances. This quote from Aoife explains further;

*She [partner] kept saying, “Awe, I don’t know anything about banking” cause her ex-husband used to do all that, he used to look after the money. “So, I don’t know about that”. So, she would do this, what I would call her passive viciousness, she’d come across as very passive and helpless but really good at manipulating everyone (Aoife)*

In her exploration of LIPA, Renzetti (1999) found that “femininity” has often been equated with “victim status”.\textsuperscript{277} The next quote from Clodagh highlights the difficulty she experienced in disclosing the abuse in her relationship because of her partner’s manipulation of feminine stereotypes. She remained in an abusive relationship for twenty-six years, primarily, she explained, because both partners were concealing their sexual identity. For Clodagh, concealing her lesbian identity increased her isolation from support

\textsuperscript{277} Renzetti (1999) found that lesbians who had a masculine appearance and whose abusers were more feminine, faced tremendous obstacles when seeking support.
networks and sustained the silence surrounding the abuse. Clodagh felt that her partner’s portrayal of femininity in the relationship, enabled her to position herself as victim in the event that Clodagh disclosed the abusive behaviour, as she explains,

...you see if I'd of said to anybody about the abuse, the first thing would be she'd of said, “It’s not me, it was you” you know, and everybody thought because she was such a meek and mild little thing...this is what she portrayed.

Heterosexist assumptions about gender roles and gender expression have been found to lead to victim-blaming and invisibility for lesbian victims (Balsam, 2001; Renzetti, 1999). The previous examples evinced in the participant’s accounts could be understood within the parameters of Jack’s (2001) concept of cultural masks. She contends that historically and culturally, women’s use of aggression is masked, “most often fashioned from a cloth of stereotypical feminine behaviour such as sweetness, silence, and passivity”, where the feminine performance “disguises women’s intent to hurt, control or oppose another” (Ibid, p.236-37).

The following section moves to examine power in the participants’ relationships with an initial focus on the decision making in relationships, the distribution of financial resources, and the contribution to household bills and chores.

6.2 Power and control in relationships: Participant experiences

To understand how power operated in relationships, participants were asked questions about who made the decisions in the relationship, who had the financial resources and how they were distributed. Informed by the existing literature, participants were also asked about the division of household labour and the contribution to household bills (McClennen, 2005; Renzetti, 1988; Scherzer, 1998).

6.2.1 Participant accounts of inequalities in relationships

From the participant’s narratives, a number of relationship inequalities emerged that participants perceived as contributing to an imbalance of power between the couple.278 As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, five participants (61%) described having more financial resources than partners (39%). For the seven participants who cohabited with partners, four indicated

278 See Appendix 30 for a comprehensive list of the inequalities in relationships identified by participants.
an equal contribution to household bills, four reported an unequal contribution to household chores, and the majority of six participants indicated unequal decision making in relationships. Concurring with previous research (Ristock, 2003; Watsons & Parsons, 2005), regardless of their financial status, participants reported this aspect of their relationship being used as a source of exploitation and abuse by partners. Some participants suggested that partners were remaining in relationships primarily for a perceived financial gain, as Aoibhinn explains further:

*I kind of felt that she knew I was going to inherit this house and part of her hanging on was for financial reasons*

**Figure 1 Financial resources in relationships**

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279 During the interview, Aoibhinn provided details that her partner had financially exploited previous female partners. With this awareness, she suggested that part of her reason for ending her eight-year relationship was so that her partner could not gain financially from an inheritance she acquired during their relationship.
6.2.2 The participant experience of financial exploitation

Unlike the heterosexual female experience of IPA (Stark, 2007) and consistent with previous work with lesbian samples (Ristock, 2002), having more financial resources did not appear to be an indicator of who was the abuser in the relationship. Like previous research examining abuse in lesbian relationships (Lockhart, et al., 1994), five participants spoke of being victimised even though they had more money and more resources than their abusive partners. Participants provided accounts of how this imbalance in the relationship was used as part of the abuse against them. For example, Aoibhinn described how her partner would demean her profession and gloat about her earning capacity in comparison to Aoibhinn’s, as this next quote illustrates:

*She actually earned a lot more money than I did, and she would be in what would be perceived as quite a public high paying visible job. So, a person would have a certain amount of power...As regards to the relationship, I suppose she would kind of let me know she was the one who was kind of more successful in some ways you know. In her [partner’s] eyes, [Aoibhinn’s profession] aren’t exactly looked at the top of the career ladder you know.*

Renzetti’s (1992) findings that a partner’s relative dependency on one another was the factor most strongly associated with abuse resonated with the current study. Two participants described a relationship dynamic in which there was complete financial dependency and exploitation by the abusive partner. Aoife’s account revealed evidence of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse from her partner. Throughout their six-year

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280 As was demonstrated in Figure 1, four participants described relationship contexts whereby their abusive partners had more financial resources.
relationship, Aoife’s partner was not in receipt of any financial income and was completely dependent on her, as she explains;

Absolutely, absolutely dependent, absolutely yeah [she had no income whatsoever coming in?] None. I mean none, I mean absolutely none, nothing, no (Aoife)

Clodagh was the only participant in the study who declared as self-employed. Through her business, she stated that while she employed her partner, her partner made no financial contribution to the household. The upkeep and maintenance of the home was Clodagh’s sole responsibility, as he explains;

...she never paid any money...she never contributed any money to anything, so it was really a messy relationship

6.2.3 The experience of an unequal sexual dynamic between the couple

Consistent with previous research (Barnes, 2009; Girshick, 2002), three participants provided evidence of the existence of unequal sexual dynamics between the couple. Girshick’s interviews with seventy women (81% lesbian) found that of the ninety-one incidents of sexual violence recorded, forty-two (46%) were in the context of abusive relationships. Mirroring findings from Barnes (2009), participants in this study recalled partners withholding affection to punish. Renzetti (1992) found that 50 per cent of her sample of 100 women reported that sex was withheld. In this study, when a partner withheld sex, participants had to request sex from their partners. This contributed to an unequal sexual dynamic, as the following quote from Aoife explains:

I gave her more than she gave me. I had to ask for stuff, she would never be intuitive about my body or anything, it was like getting into bed with someone new every night because you know when you share a bed with somebody you know your little moments, your erogenous zones and stuff like that, she never did. I would say you know, will you do this, I like it like that, she would never repeat it until I asked, I would have to ask

The experience of types of emotional sexual abuse and coercion in lesbian relationships have been identified in previous work (Barnes, 2009; Girshick, 2002; Ristock, 2002). Donovan and Hester (2014) found that lesbian women were more likely to experience emotionally abusive sexual coercion than gay males and heterosexual males and females in their sample (n=800). Eabha’s account suggests her abusive experience consisted
primarily of emotional sexual abuse where her partner used Eabha’s lesbian identity to control and demean her. Unique to lesbian and bisexual perpetrators, research suggests that internalised homophobia, where a perpetrator is concealing a sexual identity, is positively related to physical, sexual, and psychological IPA perpetration (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Carvalho, et al., 2011). Eabha recalled her partner’s homophobia and her refusal to accept her sexuality by claiming she was ‘straight’ (heterosexual) throughout their long-term relationship. As her next quote demonstrates, instead of focusing attention on herself and addressing issues with accepting her sexuality, her partner focused negative attention onto Eabha’s sexuality by blaming Eabha for her inability to engage sexually during the relationship;

“I’m straight, I don’t know how to do this”, “I don’t know how to have sex with you” ... She didn’t want to touch me that’s the truth, she didn’t want to do anything for me sexually and she made it very much about me – that I was the problem there.

6.2.4 The couple relationship within the context of the LGBT community

Motivated by existing evidence in the field, additional areas of investigation during the interviews included establishing the age of the abusive partner in comparison to the participants age, whether it was a first same sex relationship, and if the abusive partner was more connected with the LGBT community (Donovan, et al., 2014; Irwin, 2013). Recent UK research suggests that if one partner has more LGBT social and cultural capital, what they termed ‘experiential power’, this can position that partner as more powerful in the relationship (Donovan et al., 2014; Donovan & Hester, 2014). However, where power resides in the relationship, is not dependent on the abusive partner being older and more financially secure. Donovan et al. (2014) found evidence for older LGBT individuals being victimised by younger partners who were more experienced sexually, who was out, and who had connections to LGBT peer groups and social settings which the less experienced partner was excluded from. Hence, the researchers argue that in LGBT relationships, “more nuanced experiential forms of power can operate which might subvert more readily identifiable social structural markers of power” (Donovan et al., 2014, p. 26). By way of contrast, studies also report that being older, out for a longer period, and like Donovan et al. (2014), being more connected to the LGBT community, can act as an additional source

281 Balsam and Szymanki (2005) also found internalised homophobia as positively related to sexual IPA victimisation among lesbian and bisexual women.
of power in lesbian relationships (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Ristock, 2003). A US representative sample of 1,925 lesbians reported a correlation between older age and greater prevalence for IPA victimisation (Descamps, et al., 2000). However, these findings could be said to be more indicative of the cumulative experience of IPA over a longer period.

Echoing Ristock’s (2002) findings underscoring the heterogeneous nature of the experience of lesbian IPA, participants in this present study with both older and younger partners were victimised. Saoirse and Ciara described being victimised by older partners who had more financial resources. Aoife, Roisin, and Clodagh had more financial resources yet were victimised by older partners. Both Aoibhinn and Eabha described having fewer financial resources than their younger abusive partners. The example of ‘experiential power’ as set out by Donovan et al., (2014) did not concur with participants in this study. The findings indicate that most of the participants, a total of five, were abused by their older partners.

6.2.5 Examples of the escalation of violent behaviours

Participants in the current study spoke of the constant pattern of abuse, most often this was described as emotional abuse that was daily and occurred throughout the duration of relationships. While four women recalled experiencing abuse before they started living with partners, they cited experiencing an escalation of physical violence when they moved in, when the participant’s child left the shared home, and like other work (Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002; Telesco, 2004), when partners became jealous of their interactions with other women. Jealousy has been reported as a strong correlate of battering behaviours and IPA (Renzetti, 1992; Telesco, 2004). Similar findings report jealousy as a factor in male perpetrated violence in the heterosexual relationships. Capaldi et al. (2012) systematic review for risk factors associated with IPA (physical, psychological and sexual abuse), indicated jealousy in male perpetrators is associated with men’s arrest for IPA and women’s injuries from IPA.

Again similar to heterosexual relationship violence (Stark, 2007), more common responses from participants referring to the escalation of violence in their relationships, occurred when they tried to leave their partners in the final months. There was also commonality amongst the participants that the physical violence increased in frequency and severity over the duration of their relationships. The examples of abuse previously outlined could be
understood as abusive relationship dynamics that are well established in the literature, irrespective of gender and sexuality (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989). However, one participant spoke of a fluctuating power dynamic, where her narrative suggests that power does not reside fully with one person during the relationship, what Ristock (2002) termed ‘relational’ power. Other work from both a victim and service provider perspective also confirms this finding (Irwin, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Ristock, 2003). Niamh described periods in her relationship where she was dealing with a lot of anger toward her abusive partner, as she explains;

For a period of time, I was more afraid of what I might do. I was so angry. I was going from being afraid to being angry and back to being afraid to being angry and being really angry.

In the following extract, Niamh acknowledges that her position in the relationship changed to where she became, what she interpreted as, the abuser. She describes the scene;

I verbally just blasted back at her and I went right up to her, physically, I went right up to her face and I roared at her...there was just suddenly a change and suddenly I was the aggressor for a moment and awe [sigh]...I, I, stopped then I real[sic]...” Oh gosh, I’ve got to stop, get me stuff, get the fuck out of here”.

In her interpretation of her response, Niamh positioned herself as abuser in the relationship. However, her interview data demonstrated that her response was devoid of any pattern of abusive behaviour or attempt to control her partner. As will be discussed further, this form of retaliation was the typical response evidenced by participants. The chapter now moves to discuss the participant response to the abuse and violence they experienced.

6.3 Participants response to abusive behaviours

Before recounting the examples provided by participants regarding their response to violent partners, it is important to acknowledge the contexts of fear which they described living in. Seven participants reported being afraid of their partner during their relationship. Four participants reported receiving repeated threats to physically harm them. These threats occurred in contexts where physical violence had already taken place, and this proved to be an effective tactic employed by the abusive partner to instil fear, as Roisin explains;

...it was always going through my head, “What if she does it again?” I was afraid then. I was afraid to say something out of turn. I was afraid to say something sarcastic in case she picked it up wrong. I started being afraid when I was in her presence (Roisin)
Participants were asked about their response to the abusive behaviour in the relationship. As Table 14 demonstrates, they provided a range of answers to this question. The most common non-violent response was avoidance, this entailed leaving their homes to stay with family and friends, remaining silent, accepting the behaviour, sleeping in their car or a bed and breakfast, and going for a drive. Similar avoidance strategies have been found in studies exploring the differences between heterosexual and lesbian women and their experience of physical and sexual violence. Bernhard (2000, p. 68) describes these as “passive strategies” that have limited value for victims.

### Table 14 Participant response to abusive behaviour

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<th>Participant response to abusive behaviours</th>
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<th>P7</th>
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<td>sought professional help</td>
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<td>confronted partner about her abuse</td>
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<td>felt like hitting back</td>
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<td>direct anger at objects</td>
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Four participants described experiences of retaliating physically against their partners by pushing and pulling, kicking, punching, restraining, slapping, and in one case, threatening a partner with a weapon (knife). Three women asserted that they sought professional help during the relationship, primarily from couple counselling support services. They spoke about verbally confronting partners about their behaviour and trying to communicate with partners to get the abuse to stop. Two women disclosed that they wanted to hit back but instead they directed their anger at objects. Other responses included threatening to leave the relationship in an attempt to get a partner to stop her abusive behaviour.

Interestingly, behaviours used by participants who reported hitting back, are markedly different to those behaviours they reported experiencing.\(^\text{282}\) For example, while the participants described experiencing a wide range of emotionally abusive behaviour, the behaviours participants used to respond to the violence are devoid of any pattern of

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\(^{282}\) See Appendix 31 A note on abusive partner’s behaviours.
emotional or controlling behaviours and could be interpreted as acts of self-defence. Previous research has established that heterosexual women’s violence is often committed in self-defence (Kimmel, 2002). As part of the critique levelled at quantitative investigations of IPA, researchers have argued for the inclusion of motive, context, and impact in the analysis of both male and female same sex IPA to establish if the abusive behaviour is resulting in a context of fear and control (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Girshick, 2002; McCarr, et al., 2008; Ristock, 1994). To flesh out the previous finding that participants fought back, it was necessary to examine firstly, the context in which the abusive response took place, secondly, their motivation for hitting back, and finally, the impact of retaliation on the participants.

6.3.1 Contexts of retaliation

Michael Johnson argues it is no longer acceptable to speak of IPA “without specifying, loudly and clearly, the type of violence to which we refer” (Johnson, 2005, p. 1126). Not being able to understand and account for the context of a partner’s retaliation has been a major critique levelled at IPA research, particularly those employing the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) or what has been described as an acts-based approach (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). This approach has informed empirical research that suggests violence in relationships is symmetrical (Straus, 2005), where both partners are held equally responsible for the violence (Steinmetz, 1977), and where violence in lesbian relationships is conceptualised as ‘mutual combat’ (Marrujo & Kreger, 1996). Hence, researchers exploring SSIPA argue that an understanding of the context in which retaliation occurs is crucial to understand why the violence has occurred (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Girshick, 2002; Irwin, 2013; Ristock, 2002).

Participants in this study were asked questions to establish the context in which they reported fighting back against an abusive partner. Two main themes emerged from the analysis, contexts of escalating violence and contexts where participants indicated they were ending relationships. Three participants indicated that their decision to retaliate was within the context of escalating abuse during the relationship. They described how their retaliation occurred typically at the end of the relationship and when they had informed partners that they were leaving. The third and final year of Caomhe’s relationship which she described as “that last year it was constant, constant black eyes, constant kicking”, she spoke of an awareness that her partner’s mental health was deteriorating. The quote below
presents a picture of the severe and prolonged physical attacks that Caoimhe was subjected to and a level of violence that eventually compelled her to physically fight back for her own protection and safety. This response, Johnson and Ferraro (2000) would categorise as violent resistance (VR). Caoimhe’s relationship experience can be best understood as one of ‘intimate terrorism’ (Johnson, 2006):

The more strange that [partner’s mental health] became the worse the beatings would come because before when she’d beat me she might punch me like three or four times, then she would feel bad and stop, and then, then it just came to a point where she wouldn’t feel bad, she wouldn’t stop, she’d keep going, she’d keep going until I blacked out, and then I started punching back (Caoimhe)

For two participants, their retaliation was described as a single event and in both cases, it occurred on the day the relationship finished in a context of escalating violence. For Aoife, it was the first time she physically responded over a six-year period, in a relationship context where the violence began before she moved in with her partner. Her response was categorised according to Johnson and Ferraro’s (2000) typology as ‘violent resistance’. Niamh described retaliating twice during her three-year relationship. In agreement with Johnson (2006), this example of retaliation could be understood as ‘situational couple violence’ (SCV) where both partners used violence but where it is not occurring often, unconnected to control, and unlikely to escalate or involve serious injury. Finally, two participants reported responding physically more than twice. For Clodagh, her experience was also categorised as SCV (Johnson, 2006). However, as will be shown in the following section, for Caoimhe, her motivation (violent resistance) was in the context of preventing a sexually violent assault.

6.3.2 Motivation for fighting back

There is a relatively small body of literature, including clinical data, that is concerned with the motivations of lesbian abusers and victims (Donovan et al., 2014; Marrujo & Kreger, 283 Violent resistance (VR), where one partner becomes controlling or frightening, the other partner may respond with violence in self-defence. This type of violence occurs in response to a perceived threat, may be a one-time event, and is not a part of control and manipulation. The authors do not call this type of response self-defence, noting, in general, courts view this term to mean whatever is defined by State law. 284 Previous known as ‘common couple violence’ (Johnson, 1995).
In a list of the top ten reasons to use abusive behaviour in same sex relationship contexts, Donovan et al. (2014) reported: being unhappy in the relationship, not feeling good enough/felt insecure, to retaliate, and because of emotional problems (joint third reason) as the top three answers provided by their LGBT respondents (n=872). Langhinrichsen-Rohling, et al. (2012) reviewed seventy-three empirical studies to ascertain what motivates partners to perpetrate IPA and to establish if such motivations differ between men and women. The author’s hypothesis that men report perpetrating violence as a means of power and control more frequently than women was only partially supported. The review also found that self-defence as a motive for perpetration was more common for women than for men. The review indicates that women also use violence similar to male perpetrator motivations, such as, to retaliate, to express anger, and to control.

Participants in this study who indicated that they fought back against a partner were asked questions to establish their motivation for the retaliation. Table 15 provides an overview of the responses given by interviewees. The majority indicated they reacted in self-defence. Data from other studies indicate that heterosexual women’s violence in relationships is motivated by fear and self-defense against aggressive male partners (Kimmel, 2002; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2008). Mirroring previous findings (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012), in two cases, participants reported that they intentionally wanted to harm their partners. Other responses regarding retaliation included to restrain, to remove a partner from their home, to obtain some peace from the abusive behaviours, and to prevent a sexual assault. Participants also indicated that motivation for retaliation was the result of contexts where they had enough of the partner’s abusive behaviour. This was typically after a prolonged period of abuse and an escalation in the severity of violence.

285 Marrujo and Kreger (1996) analysed clinical data derived from the private treatment of 62 lesbian clients who self-identified as either victims or perpetrators of IPA.
286 Other reasons reported include: 4th because you didn’t know what else to do; 5th to protect yourself; 6th because they betrayed/rejected you; 7th because you didn’t trust them; 8th because you were unhappy in work/life; and joint 9th because you loved/cared for them and because they hit you first.
None of the participant’s motivations suggests that they were trying to control their partners by their use of physical violence. Apart from the two cases where women indicated they wanted to physically harm, which could be interpreted as ‘situational couple violence’, again without the context of control, the remaining examples are defined as ‘violent resistance’ with the primary objective of wanting the abuse to stop (Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Furthermore, unlike partners who did not take responsibility for their behaviour and who blamed participants for their use of violent behaviour, the participants expressed their feelings of emotional turmoil and guilt following a violent retaliation. The next section elaborates on this point.

### 6.3.3 Impact of retaliation on participants

As previously mentioned, asking questions to establish impact alongside context and motivation in abusive relationships furnishes the analyst with additional layers to understand the complex phenomenon of IPA. Participants were asked how they felt in the aftermath of their physical retaliation. As can be seen from Table 15, their responses provide further evidence that their fighting back was not connected to establishing or maintaining control and power in the relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive for retaliation</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self-defense</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intentional act to cause harm</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had enough to prevent sexual assault</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lost control to remove partner from home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanted peace to restrain partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 Motive for retaliation
Conversely, the participants spoke of feeling frightened, guilty, confused, angry, and equally to blame for the abuse in the relationship. The following quote from Caoimhe confirms this point:

*I just turned around and I just reacted, and I fucking punched her back. I didn’t punch her in the face, I punched her in the stomach, and I felt so guilty like I felt so guilty [whispers], I cried and cried, and I apologised, and I thought, “God, am I just as bad as her now?” [Pause], and [pause] that was the worst feeling you know that I had reacted like that* (Caoimhe)

Other participants recalled seeking professional support in the aftermath of a physical retaliation, and concurring with Girshick (2002), another participant claimed that the abuse stopped temporarily after she responded with violence.

The evidence provided by the current study suggests that participants who reported ‘fighting back’ were doing so primarily to defend themselves. Two women stated they wanted to intentionally harm their partner. Their physical response was not part of an effort to control their partners and occurred with no frequency or pattern during the relationship. One pattern established in the study for ‘fighting back’ was within contexts of escalated violence and when a relationship was ending. The two examples in the study defined as ‘situational couple violence’ still involved a primary aggressor in the relationship. In contrast to the literature supporting the idea that violence in lesbian relationships is constituted by ‘mutual abuse’ (Marrujo & Kreger, 1996), the current study did not find any evidence to describe the abusive behaviours as symmetrical or ‘mutual abuse’ and would define the behaviour of participants as primarily acting in self-defence, what Johnson and Ferrero (2000) describe as ‘violent resistance’.

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**Table 16 Impact of retaliation on participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retaliation - impact</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>felt frightened</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>felt angry</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feels confused about her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feels guilty about her response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sought professional help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>felt equally to blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuse stopped temporarily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Notes: * indicates frequency of occurrence.*
In keeping with the objectives of this study to capture the experience of lesbian intimate partner abuse, the second part of this chapter moves to discuss the impacts associated with experiencing IPA for the nine participants both during and post-relationships.

### 6.4 Impact of an abusive relationship

Minimal research focuses on the impact (Barnes, 2013) and the recovery processes for survivors of IPA (Flasch, et al., 2017) for both lesbian and heterosexual women. The current study addressed this gap in the literature and employed questions to understand the impact of experiencing an abusive relationship over three stages. The study captured impact during relationships, impact post-relationship, and the longer-term impacts associated with experiencing an abusive relationship. A total of forty-seven items to explain impacts during the relationship were identified across the sample.\(^{287}\)

Figures 3, 4 and 5 portray the key impacts identified by the participants. Interestingly, four participants understood their abusive experience as having a positive long-term impact on themselves. These impacts reported by participants are expanded upon in the subsequent sections, beginning first with a description of impacts reported on mental and physical well-being.

**Figure 3 Key impacts during relationships**

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\(^{287}\) See Appendix 32 for a comprehensive list of impacts on participants during the relationship. 26 items were captured to explain post-relationship impact (See Appendix 33), and 11 items for long-term impacts (See Appendix 34).
6.4.1 Impact on mental and physical health (during & post-relationship)

The existing research suggests that survivors of IPA may experience negative consequences from their abusive experiences such as longer-term impacts that include mental health symptoms (depression and PTSD), long-term physical health effects, negative career and educational outcomes, and an increased risk of experiencing additional abusive relationships (Tjaden & Thonnes, 2000; World Health Organisation, 2012). Similar to participants in this study, lesbian victims report countless psychological, physical, and social consequences of their IPA victimisation (Descamps et al., 2000; Irwin, 2008; Walters, et al., 2013).
Participants spoke of impacts *during* their relationships that affected their mental and physical well-being. Regarding the impact on mental health, five out of the nine women disclosed that they felt unable to cope, they blamed themselves for the abuse, felt anxious, nervous, and stressed, felt stupid and embarrassed, felt depressed and lethargic, and felt that they had to monitor what they said and did. Half of the sample felt suicidal during their relationship, with two women giving accounts of attempting suicide. Irwin’s (2008) Australian study reported similar findings. Consistent with previous work (Turell & Herrmann, 2008; Walters, 2011), participants further reported undesirable feelings such as confusion, anger, shock, shame, and powerlessness during their relationships. Four participants expressed the opinion that they felt anger toward their partner for their mistreatment. However, for one participant, her anger was more focused on her potential to harm her partner, as Niamh explains:

> I was afraid of my anger because I felt it was much more focused and that if I actually let go of myself, sometimes she was you know in, in, in your face, you know following me around the house, going, going, going, going, that if I, if I let go that I could fucking kill her you know

Mirroring Girshick’s (2002) findings, the women’s narratives suggest that they disassociated from the abuse by blocking it out and not taking time to process what was happening. Sleeping and eating patterns were affected during their relationships with two women describing experiencing significant weight gain that they associated with their partner’s abusive behaviour. This disruption of eating and sleeping patterns is established in the literature as an abusive tactic used in lesbian IPA (Poorman, 2001; Scherzer, 1998). Scherzer found eighty (31%) of her lesbian sample (n=256) reported having their eating and sleeping habits disrupted as part of the physically abusive behaviour directed toward them.

Participants also described the experience of an emotional breakdown during the relationships. Both emotional shutdown and disassociation were understood by the participants as a mechanism to cope and as a means of self-protection from the abusive behaviour (Girshick, 2002). However, not dealing with the abuse and blocking it out, led to one participant to experiencing what she described as negative physical health problems. Concurring with the existing research (Tjaden & Thonnes, 2000; World Health
Organisation, 2012), Aoibhinn, attributed her decrease in physical well-being to, “I was denying it [abusive behaviour] to the point it was really hurting me”. During her interview, Aoibhinn explained that she received a diagnosis of chronic fatigue which she attributed to her being in an abusive relationship. Overall, the abusive behaviours impact on mental health contributed to a negative self-perception and issues with self-esteem as described by the participants.

In their examination of the prevalence of LGBT IPA and sexual violence in a US national sample (Walters et al., 2013), nightmares were included as an impact associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms to measure IPA. In terms of impact on physical health, participants in this study spoke of self-harming and experiencing nightmares and insomnia during their relationships. As previously indicated, Aoibhinn incurred a diagnosis during her relationship which she directly related to the abusive experience, that she claimed, “undermined my whole immune system”. Two other participants spoke of receiving a diagnosis during their relationships which they attributed to the abusive relationship. One of these participants, Saoirse, had an existing diagnosis that increased in effect during the relationship. She understood the relationship as a factor in the increased impact of her diagnosis as the effects and medication of the diagnosis were no longer required when her relationship ended, as she explains;

...it was really tough. I wasn’t allowed drive for six months because the shakes were too bad, you know things like that. As I said, the last two years I haven’t, I’m not on medication, I’m not on anything [and were you on daily medication before this?] yeah [for how long?] say maybe over a year yeah

National US study’s include ‘missing days from work or college’ as an item to measure the impact of IPA (Walters et al., 2013). In this study, one participant reported failing her third level degree course. In this next quote, Caoimhe recalled being unable to attend college throughout her three-year relationship because of the physical violence she was subjected to;

I ended up taking loads of time off college. I failed college because I would’ve gone in, but she would give me black eyes sometimes and I wouldn’t want to go in to college. So, I wouldn’t go in and then I failed.

The negative impact on mental and physical well-being was reported to continue post-relationship. Five women reported feelings of anger post-relationship that included feeling
anger about their partner’s behaviour toward them. Anger was also expressed where participants felt they allowed the abuse to happen, anger for remaining in the relationship, anger for not retaliating, and anger that they never formally reported to the police and to medical professionals or disclosed the abuse to family and friends. During her interview, Saoirse disclosed her reasons for not telling anybody about the abuse she endured;

*She swore me to secrecy… [What do you mean she swore you to secrecy?] She asked me not to tell people, she didn’t want people knowing what she done because they’d think she was a monster.*

Women spoke of periods of depression and clinical depression post-relationship where the full impact of their experience was understood once they had time to reflect on what had happened. During this time, women isolated themselves from family, friends, and the LGBT community. They also stated they remained silent on their experience. Aoife described her experience as “post-traumatic stress” when her relationship ended. She described the experience of a period of clinical depression and not being able to leave her home. Consistent with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) impacts identified by Walters, et al. (2013), Aoibhinn described feeling increased vulnerability post-relationship, when the full weight of her abusive experience ’hit home’, as this quote illustrates;

*I started letting that knowledge of the abuse and the fear that I had of her actually kind of hit home more and so then I actually felt more vulnerable and really just didn’t want her near me*

As previously mentioned, women described experiencing a loss of self-confidence and self-worth. There would be wide consensus in the literature related to this finding (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Turell, 1999). Two participants received a diagnosis of clinical depression, for one woman, this was a repeat diagnosis. Other mental health impacts experienced post-relationship included experiencing both a destructive and a positive impact on the self, disassociation, and feelings of embarrassment, sadness, regret, and shame. In terms of physical health, participants experienced headaches, constipation,

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The authors classified PTSD as, having nightmares; trying hard not to think about it or avoiding being reminded of it; feeling constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled; feeling numb or detached from others, activities, or surroundings.
and described experiences of panic in social spaces. Two participants described the experience of agoraphobia. Aoife recounted the personal difficulty she experienced over a prolonged period after her abusive relationship ended,

...it took me two years to be able to get out of my house socially...I took the cooker with me from the cottage and it was eighteen months before I was comfortable enough to let anybody come in and install it in the house - that’s how bad I was, and all the windows, all the curtains onto the front of the house where I live now, they stayed closed for two years, and last year was the first time I actually opened the blinds in the sitting room. So, we’re talking, talking major, major impact, we’re not talking walk away and that’s great.

Studies report that heterosexual women may cope with sexual assault by self-medicating with alcohol and/or drugs and engage in casual sexual activity (Lonsway & Archambault, 2017). Although this type of destructive behaviour can put the individual at risk of further harm, the behaviour can be understood as an attempt to reclaim control over their lives following a traumatic experience. Participants stipulated that they engaged in self-destructive behaviour including excessive drinking and drug taking, promiscuous sexual activity, and suicidality. One participant described self-harming when her relationship ended. The following testimonies from participants describe their experience of this period;

I would say mental health yeah, depression, quite severe depression...I certainly would have been [deep breath in] suicidal. Now, I never actually wanted to kill myself, but I wanted something to change and so more self-harming (Eabha)

Didn’t give a feck what I got involved with or who I got involved with and yeah [deep breath in], drinking too much [exhale], smoking too much [exhale] and no kind of, no self-worth or value or just, chugging along (Ciara)

Five women reported self-blame as an impact post-relationship.289 Caoimhe explained that she felt so isolated in her experience of sexual abuse from a female having never heard of this type of perpetration from her friends, despite her friends also having “traumatic experiences”. Resonating with previous work (Barnes, 2008), Caoimhe felt that her experience was so remote and unconnected to any prior knowledge she had around sexual abuse, that the problem must reside within her. The following quotes demonstrate the point:

Like I mean a lot of my friends have had something happen you know, have had traumatic experiences in their lives and have spoken to me about it. But they’d never been with a woman who had did something like that [rape] to them or got off on it you know, and I

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289 This finding is discussed further in Chapter 7, see section 7.1.6 ‘Contexts of a previous abuse history’
always thought maybe, maybe there’s something wrong with me…Well that’s what I thought, I thought I was attracting the abuse (Caoimhe)

Caoimhe’s last quote highlights the invisibility of female perpetrated sexual violence within her peer group and this denied Caoimhe the opportunity to talk through and make sense of her experiences. Previous work has drawn attention to the lack of language available to survivors to explain the experience of female perpetrated sexual abuse and the need to develop a language and framework to discuss such abuse (Barnes, 2008; Miner, 2003). Like the participants in Barnes (2008) study, the lack of language to explain sexual violence perpetrated by a female partner inhibited participants in coming to terms with their violent experiences.

One of the key impacts identified during relationships was that the experience of violence and abuse impacted upon the sexual side of relationships. The next section demonstrates that this specific impact had far-reaching effects for participants that continued over prolonged periods.

6.4.2 Impact on sexual intimacy during relationships

Like previous research examining sexual violence in female to female intimate relationships (Barnes, 2009; Girshick, 2002), seven participants spoke of the difficulty they had with sexual intimacy with partners while the abuse was ongoing. Aoibhinn related her experience of physical abuse as impacting negatively on the sexual side of her relationship, as her next quote explains:

*I mean, I knew that I stopped feeling sexually attracted to her when you know, particularly from the first physical abuse. I mean we did share a bed sometimes but less and less, it became more of a non-sexual lesbian relationship you know asexual…I just didn’t want the sexual relationship* (Aoibhinn)

Throughout Caoimhe’s three-year relationship she described experiencing ongoing sexual violence and rape from her partner. Caoimhe recalled how she employed tactics to distance herself from her partner and prevent a sexual assault, such as insisting on having a separate bedroom. This next quote is a response to an interview question asked about her insistence on a separate sleeping space. It further evidences the PTSD symptoms she experienced during her relationship (Walters et al., 2013):
The fact that I didn’t want to be with her...I had said to her that it was because of the flashbacks at night [flashbacks from a childhood sexual assault] and I mean I did have flashbacks at night, I wasn’t completely fibbing about it either you know, and then I was suffering with nightmares, and then I had insomnia and I’d say the insomnia was probably more to do with her. I was totally stressed out, so I did have a space of my own.

Saoirse explained that without the influence of alcohol she couldn’t engage intimately with her partner. The quote below also highlights the emotional abuse Saoirse experienced and the associated negative impact on her self-perception, as she recalls;

*Even in bed like I’d never be comfortable, I’d be always uncomfortable. If anything ever was to happen [sexually] between us, it was probably more than likely when I had drink on me because just then your kind of, not as kind of you know aware. It’s just the way she made me feel about myself. I hated myself.* (Saoirse)

6.4.3 Impact on sexual intimacy post-relationship

It became apparent during interviews, that the difficulties reported with sexual intimacy during the abusive relationships continued to be problematic post-relationship and had longer-term effects for participants. For some, they reported refraining from sexual intimacy over extended periods of their lives, particularly in cases where women experienced sexual violence from partners. These findings concur with the experience of heterosexual women (Campbell, et al., 2004). At the time of the interview, three women in the sample specified they were unable to engage in an intimate relationship or any sexual intimacy since their abusive experience. Most participants disclosed that abstaining from sexual activity was directly related to their abusive relationship experience. The existing research recognises that fear of encountering abuse in future relationships hampers women’s efforts to rebuild their lives following an abusive relationship experience (Evans & Lindsay, 2008). Most participants described the experience of an amplified sense of caution prior to engaging in a new relationship, instead opting for a ‘friends first’ approach before engaging in intimacy, as Roisin explains;

*I meet somebody it’s always the case of...I’m more sort of about building up kind of a relationship first, a friendship first before a relationship because you get to know somebody better that way rather than jumping straight into bed with them* (Roisin)

Participants provided a detailed account of the measures that would have to be in place before being intimate with a new partner. Caoimhe experienced her first abusive
relationship between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Following this experience, she stated that it was ten years before she could engage sexually with another woman, and even then, she put certain safety measures in place, as this next extract illustrates;

*I wouldn’t go home to their space, it would have to be in my space where I knew I had housemates nearby, you know there’d have to be like certain conditions or I’d have to know them a wee while*

As previously mentioned, three women re-counted how they never engaged in another relationship after their abusive experience, as Aoife explains;

*The overall effect is that I will never have another relationship again. Never no. I’ve only had sexual flings in the last six years, I will not commit to another relationship EVER... It, it is sad, but I will never ever commit to another relationship ever.*

Research with heterosexual women demonstrates victims may lose interest in or reject sex after an assault, or they may become promiscuous when this was not previously their typical behaviour (Campbell, et al., 2004). Large national studies report that mental health consequences of IPA for heterosexual women can include emotional detachment and engagement in risky behaviours (Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, 2012). In this study, there was some divergence in the sample related to the impact on sexual intimacy following an abusive relationship experience. Dissimilar to the participants in the study who refrained from sexual intimacy over prolonged periods, and from those who abstained entirely, Ciara described experiencing a change in her sexual behaviour post-relationship. Her experience of a sexual assault by a female partner who was fifteen years older “completely, completely and utterly violated” Ciara. Post-relationship, she explained that her sexual behaviour changed. She was promiscuous both in and outside of relationships, as she explains;

*I was rather promiscuous for the want of a better expression and probably engaging in not very healthy kind of relationships, you know kind of one-night stands and just pure fucking stupidity when ya look back on it you now* (Ciara)

She recalls in the quote below, that her promiscuity while engaging in a relationship would not have been in her nature prior to her abusive experience;

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290 Other impacts reported include depression, PTSD, and suicidal feelings.
...prior to that [sexual assault], I’d had a four-year happy, normal relationship, no messing outside you know. (Ciara)

Yet for Ciara, her promiscuity did not necessitate sexual gratification as she was unable to accept intimacy in future relationships;

Yeah, I was [deep sigh], I was fairly promiscuous, but I wasn’t, I wasn’t receiving kind of any sexual gratification, I was giving if you understand

As her next quote makes evident, her change in approach to sexual intimacy and behaviour lasted over an extended period, as she recalled,

I would say it was [pause], I’d say it was four to six years before I’d accept intimacy yeah...where I felt comfortable enough when anybody kind of touched like that.\textsuperscript{291}

The abuse women experienced also impacted upon their relationships with their children, these impacts are discussed next.

6.4.4 Impact on relationships with children

Heterosexual mothers experiences of IPA are well established in the literature (Levendosky, et al.,2000). Hardesty, et al. (2008) argue that, with the exception of Renzetti (1988) and Scherzer (1998), research on lesbian IPA largely overlooks the fact that women in same sex relationships may also be mothers. Scherzer’s (1998) quantitative study with a qualitative component found that 14 per cent of respondents reported female partners abusing both their children or their own. In the present study, mothers gave accounts of trying to protect their children from violence. Two participants in the sample were biological mothers and one woman had a dependent child at the time of interview. Saoirse gave an account of an abusive relationship that both impacted negatively on her child and on her relationship with her child. In accordance with Hardesty, et al. (2008), her relationship with her young child is categorised as a ‘hider’ as she tried to shield her young child from the violence she experienced.

\textsuperscript{291} In conversations with Ciara post-interview, she explained that she felt a great deal of anger after engaging with the interview. She explained that she never thought about the impact of the sexual assault in terms of the number of years it had affected her. She expressed the opinion that she only realised this after engaging in the interview process and consequently this was a source of anger for her.
Concurring with Hardesty et al., (2008), Saoirse partner’s relationship with her child could be classified as ‘co-parent’ as both partners were actively and positively involved in raising the child. Saoirse reported her child had a strong and positive attachment to her partner and that this influenced her decision to allow visitation after the relationship ended. The co-parent, in this case, did not directly abuse Saoirse’s child. However, unlike Hardesty et al.’s (2008) co-parent findings, Saoirse’s partner did not hide the abuse from the child as Saoirse explained her child witnessed multiple violent incidences. For Saoirse, the ending of her abusive relationship was the beginning of her establishing a bond with her biological child, as she explains;

> Like, this is a big thing, and I’m not proud of it but for the first two years, so [child] was two and a half, nearly three I suppose... I didn’t bond with [child] properly all that time because [child] would say, “can I sit”, you know she’d come up on my lap, [Partner] would say, “Oh come on, come up on my lap now – be with me” and I allowed it you know. I was stupid to allow that. When I look back and I only realised all these things when we broke up.

For Saoirse, establishing a bond with her biological child occurred when her abusive relationship ended, as she recalls,

> ...myself and [child], I really feel like we’ve a mother and [child] relationship now, we get on really, really well and we have... [Emotional], I never got to do that when I was with [partner] because she would just take over you know.

Aoife’s child lived with her and her partner for a period during their relationship. She described experiencing an escalation of violence when her child moved out of the home. Aoife claimed her partner was not fond of her daughter. In accordance with Hardesty et al.’s (2008) typology, her partner’s relationship with her child is categorised as ‘non-parent’ as she was not actively involved in the child’s life. Consistent with Hardesty and colleague’s findings, Aoife’s partner timed the violence to coincide with the child being out of the home. Aoife’s narrative regarding her relationship with her now adult child could be described as a ‘communicator’ (Hardesty et al., 2008) as she acknowledged her partner’s violence and her child’s concerns and communicated with her child about the ongoing abuse. The quote below highlights the constant reinforcing Aoife felt she was compelled to do to demonstrate her loyalty to her child over her partner:

> Every week, almost every week, I would go to [child] and I would sit on the bed and I would say, “You come first, you always come first, and you need to know that”.

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As was previously indicated, participants understood their experience of IPA as having a positive impact on their sense of self. The final part of this chapter expands upon this finding.

6.4.5 Positive impact on the self: post-relationship

The findings in this section of the chapter concur with a recent phenomenological study that investigated the key factors in the recovery process from IPA (Flasch, et al., 2017). Interviews with 123 participants who had overcome abusive relationships, found positive recovery was related to both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. The author’s found that intrapersonal processes were associated with regaining and recreating one’s own life, embracing the freedom and power to direct one’s own life, determining whether and how to enter new relationships, and healing from the mental and physical health symptoms of abuse. Interpersonal processes comprised building positive social supports and relationships and using one’s experience to help others.

In this study, four participants spoke of experiencing a positive impact post-relationship. Consistent with the intrapersonal processes established by Flasch et al. (2017), participants reported experiencing feelings of happiness, feeling free from fear, and experiencing independence. Clodagh stated she was twenty-two when she began a twenty-six-year abusive relationship in which both partners were concealing their lesbian identities. Leaving the relationship as a forty-eight-year-old woman was for Clodagh her first experience of living independently and living without fear, as this quote illustrates;

> It was the first time I’d lived on me own ever because I’d came straight from me Mams house, and then to live with her like down the track you know, and it was the first time and I felt really independent. I began to enjoy the house because she wasn’t around, and I wasn’t terrified of her coming in (Clodagh)

Concurring with the interpersonal process of building positive social support as a key factor in the recovery process (Flasch, et al., 2017), a positive support identified in this study was

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292 Interviews were conducted with females (95.1%) and males (4.9%), participants in same sex relationships comprised 4.9% of the sample.
the ability to re-connect with the LGBT community. Under pressure and coercion from
her partner, Eabha described being forced to conceal her lesbian identity during their
relationship. ‘Homophobic control’ or ‘identity abuse’ as a tactic to control is well-
established in the LIPA literature (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hart, 1986; Lindhorst, et al.,
2010; West, 1998). Eabha described feeling an intense sense of connection with the LGB
community prior to her relationship. During interview, she spoke with pride of her
association and activism in the early days of the LGB movement in Ireland, as she
recounted;

Well, I’d been very out, very active, I’d been part of the [LGB publication] ...I was part of
that, so I was really politically out, and it gave me great community, sense of community
and strength

For thirteen years, Eabha disconnected from the LGBT community. Under pressure from
her partner, she declined offers of career-enhancing employment because it was within the
LGB sector. When her relationship ended, she described reconnecting with the LGBT
community by joining a social group which she stated, “saved my life”. Eabha’s expression
of her sexual identity was no longer restricted and regulated by her partner which meant
she could return to her position as an openly gay woman, as she reflects here;

Well we weren’t in a relationship anymore, so I didn’t have to protect her not being in a
relationship with me, so [laughs] I could be lesbian again you know, and openly

One participant spoke of her abusive relationship experience as having a positive impact
on her professional practice. As a police officer, Roisin described having more empathy
and compassion and having a fuller understanding of the complexities of ‘domestic
violence’ (her terminology) in the aftermath of her abusive experience. Roisin’s experience
is compatible with the interpersonal processes identified by Flasch et al. (2017) suggesting
that recovery from IPA involves using one’s experience with abuse to help others. Roisin
spoke of providing support options and talking them through with victims and providing
follow up and additional options to make a complaint. The quote below also suggests that
her professional practice underwent a positive change from her previous interactions with
domestic violence house calls:

There is a divergence in the sample on this point. Other participants described being isolated from the
LGBT community post-relationship due to their partners claiming victimisation when the relationship ended. In other examples, participants isolated themselves rather than answer awkward questions about the relationship ending.
I have more compassion going to these calls...yeah as opposed to a card going this is what you do...I’m more willing to go back a second time and ring them up sort of a week later and go, “Have you thought...”, like normally, like it’s a case you’d walk out the house, nobody wants to make a complaint all the rest and that was it, “Whoo hoo happy days” that was it for us [police]. I’m more willing to kind of ring back a week later and go, “How are you now?” Do you still not want to make a complaint? Is there anything else happened that you want me to note?” I’m more willing to just kind of be a little bit more involved rather than just going that’s that job done – tick you know

Research with women who make a positive recovery from the experience of IPA suggests that interpersonal processes of building positive relationships are a key factor in their recovery process (Flasch et al., 2017). In general, participants in this study spoke of subsequent healthy relationships with women as having a primary role in their healing processes following an abusive experience. Two women in the sample were in a long-term monogamous relationship at the time of interview. Ciara spoke of her sixteen-year relationship with her partner which she exclaimed played a primary role in her healing from a sexual assault with a female partner, as she recalls;

…I suppose with [partner] em kind of sexually I got back to, to a normal healthy kind of, not just one-sided sexual relationship, she fixed me that way

Additional findings regarding the experience of a positive impact post-relationship, comprised of feeling like a changed person and moving from a position of weakness to a position of strength. This finding is consistent with the intrapersonal processes identified by Flasch et al. (2017) suggesting that regaining and recreating one’s own life is a key factor in recovery from IPA. In two cases, participants gave accounts of experiencing two abusive relationships. Their accounts provide evidence of learning from their experiences by recognising the warning signs of an abusive relationship. In both cases, the participants ended their relationships immediately after experiencing a physical assault.

**Conclusion: Chapter six**

This chapter has shown that heteronormative values infused and shaped the participant’s understandings of abuse in relationships, positioned partners in gendered stereotypical roles, and influenced partners expectations associated with roles within the relationship. Concurring with previous work (Barnes, 2008; Miner, 2003), the findings from this study
suggest the need to develop a language and framework to discuss female perpetrated sexual violence as a means to assist women who are sexually abused by other women.

Participants marginalised identity status created a unique manifestation of power in relationships. The experience of ‘homophobic control’ (Hart, 1986) also described as ‘identity abuse’ (Donovan & Hester, 2014) and its longer-term impact, would be devoid of any potential to harm were it not for the socio-cultural context that reinforces heteronormativity. Moreover, more nuanced forms of power existed within participant’s relationships that did not correlate with typical social structural markers of power in heterosexual relationships. There was evidence that power does not fully reside with one person over the duration of the relationship and can be described as what Ristock (2002) terms ‘relational’ power. Having said that, when participants retaliated, there was no evidence of any pattern of ongoing controlling behaviour. The participants’ behaviour and their motivation for retaliation were markedly different from that of their partners. Similar to other work (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hart, 1986a; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1997), in this study, the participant’s experience of IPA was not characterised as ‘mutual abuse’. The abusive experience in the relationships were categorised as ‘situational couple violence’ and ‘violent resistance’ (Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000).

The experience of IPA created a series of impacts during, post-relationship, and longer-term that affected participants mental and physical well-being, their ability to engage sexually in future intimate relationships, and negatively impacted on their relationships with their biological children. In terms of a positive impact, participants spoke of both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that assisted with a positive recovery from IPA (Flasch et al., 2017).

One of the objectives of the current study is to capture how participants made sense of their abusive experiences. The next chapter focuses on the participants’ meaning-making processes and how they understood the abuse occurring in their relationships.
CHAPTER SEVEN: MEANING MAKING: MAKING SENSE OF ABUSE IN RELATIONSHIPS

As demonstrated in the methodology chapter, the conduct of an interpretative phenomenological analysis involves a long and complex process where the researcher strives to make sense of their participant’s narratives. A central focus is placed on examining the participant’s lived experience and how they made sense of what was happening to them (Smith, et al., 2009). Therefore, this third findings chapter converges on the theme of meaning-making. Two main themes emerged from the participant accounts regarding their understanding of the abusive relationship. The themes comprised firstly, a focus on the self, the partner, and the relationship, and secondly, participants acknowledged specific contexts of heterosexism and homophobia as influencing their understanding of the abuse in their relationships.294

The chapter proceeds by exploring the first part of theme number one, a focus on the self.295

7.1 A focus on the self

7.1.1 The experience of self-blame

In their attempt to comprehend and make sense of their abusive experience, eight out of the nine participants provided examples of looking inward and self-blaming as a mechanism to understand their partner’s abusive behaviour. Table 17 demonstrates the main areas identified by the participants that confirm this finding. An abusive partner’s constant criticism and verbal aggression are actions that can cause a victim to be fearful and can lead to experiences of low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is identified in the existing heterosexual research as a negative consequence of emotional/psychological abuse (O’Leary, 1999). This tendency for lesbian victims to self-blame concurs with other work (Barnes, 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Renzetti, 1992). Patzel (2006) found both lesbian

294 See Appendix 16 Superordinate theme 3: Making sense of an abusive relationship.
295 See Appendix 37 for an illustration of the wide-ranging list of themes allied with participants meaning-making.
and heterosexual respondents reported self-blaming in response to IPA. In the current study the following responses were typical across the sample;

*That is the mind fuck of domestic violence because you actually believe you are the problem that is the mind fuck* (Aoife)

*I always felt somewhat it was my fault. I came away from it all saying it was my fault* (Saoirse)

### Table 17 A focus on the self*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on the self</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>self-blame</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>low of self-esteem/confidence</td>
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<td>powerless</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* See Appendix 35 for a comprehensive list of items associated with ‘a focus on the self’

For participants who were concealing their sexual identities in relationships with what they described as homophobic partners, they depicted a form of self-blame where blame was primarily associated with having a lesbian sexual identity.²⁹⁶ Studies show that homophobia that is internalised may contribute to the belief that the abuse may be deserved (Patzel, 2006). In addition, the perception of not engaging enough in counselling, being hormonal during pregnancy, experiencing multiple incidents of abuse, and having a previous abuse history were also cited as shaping participants meaning-making processes.²⁹⁷ For example, Aoife attributed the abusive behaviour occurring in her relationship to her not doing enough “personal work” during counselling. Aoife provided accounts of attending counselling support at various times in her life in response to her experience of abuse as a child, and an experience of sexual violence as an adult. Saoirse reflected on her three-year relationship, recalling that it started with constant name-calling during her pregnancy:

²⁹⁶ This point is further discussed in section 7.5 Contexts of heterosexism and homophobia.
²⁹⁷ The influence of a previous abuse history on participants meaning-making is discussed further on in the section 7.1.6 Contexts of a previous abuse history.
When we used to go to the hospital appointments, we were fighting a lot and I thought it was me because I’d been hormonal, I thought maybe it was my problem (Saoirse)

Aoife gave an account of trying to understand her partner’s abusive behaviour during their relationship. Her quote suggests that multiple incidents of abuse during a relationship impacted her ability to make sense of and understand the abusive behaviour, as she asserts:

So, I was kind of going ok, “This must be why” because you need that as a human, you need to understand at some level why people behave in the way they do, and yet every time I tried to get my head around it something else would happen. (Aoife)

7.1.2 The experience of loss of self-confidence

Consistent with previous research (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Turell, 1999) aligned with the experience of self-blame, six participants described their loss of self-confidence and self-esteem while six also perceived the experience of powerlessness as a contributory influence on their meaning-making processes. For example, Aoibhinn stated, “I didn’t feel strong enough to say I didn’t deserve it [abusive behaviour].” She attributed this weakness to the erosion of her self-confidence by her partner’s use of both emotional/psychological and physical violence, the impact of which, she explains in this next quote:

You know it undermined my self-confidence to the point where instead of reacting by just getting out of it, I actually found it harder to stand up for myself (Aoibhinn)

In the domestic violence literature, low self-esteem is among the qualities that characterise both perpetrators and victims of heterosexual IPA (Capaldi, et al., 2012), and lesbian survivors of IPA (Merlis & Linville, 2006). Furthermore, lesbian survivor stories indicate victims associate their partner’s abusive behaviour with having low self-esteem (Crall, 1986).

Participants interpreted their relationship experience as encompassing a loss of power. This experience was construed in diverse ways by the participants. For Aoife, the loss of power influenced her understanding of the abuse where she felt she deserved the behaviour, as she recalls:

You’re so smashed down, you don’t think you have any power and I mean any power. I actually thought I deserved that behaviour (Aoife)
Previous research has shown that in lesbian abusive relationships, an abuser’s negative messages and constant criticism shapes a victim’s sense of self (Irwin, 2008). For Caoimhe, the loss of power and control during her relationship affected her sense of identity, as she explains:

*I just completely forgot who I was, I didn’t know who I was anymore, I just became this person that I didn’t recognise* (Caoimhe)

Aoibhinn attributed her loss of power during the relationship, to her need, at that period of her life, to be in a relationship rather than being alone, as she reflects:

*I had handed over my own power somehow or another, partly, I think because I really wanted to be in a relationship* (Aoibhinn)

### 7.1.3 The perception of compliance in abusive behaviour

Three participants described experiencing a loss of power and control during relationships that manifested in what they characterised as their complicity in the abusive behaviour. 

Women spoke of a lack of assertion, and not confronting their partners which resulted in contexts that they felt permitted the abusive behaviour to gain traction. A seminal study investigating domestic and dating violence for lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women from Macedonia and Serbia (Lozanoska, 2016) reported addressing controlling behaviours at the start of a dating relationship as a mitigating factor in abusive relationships. Talking about her second abusive relationship experience, Roisin recalls here what she perceived as the repercussions for her lack of assertion at the beginning of the relationship which she attributed to her partner gaining control:

*I was kind of letting things slide that I shouldn’t have let slide. When I finally copped on what I was doing, it was nearly too late for her to backpedal and not be as controlling. Now, I’m not saying I’m giving her an out here or anything, but it was just the way, if I had been more assertive from the start, we more than likely wouldn’t have lasted more than three or four weeks* (Roisin)

The next quote from Niamh exhibits her understanding that she was complicit in her abusive partner’s behaviour by re-starting her relationship after a physical assault,
We eventually got back together again, and that was the slippery slope that I kind of fell some level of what I was doing was giving permission (Niamh)

Echoing the previous example, Eabha believed that by complying with her partner’s demands to conceal both her and her partner’s lesbian identity, this acquiescence formed the basis for the subsequent control she experienced over her lesbian sexual identity, as she recalls:

*Did I have a relationship? Of course, I didn’t because she was ‘straight’, and she was just my friend [sarcastic]. So, I had gone along with that. So, I was kind of painted into a corner by that you know, and I done that [laughs] (Eabha)*

This next excerpt by Aoibhinn underscores the complexity of intimate partner abuse. Because relationships are not experienced as negative all of the time, her quote sheds some light on how abuse in a relationship can gain traction.

*I should have gotten out much earlier and not let things happen or whatever, but I can kind of understand how someone can get sucked into this because that’s only part of the whole picture, because there are obviously good things that are happening or things that you perceive that somehow balance it out, otherwise, if it was all just that [abusive] I wouldn’t have stayed.*

Corresponding with Girshick’s (2002) findings concerned with sexual violence in lesbian and bisexual women’s relationships,298 additional sub-themes identified by the participants that shaped how they made sense of their abusive experiences, included disassociation,299 contexts of invisibility of same sex IPA, and feeling sorry and/ or responsible for their partners. Interim findings from the first UK study to explore abusive behaviours in LGBT relationships (CORAL project) suggests that the lower visibility of LGBT IPA and the pervasive public story of IPA as heterosexual results in the language to describe IPA being less readily available to those who are LGBT (Donovan, et al., 2014).300 Participants in this present study noted a lack of visibility and awareness in the public domain surrounding same sex IPA, as Saoirse discovered:

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298 Girshick interview 70 women (1% of her sample was heterosexual).
299 Dissociation was discussed in Chapter 6, see section 6.4.1. Impact on mental and physical health (during & post-relationship).
...there is loads of kind straight services out there but if you Google lesbian or same sex domestic violence support groups there is none (Saoirse)

Participants from the CORAL project also noted the importance of not being able to relate their experience with a service provider which was interpreted as a barrier to service access (Ibid, 2014). Not being able to relate her experience to others in a similar position or find a support option online contributed to Saoirse feeling isolated and alone in her experience of abuse from a female partner, as she explains:

*I feel sometimes it’s just me that this is after happening to because like I said there’s nothing out there, so little out there* (Saoirse)

Concurring with Donovan and Hester’s (2014) findings that practices of love form part of the abusive behaviour in relationships, participants observed that their love and their feelings of sympathy and responsibility for their partners, shaped their understanding of the abuse in their relationships. An examination of heterosexual men and women’s reasons (to self and to others) for remaining in abusive relationships found that respondents reported wanting to save (55.7% men, 46.9% women) and to protect (34.9% men, 22.2% women) partners as their reasons communicated to themselves for remaining (Eckstein, 2011).301 Participants in Patzel’s (2006) qualitative study found lesbian and bisexual women cited love for their partners as a reason for remaining in relationships. Similarly, in this study, Clodagh referred to feelings of sympathy for her partner that bound her to an abusive relationship for twenty-six years, as she explains:

*...she was a human being and I felt sorry for her, and I think that’s what happened through the years* (Clodagh)

Researchers have argued for a focus on social contexts when exploring abuse in same sex relationships as critical to an accurate assessment of the phenomenon (Goddard & Hardy, 1999; Ristock, 2002). Participants in this study acknowledged various contexts, informed by experiences that happened prior to and during their abusive relationships that shaped their meaning making in response to the abuse.302 The next section explores their personal contexts, key life events, and contexts of a previous abuse history.

301 Sample consisted of 345 respondents (239 females, 106 males).
302 See Appendix 38 for a comprehensive list of the items to describe ‘Contexts of relationship violence’.
7.1.4 Personal contexts

The sub theme of ‘Personal contexts’ was established to incorporate aspects of the participants lives identified during interviews such as, being young (and older) and inexperienced in relationships, the experience of a first same sex relationship, meeting a partner on the rebound, and vulnerability following an abusive relationship experience. The participants associated these personal contexts with their vulnerability to abuse. Saoirse spoke of meeting her partner on the rebound from a long-term relationship with a partner who was significantly older than she was,

...I’d come out of a long-term relationship, I was kind of, kind of all over the place. I was it was a bad space. (Saoirse)

Reflecting on her second abusive relationship with a female, Roisin suggested her happiness with being in a relationship again superseded confronting her partner’s abusive behaviour, as she explains;

I think it was sort of like she was the next relationship I had after [first abusive experience] and I was so happy about being in another relationship, I was kind of letting things slide. (Roisin)

Consistent with previous research (Brown, 2007; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2008), two participants disclosed that their experience of abuse occurred in a first same sex relationship. The following quote from Clodagh conveys her experience of being young and inexperienced, and lacking knowledge of a healthy relationship;

...it was a horrible situation and I was too young to have the courage and, and to have the sense to know that this wasn’t right, you know it was my first relationship. (Clodagh)

A recent Irish study investigating older LGBT lives (Higgins, et al., 2011) referred to the later age in coming out as reflecting a reluctance to come out in a culture where “sexual relationships between people of the same sex was considered a mental illness and a criminal, immoral and sinful act” (p.56). While three participants noted being young and inexperienced as a contributory factor in understanding an abusive experience, and their reasons for remaining, one participant acknowledged that coming out later in life affected her comprehension of the relationship violence. Niamh recalled, “...up until I was in my
40s, I’d never lived with anyone”. Coming out late in life and not having any prior relationship experience caused Niamh to state:

I kind of had the sense that I was rabbit in the head lamps a little bit because maturity maybe, very little previous relationship history, the sense of, “What the fucks going on?”

The next section moves on to consider key life events that occurred for participants’ while the relationship abuse was ongoing. Participants pinpointed key life events as influencing their response to abusive behaviour, and their reasons for remaining in relationships.

7.1.5 Key life events

Key life events including the experience of a bereavement, starting a new occupation, procuring a new home, a family member receiving an acute diagnosis, participants receiving a diagnosis, and being a primary carer for a family member were cited as affecting the participant’s decision-making during relationships, and further contributed to them remaining in abusive partnerships. Two participants experienced the loss of family members during their relationships. Their accounts reflect some disparity in terms of their response to abusive behaviour. For example, Aoibhinn explained that she was primary carer for her two elderly relatives who both passed away during her relationship. She cited the loss of her family members as empowering her to end her relationship, as she explains:

Well, I mean it does seem in a way like a contradiction, having two very close family deaths together, and that somehow that is when I got the strength to break it off with her. (Aoibhinn)

Conversely, Niamh suggested that her experience of bereavement added further to her sense of vulnerability. This next quote from Niamh confirms her understanding of the link between her vulnerability through loss and her partner’s abusive behaviour;

...there was those two deaths which were at the time the two closest deaths that I had dealt with again in my life...so I was particularly vulnerable at the time...I don’t think that was coincidental. (Niamh)

The participants’ narratives suggest that dealing with the key life events shifted their focus and attention away from a partner’s abusive behaviour. For example, Roisin gave an
account of a combination of life changes happening at the same time as the abuse in her relationship which she claimed delayed her response to the abusive behaviour;

I was so preoccupied at home [parent’s diagnosis] that I couldn’t concentrate on everything together. I had just bought a [property] as well... I had [changed position within her profession] ...all of that was happening at the same time. (Roisin)

In the context of an acute diagnosis, Roisin stated she remained in an abusive relationship and stayed silent about the abuse rather than cause additional concern to her parents, as she explains:

...he [father] had too much to worry about, my mother had too much to worry about, I wasn’t putting this [her abusive relationship experience] on them. I didn’t want to put it on them. So, I just kept going with the relationship (Roisin)

Aoibhinn described being more focused on her own physical health following a diagnosis during her relationship rather than her partner’s abusive behaviour, as she recalls:

I was actually really weak physically and I was almost trying to deal with my health issues more than trying to really kind of psycho-analyse whatever what was going on. (Aoibhinn)

This next section explores contexts of a previous abuse histories and the influence this had on the participants understanding of the abusive behaviour.

7.1.6 Contexts of a previous abuse history

A previous abuse history in the family of origin has proved to be a major risk factor for experiencing IPA in adult life (Whitfield, et al., 2003). Similar to heterosexual women’s experiences, studies have found that lesbians with a previous abuse history are at risk of experiencing IPA in their adult lives (Lockhart, et al., 1994). Evidence from the participant’s narratives suggests that having a previous abuse history effected their understanding and their meaning-making processes. Moreover, knowledge of a previous abuse history was reported to be exploited by partners. The current study corroborates

303 Aoibhinn attributed her diagnosis during her relationship as directly related to the physical and psychological abuse she experienced.
304 See Chapter 5 section 5.3.6 Re-enacting a previous abuse history.
previous research findings that indicate similar tactics are used by female perpetrators in same sex relationships (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002; Walters, 2011).

Participants who had a previous abuse history contrasted with those who did not, in terms of how they understood and made sense of the abusive relationship. They spoke of feeling to blame for the abusive behaviour, they stated they felt incapable of and had no reference for a healthy relationship, and they drew parallels with a previous abuser to understand their female partner’s behaviour. For example, Aoife explained:

*I thought it was me, I thought because of my past…I thought I was incapable of having a healthy relationship* (Aoife)

As a mechanism to understand the abuse in her relationship, Aoife stated she reflected on a previous experience of abuse. She associated the abuse she experienced from her mother as a causal factor in her having no reference for a healthy relationship,

...you think your mothers supposed to love you, and nurture you, and want the best for you. So, when you have a mother who doesn’t, again you, you, you, you’ve lost a reference (Aoife)

Caoimhe revealed that her previous childhood sexual abuse played a role in her understanding of the sexual violence and abuse she experienced in her relationship, as she recalls here:

...to be so abused as a kid, and then for this to happen, for me to find myself in a situation where you know I’m being abused again, and I thought, “There’s something actually wrong with me” (Caoimhe)

The two previous examples from Aoife and Caoimhe contrast with Niamh’s understanding of abusive behaviour during her relationship. She explained that she never experienced any form of violence prior to her abusive experience which she stipulated contributed to her awareness that she was not the culpable person in her relationship, as she asserts:

*I had a strong core all the time... What’s going on here is not ok, that I don’t deserve this, you know, that I deserve better, I deserve better*” (Niamh)

Contrasting with the previous examples, Roisin initially experienced feelings of self-blame but perhaps because it was her second abusive experience with a woman, she soon recognised who was at fault for the abuse, as she explains:

*I know after [second abusive relationship] and I was, “What is it with me? Why me? Why two relationships’ that went absolutely pear shaped this way?” I was going, “What did I
do?” Once I started having those thoughts that’s when I went back to counselling again going, ‘No this isn’t you, it’s not you, it’s them”

The next section explores the participants’ understanding of their partners’ abusive behaviours during relationships.

7.2 A focus on abusive partners

Participants focused on their abusive partners in response to questions posed around their understanding of the violence in relationships. As table 18 illustrates, they made specific reference to partner’s tailoring abuse to vulnerabilities which was cited by five participants as influencing their understanding of abusive behaviour. The participant accounts suggesting their partners exploited what they perceived as a vulnerability is further explicated next as some women associated this behaviour as a partner projecting a negative self-image.

Table 18 A focus on the partner***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on partner</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tailoring abuse to vulnerabilities</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>previous abuse history*</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>controlling and manipulative</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>personality disorder/ multiple personalities</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>internalised homophobia**</td>
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<tr>
<td>projecting negative self-perception</td>
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<td>homophobic response from family</td>
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<td>negative body image</td>
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<td>unable to control temper</td>
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<tr>
<td>stress at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural differences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Previous abuse history included a previous heterosexual, same sex, and family of origin abuse experiences.

** Internalised homophobia included the fear of ‘coming out’.

***See Appendix 36 for a comprehensive list of items associated with ‘a focus on the partner’.

7.2.1 Projecting a negative self-perception

In their attempt to understand a partner’s abusive behaviour, two participants linked the behaviour to partners having a negative self-perception and projecting this negativity upon

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305 See Appendix 31 ‘A note on abusive partners.

306 Chapter 5 considered this finding in the section 5.3.5 ‘Exploiting vulnerabilities’
them. For example, Aoibhinn criticised her partner for not acknowledging and addressing her personal issues which she felt she endured the most of, as she explains in this next quote:

*I don’t want to go into all the analysis but some kind of self-hatred in herself that for some reason instead of you know recognising and taking care of that herself, she was taking it out on me* (Aoibhinn)

Mirroring the previous quote, Saoirse was steadfast in her understanding of her partner’s behaviour as being rooted in a negative self-perception, as she asserts:

*I firmly believe that the things she used to put on me is the way that she felt about herself, to make herself feel better – she’d make me feel like that to bring me down to her level, I do think that without a doubt* (Saoirse)

### 7.2.2 Contexts of substance misuse

Among heterosexual couples, alcohol misuse and alcohol related problems are well established risk factors for IPA (O’Leary & Schumacher, 2003; Schumacher, et al., 2001). Relative to heterosexual IPA studies, the role of alcohol misuse in LGBT relationships is grossly understudied (Klostermann et al., 2011), despite the evidence that gay and lesbian individuals are more likely to drink in larger quantities and experience alcohol dependency (Diamond & Wilsnack, 1978; Wilsnack et al., 2008) which some studies attribute to the bar culture associated with the LGBT scene (McDonald, 2012). Studies further demonstrate that lesbian batterers frequently abuse alcohol or drugs (Glass et al., 2008; McDonald, 2012).

Five participants reported their partners drinking and drug taking (prescription and recreational) as influencing their meaning-making and understanding of the abusive behaviour. Common across the five narratives was the influence of alcohol in the occurrence of an abusive incident. Research examining substance and alcohol abuse and same sex IPA suggests that alcohol and substance abuse may serve as a precipitating factor for violence (Fortunata & Kohn, 2003). Similarly, research examining male to female physical violence (Schumacher, et al., 2001) has established that IPA increases during
periods in which alcohol or drugs are being used. Two participants in this study stated their partners were binge drinkers, and another two described their partners as alcoholics.

Participants associated their partner’s use of alcohol with sudden mood changes, as Saoirse explains, “I always knew when she was drinking that you know her mood would change, you know get aggressive”. Additionally, alcohol was interpreted as a trigger for abusive behaviour, as a factor that increased aggression, and increased fear on the part of the participant, as the following quote displays:

...she’d be ok up to a point and then she’d have a drink, or she’d come home, and she’d have drink on her...it was that lack of control, like she could have done anything. I, I felt she was capable of anything (Niamh)

Similarly, participants noted an increase in a partner’s aggression connected with prescribed medication. For example, Clodagh recalled;

...if coming near the end of the prescription that she didn’t have one in the house, she used to go berserk because the tablets weren’t there, and I used to have to hide one or two and hold onto them so as that when the prescription be running out that I would have one there for her

Saoirse’s understanding of her abusive relationship was influenced by her partner’s use of both alcohol and medication prescribed for depression. Concurring with other research (Donovan and Hester, 2014), her partner used her medication as a rationale for her abusive behaviour, as Saoirse explains;

I just put it [abusive behaviour] down to like just she wasn’t able to handle her drink, then her depression...I thought that was kind of a factor, maybe the medication she was on, she used to put it down to that as well, a combination of that and drink you know.

As previously mentioned, the participant’s focused upon their partner’s mental health, character and personality traits which was stated as influencing their understanding of the abusive behaviour. This aspect of the focus on partners theme is reviewed next.
7.2.3 Understanding abuse: A partner’s mental health

In comparison to the literature on male heterosexual batterers (Murphy, et al., 1993), few studies have examined the characteristics of lesbian batterers (Farley, 1996; Fortunata & Kohn, 2003). Farley’s qualitative study of lesbian and gay batterers found that 94% of lesbians reported a mental health treatment history. Fortuna and Kohn (2003) found lesbian batterers reported higher levels of borderline and paranoid personality traits, as well as higher levels of delusional clinical characteristics which they argue are consistent with the literature on heterosexual males, and clinical observation literature on lesbian batterers. In the current study, participants associated their partner’s poor mental health with their understanding of abuse in the relationship. For example, Caoimhe’s narrative demonstrates the connection between increased frequency and severity of abuse, and the deterioration of her partner’s mental health. She acknowledged “the more strange that [partner’s mental health] became the worse the beatings would come”. Similarly, Clodagh understood her partner’s poor mental health as interconnected to the abusive behaviour and the ensuing negative impact upon her, as she explains:

...she was sort of a manic depressant, she was never happy. Like if you got up in the mornings and you were in good humour by the time, you’d be sitting with her for a half an hour, you’d have been deflated you know, it was always a struggle (Clodagh)

7.2.4 A focus on a partner’s personality traits

Coleman (1994) argues that regardless of sexual orientation, personality traits play a significant role in the perpetration of IPA. Research shows that lesbian batterers feel powerless, have low self-esteem, and tend to be overly dependent and jealous (Miller, et al., 2001; Schilit, et al., 1990; Telesco, 2004), and display higher levels of borderline and paranoid personality traits than lesbian non-batterers (Fortunata & Kohn, 2003).

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307 These findings must be interpreted with caution as they are based on clinical research. No comparison group was included in the study.

308 Demographic and psychosocial characteristics and personality traits were examined in 100 lesbians in current relationships (33 Batterers and 67 Non-batterers).

309 Caoimhe’s three-year relationship ended with her partner being committed to a psychiatric service voluntarily.

310 These findings are in accord with Renzetti (1988; 1992) findings that demonstrate correlations between batterers’ levels of dependency, jealousy, substance abuse, and the use of violence.

311 Borderline and narcissistic disorders both involve basic deficits in the self, resulting from early trauma and failure to negotiate the separation-individuation process of normal development (Coleman, 1994).
Alongside perceiving their partners controlling and manipulative behaviours as paramount to their understanding of abuse, three participants suggested that their partners had, what they interpreted as, a personality disorder. In such cases, they described partners as displaying passive aggressive behaviours, as Ciara explains:

…it would be more, more manipulation than kind of full on aggressive if you know what I mean…passive aggressive kind of behaviour. (Ciara)

The literature suggests that lesbian batterers exhibit personality traits associated with an inflated sense of self (Renzetti, 1992). Participants associated their partner’s abusive behaviours with having a narcissistic personality. Aoife was adamant this was a causal factor for her partner’s behaviour, as this next quote illuminates;

I can say now, having read extensively, have you ever heard of narcissistic personality disorder? [Yes] Yeah, she is text book in everything that I have read. I am not a psychologist, but she is textbook. (Aoife)

Participants commented on their partner’s addictive personalities which they related to their abusive experience. Poor impulse control is another personality trait associated with lesbian batterers (Renzetti, 1992). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that lesbians may use alcohol and drugs as a means to increase aggression and feelings of power, as well as decrease feelings of dependency and low self-esteem (Diamond and Wilsnack, 1978; Renzetti, 1992). Clodagh described her partner as having multiple addictions to cigarettes, alcohol, and prescription and non-prescription medication during her relationship. She attributed the addictions to an increase in the frequency and severity of the violence and abuse in her relationship, as she explains;

…it [abusive behaviour] got progressively worse as the years went on, and then she smoked…she was addicted to cigarettes, and then she started to drink, and then she was a heavy drinker. So, the pattern sort of continued you know (Clodagh)

Positive aspects of a partner’s personality were also cited as impacting negatively on participants. The next section expands upon this finding.

312 Apart from Caoimhe’s account, there was no evidence in the participant’s narratives that a partner had a diagnosis of a personality disorder. (Caoimhe’s partner was voluntarily admitted to a psychiatric hospital during her relationship).
7.2.5 “Jekyll and Hyde” versus “charming” personalities

Whereas the previous quotes reflect participant’s interpretation of partners negative personality traits during relationships, they also identified partners positive behaviours which they suggested also had a negative impact on them. For example, there was commonality across the interviews with partners being described as “attractive”, “charming”, “popular”, “gregarious”, and “likeable” characters who were popular on the LGBT scene. Donovan and Hester (2014) describe this popularity as ‘experiential power’ which can be used as an additional form of power in relationships. Participants observed that when partners displayed these likeable traits to others outside the relationship, this created difficulty for them when they sought support. In this next quote, Niamh explains how her partner’s popularity in the LGBT community negatively impacted people believing her when she disclosed details of the abuse to friends:

...people generally found her, probably still find her [sic] very attractive persona... because she was an attractive personality so people who knew her – liked her you know, and found it very hard to believe me about the abuse (Niamh)

Like heterosexual male perpetrators of IPA (Zink, et al., 2006), research demonstrates that lesbian abusive partners portray themselves as charming and articulate to key others for the purposes of manipulation (Renzetti, 1992). The following quote from Caoimhe highlights that when partners displayed likeable characteristics to friends, this created an illusion of a healthy, happy relationship. Caoimhe ascribed this behaviour as creating a barrier to disclosing the abuse to friends, as she explains;

You know her friends would come around and she would act like she was totally in love with me. You know her friends didn’t think there was anything wrong. Her friends thought she was the nicest person on the face of the earth...that silenced me.

Partners were also referred to as portraying multiple identities during their relationships, as the following quote from Caoimhe conveys;

...I did think she was a very nice person, you know sure that’s the impression she gives, and if you met her on the street, she couldn’t do enough for you. You know like she’s always fundraising for charity, you know she’s a fucking total Jekyll and Hyde (Caoimhe)

Aoife explained that her partner “was completely fluid, there was no core value, there was no core behaviour”. For Aoife, this created a relationship context whereby,
...it was like I was living with somebody who had about five or six different personalities.
(Aoife)

In addition, the participants also linked abusive behaviour to a partner experiencing a bereavement, stress at work, being unable to control anger, a previous abuse history (primarily in their family of origin), their controlling and manipulative behaviours, partners experiencing a homophobic reaction from family, partners as homophobic, and fear associated with ‘coming out’. Furthermore, participants suggested that cultural differences, where a partner came from another country, shaped their understanding of abusive behaviour. For example, Roisin questioned whether her non-Irish partner misinterpreted what she described as the particularity of Irish sarcasm.

The next section focuses attention on aspects of the relationship between the couple that participants implied swayed their understanding of abusive behaviour.

### 7.3 A focus on the relationship

The final part of the first theme derived to explain the participants’ meaning-making, focuses attention on their relationships and how they influenced an understanding of the abusive behaviour. Table 19 highlights features of the participant’s relationships that informed their understanding of abusive experiences. Seven participants provided examples of abusive relationship practices that could be interpreted as ‘practices of love’ (Donovan and Hester 2014).

**Table 19 A focus on the relationship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on relationship</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>practices of love</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication breakdown</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>abuse as temporary/ phase</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Unequal power in relationships was discussed in Chapter 6.

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313 Partner’s practices of love served to keep participants in abusive relationships, return to relationships, impacted on non-reporting of abuse to formal and informal supports, and influenced participant’s recognition of behaviour as IPA.
7.3.1 Poor communication between the couple

Research indicates that lesbian batterers have poorly developed communication skills (Leeder, 1988 cited in Renzetti, 1992). However, as previously indicated, Renzetti (1992) found the opposite and described lesbian batterers as charming and articulate. Consistent with Walters (2011), a breakdown in communication between the couple was acknowledged by five participants as contributing to abusive behaviour. Niamh suggested the communication breakdown in her three-year relationship was a causal factor in her partner becoming abusive, as she explains here:

*I think it was to do with something about our emotional linkage, whatever, that it went askew some way and she became abusive.* (Niamh)

Aoife provided an account of constant attempts to communicate with her partner to relay her dissatisfaction during the relationship. She recalled how her partner ridiculed these endeavours with responses like, “Don’t go all Oprah on me”. Regardless of her continual efforts to communicate, she experienced a complete communication breakdown toward the latter end of her six-year partnership. This is explained in her next quote:

*...we didn’t speak at all, if I needed something from her or she needed something from me it was the sticky note on the kitchen table.* (Aoife)

Additionally, to account for their understanding of abusive behaviour, four participants focused on the experience of an unequal power in relationships which manifested itself around financial exploitation and sexual violence. This aspect of the participant’s relationships is discussed in Chapter 6.

The following section details participant’s reasons for remaining and for leaving their relationships. It should be noted, that participants were not asked specific questions about their reasons for staying and leaving. This data emerged within contexts of meaning-making where participants rationalised and justified their individual reasons for remaining and leaving abusive relationships.
7.4 Reasons for remaining

Table 20 below provides an overview of the reasons for remaining in relationships tendered by the participants. Experiencing a decline in self-confidence during the relationship and feeling committed to their relationship/partner were cited as the most common reasons for remaining. The participants reason for remaining are similar to the experience of heterosexual men and women who report staying in relationships because they want to save and protect their partners, fear of partners, feeling there is no support option available, and having nowhere to go (Eckstein, 2011).

Table 20 Reason for remaining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for remaining</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>commitment to partner</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>limited support options</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>fear</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>not cohabiting</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>silence/hidden nature of SS IPA</td>
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</table>

Five participants acknowledged their partners abusive behaviours as responsible for the decrease in their self-confidence. This experience of low self-confidence was also referred to by Irwin (2008) where her interviewees noted the experience of IPA as posing the greatest challenge to their sense of self. Service providers perspectives on lesbian IPA also acknowledge the impact on self-confidence and self-esteem as a consequence of experiencing IPA (Merlis & Linville, 2006).

Five participants stipulated they remained committed to abusive partners because they believed they would change their behaviour, a belief that a partner would accept their sexuality over time, their love for partners, and a belief that the abuse was temporary were cited by participants as sustain their commitment to an abusive partner. Similar findings for remaining in relationships by both heterosexual and lesbian women were reported by Donovan and Hester (2014) and Patzel (2006). The following quote from Saoirse illustrates the point;

*My confidence was so low, I stuck it out and kept on hoping that she’d change, kept on thinking that like that’s the last time.* (Saoirse)
Four participants expressed the opinion that disassociation from their partners abusive behaviours led to them remaining in relationships. Participants gave accounts of blocking out the abuse and not dealing with it emotionally. Blocking out the experience of violence and abuse has been acknowledged as a coping mechanism used by lesbian victims of IPA (Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002). Studies examining heterosexual women’s experience of IPA report similar victim responses (Baly, 2010). Varied reasons were cited for blocking the abuse such as, love for partners, as Eabha explains: “I completely shut my eyes to it…I just loved her you know”. Participants also linked their dissociation to safeguarding various aspects of their sense of identity. For example, Aoife chose not to acknowledge the abuse in her relationship because the experience was conflicting with a positive self-identity, as she explains: “I blocked it because at work I was super woman”.

Aoibhinn gave an account of her identity as intertwined with being a part of a couple relationship. She described disregarding her partner’s abusive behaviour, primarily, because she didn’t want to be alone. This finding concurs with Patzel’s (2006) qualitative study with lesbian and bisexual women who reported not wanting to be alone as a reason for remaining in an abusive relationship. As discussed in Chapter 3, “Merger” (Coleman, 1994) also known as “fusion” (Krestan & Bepko, 1980) are terms found in the literature to explain lesbian relationships that describe excessive, relational closeness and assimilation in their partnerships (Gold, 2003), within contexts of a hostile, homophobic society. Coleman (1994) suggests ‘merger’ creates the potential for dependency, and the loss of individual identity to be increased. Fusion has also been found to impact on a lesbian’s ability to end an abusive relationship (Patzel, 2006). Aoibhinn explained that she invested so much into the relationship, such as, dropping friends to be with her partner. Her desire to be paired at that stage of her life, coupled with sacrifices made to be in a relationship, impacted on her sense of maintaining an independent identity outside of the relationship. This contributed to her remaining in an abusive relationship. Her next quote elaborates:

...at that stage, I just couldn’t face being on my own, we’d been together probably like seven years maybe and that would have you know changed everything about my identity. I’d given up so much to be in a couple because I thought you know that was so important (Aoibhinn)
Conducive to contexts of coercive control, three participants maintained that their experience of fear prohibited them from leaving relationships. Similar findings were reported for heterosexual male and female victims of IPA (Eckstein, 2011). Participants identified three different formations of fear: fear of partner, fear of exposing their lesbian sexual identity, and fear of their partner’s family were cited as influencing decisions to remain in abusive relationships. Caoimhe described the events that led to her “feeling trapped” in her three-year relationship. Following two occasions where there was sexual intimacy, Caoimhe stated her partner began, without her knowledge or agreement, informing mutual friends that they were in a relationship. Her experience of physical violence started within two weeks of meeting her partner with a violent assault in a public bathroom. Being suddenly launched into a violent relationship at eighteen years old, created a context of fear in which Caoimhe felt powerless to challenge the status of the relationship, and her ‘partners’ violent behaviour, as she explains:

...you know but what could I do? What could I say? I didn’t know what to say, I was kind of afraid of her then by that point you know, I realised that she was very volatile (Caoimhe)

After ending a twenty-six-year abusive relationship, Clodagh recalled ‘coming out’ to her family and friends at the age of forty-eight. As the following quote from her illustrates, concealing a lesbian sexual identity and the concomitant fear of ‘coming out’ resulted in her remaining in an abusive relationship for a substantial period of her life;

Like a lot of people and friends have said to me in the later years, “Jesus, why did you stay so long in that relationship?” and I’ve often said, “I really don’t know”, the only thing is that it was fear of coming out. (Clodagh)

Corbally (2015) utilised the term ‘second wave abuse’ in her exploration of heterosexual female to male IPA. Corbally argues that second wave abuse is a collective endeavour, initiated by the abusive partner but not exercised by her. Clodagh explained that throughout her relationship she and her partner lived close to her partner’s family. She reflected during interview, “I realised later they [partner’s family] controlled me”. When she finally asked her partner to leave their shared home, she experienced further abuse from her partner’s family, as she explains:

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314 Caoimhe gave an account of her ‘partner’ making a copy of her house key and moving her belongings into her home without any prior discussion.
So, I was sort of caught up and it was, “How do I get out of here?” ...I suppose I was afraid, if I’d said to her, “Right I’m leaving...and I’m going to sell this house” there’d have been an uproar [higher tone]. Like there was at the end when I told her to leave. Her mother and her sister came over to bully me.

Additional details were put forth by participants that contextualise their individual grounds for remaining in abusive relationships. Two interviewee’s described relationship contexts where they did not cohabit with partners. Non-cohabitation was understood as a reason for both remaining and leaving an abusive relationship. The following quotes from Aoibhinn and Roisin exemplify the point:

I always felt, I even said it to her [partner] once, the reason that we stayed together as long as we did was because we didn’t live together...we couldn’t have lived together. I think it would have ended much quicker because just so much control. (Aoibhinn)

I got away from both of them [two abusive relationships] because we weren’t living together. I’ve this thing if we were living together and it happened, it would be harder to break away from it all because there would be so much more to consider. (Roisin)

In their efforts to make sense of their abusive experiences, participants also disclosed their specific reasons for leaving relationships. The following section outlines their unique circumstances that influenced their decisions to leave.

7.4.1 Reasons for leaving

Table 21 displays the multitude of reasons provided by the participants to explain their reasons for leaving abusive relationships. In eight cases, participants made the decision to leave a partner. Eabha was the only participant in the study whose partner made the decision to end the relationship. She recalled her partner leaving after thirteen-years to begin a new heterosexual relationship.
Like the heterosexual female experience of ending an abusive relationship (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995 cited in Kimmel, 2002), violence continues and escalates when women indicate their intention to leave relationships. An escalation of violence in frequency and severity was cited by five participants as motivating the decision to leave. In such cases, participants gave accounts of their partners using weapons, including knives and glass, as part of the assault. Participants noted that where partners would previously have stopped their physical attack, it became more regular that they would not stop until a participant lost consciousness. As the following quote from Saoirse underscores, participants became genuinely concerned for their safety and well-being:

*Just that level of violence because I said the next time she’s going to do that, I’m going to be taken out of my house in a box* (Saoirse)

Two participants described attending counselling support services during their relationships which they affiliated with providing the support and strength that influenced their decision to leave.315 The following quote from Aoibhinn confirms this finding.

*I had got a lot of support from her [counsellor] to do with my [family members] illness. I didn’t mention what was happening in the relationship, but I guess it gave me enough strength that when [family members died] and I had kind of dealt with that loss, I just kind of said to her [partner], “It’s over” you know, “It is over” [deep breath in].* (Aoibhinn)

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315 Caoimhe and Aoibhinn attended counselling services to address issues associated with a previous childhood sexual abuse experience and bereavement.
Caoimhe recalled that her decision to leave the relationship came about following her physical retaliation against her partner. Like reports by participants in Girshick’s (2002) examination of sexual violence in lesbian and bisexual women’s relationships, in the aftermath of her retaliation, Caoimhe experienced a period without violence. As the quote below highlights, she used this non-violent period as an opportunity to break away from her partner:

*She left me alone for a few weeks, yeah and I started saying to her, “I’m going to leave. I think it’s time we just call an end to this, it’s destructive”.* (Caoimhe)

The period of non-violence ended, and the relationship returned to frequent and severe bouts of violence. The same findings were reported by Girshick, (2002) where fighting back resulted in a lull in abuse or it increased the severity of violence. Caoimhe explains here how the relationship ended and she was enabled to escape the violence:

*...that’s how the relationship ended with her committal to the mental hospital and that’s the only reason, that’s the only way I got out you know* (Caoimhe)

In addition, participants reported no longer feeling committed to partners, experiencing a sexual and physical assault, avoiding financial exploitation, gaining financial independence, and wanting to become a part, for the first time, of the LGBT community as influential in decisions to leave abusive relationships.

A second key theme to emerge from participants accounts that was associated with their meaning-making related to ‘contexts of relationship violence’. The following section outlines the various contexts in which the relationship violence arose.

### 7.5 Contexts of heterosexism and homophobia

The public story narrative of DV as a heterosexual phenomenon was found to influence participants meaning-making, the next section elaborates on this finding.

#### 7.5.1 The influence of the DV ‘public story’

The participant accounts reference the influence of the heterosexist DV ‘public story’ narrative on their meaning-making (Donovan & Hester, 2014). The next quote from Ciara
suggests her understanding of IPA was informed by its pervasive ‘public story’ (Donovan & Hester, 2010), where women are victims and not the aggressor, she explains,

*It sounds so cliché now, but I suppose the expectation of it is that it’s a crime committed by men and you don’t expect it from women. So, I suppose to me that’s the ultimate betrayal is to have that behaviour from a woman.* (Ciara)

Ciara’s next quote is interesting because it conveys the pervasive nature of the public story narrative surrounding DV, and its influence on people’s understanding of what constitutes an abusive relationship. Ciara described experiencing IPA in three same sex relationships (including one with a heterosexual female). Despite this first-hand knowledge that women can be abusers in relationships, she gave an account of resisting the idea of men being victims. Her quote draws attentions to the hierarchical nature of the heterosexual DV public story in terms of victimhood, as she explains:

*I suppose when we learn about relationships and violence within relationships, it’s, its men are always the perpetrators, and if I hear of organisations like AMEN 316 where men are being abused, well I know I’ve balked at it and kind of gone, “For fuck sake come on”. So, I think women [lesbian women] are also in a sub class of that* (Ciara)

Again, highlighting the hierarchical nature of the dominant DV narrative, Saoirse gave an account of feeling that her experience of IPA was “undermined” because her abuser was female, as she explains:

*I think if domestic violence happens in a same sex relationship, I think its undermined compared to if it’s a male and female, if a man’s being ill to a woman. I definitely think that’s out there.* (Saoirse)

Two participants in the study talked of their family’s heterosexist views and how these views limited their options to disclose the abuse in their relationship. One of the participants, Caoimhe recalls:

*They [family] always assumed like two women together sure it would be lovely you know, it would be like your best mate, you know they would have never had thought that it could be violent, and I didn’t want to rock the boat with them either and tell them that it can be.* (Caoimhe)

316 AMEN support services are a registered charity. It is the only service for male victims of IPA in Ireland.
7.5.2 Factors influencing non-recognition of IPA

Research shows that living in a predominantly heterosexist society creates a social context where lesbian, bisexual, and queer women are vulnerable to abuse (Girshick, 2002; McDonald, 2012; Russo, 1999). Naming male-perpetrated violence against women has been a key component of feminist activism, and used as a platform to address the phenomenon in both the political and judicial spheres (Kelly, 1991). However, the lack of understanding, limited language, and a general lack of discussion about lesbian IPA has contributed to a difficulty in identifying, naming, and speaking out about violence in lesbian relationships (Barnes, 2008; Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002; Kelly, 1991). Barnes (2008) asserts that the lack of language to describe female perpetrated sexual violence contributes to survivors being unable to come to terms with their experience, and further, denies women the opportunity to talk through and make sense of their experience. In this study, the lack of language acted as a barrier to accessing support.

Several lines of evidence suggest that recognition of IPA can be hampered by public stories about the phenomenon where IPA is constructed as gendered, heterosexual, and largely physical in nature (Barnes, 2008; Donovan & Hester, 2010; Donovan, et al., 2006; Irwin, 2008; Ristock, 2002). Ristock (2002) argues that such dichotomous understandings of IPA limit discussions that fall outside of the defining binaries, and impact on recognition and access to support. In this study, participants spoke of media representations of IPA, and specialist DV services promotional material, websites, and advertising campaigns as affecting non-recognition of abuse in relationships.

Table 22 Non-recognition of IPA - influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non recognition of IPA</th>
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<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>heterosexual public story IPA</td>
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<td>young &amp; inexperienced</td>
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<td>isolated experience</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>reluctance to identify as victim</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>lack of visibility of SSIPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>concerns dismissed by partner</td>
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<td>lack of physical abuse</td>
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<td>role of professional knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>women as non-violent</td>
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As can be seen from Table 22, four of the women interviewed described not recognising what was happening to them because they thought of IPA as a heterosexual issue. The following quote from Caoimhe explains:

*I didn’t connect the dots in my head you know, I didn’t think this is domestic violence because you were always thought to think that domestic violence was between a man and a woman* (Caoimhe)

The public story that constitutes IPA as occurring in a heterosexual relationship with a male perpetrator and a female victim was found to inform participant’s recognition of IPA, as the following quote illustrates:

*I suppose when we learn about relationships and violence within relationships it’s, its men are always the perpetrators* (Ciara)

Helfrich and Simpson (2006) considered service barriers and needs from the perspectives of agency staff working in an urban domestic violence shelter. Heterosexist assumptions were identified as pervasive and influential on theories that guide the response of service agencies. Participants in this study singled out specialist DV services advertising campaigns and their online platforms that displayed no awareness or visibility of lesbian IPA, and focused predominantly on the heterosexist experience, as influencing recognition of abuse in relationships. The following quotes from Saoirse and Aoibhinn demonstrate their perception of DV services as catering for heterosexual women:

*Domestic violence places to me are for straight women do you know, that’s how I see them, that’s what they look like in their adverts* (Saoirse)

*Well there was nothing visual out there about same sex abusive relationships, all the images and literature I had seen before were showing straight couples, women being beaten by men* (Aoibhinn)

The next quote from Saoirse highlights her perception of the lack of visibility and awareness surrounding same sex IPA. A lack of inclusiveness within service agencies has been cited as a primary reason in deciding not to seek support (Renzetti, 1992). This has also been reported by Bornstein et al. (2006).

*...it’s always about women and men. I never seen anything about two women anywhere until I saw your poster [research promotional poster]* (Saoirse)
Victims of same sex IPA report that when services are tailored to lesbian victims, they are perceived as helpful (Irwin, 2008; St Pierre & Senn, 2010). This following quote from Aoibhinn details her experience where a specialist service, in another country, was advertising awareness of same sex IPA. She noted that the same sex IPA advertising and literature on display at the service enabled her to relate her experience, and crucially, assisted her in naming her experience as IPA, as she explains here:

...even just seeing the literature in that few minutes, and just getting that message so strongly you know, such a simple thing like, helped me so much to connect my experience and you know really name it as domestic violence (Aoibhinn)

Another aspect of the IPA public story constructs the victim as ‘other’, weak, and passive (Donovan & Hester, 2010). Baker (2008) argues that constructing victims of IPA as weak impacts negatively on heterosexual women’s sense of self. Unquestionably, participants in this study felt strongly that the term ‘victim’ held negative connotations for them. Aoife suggested, “...going to a service is me surrendering and saying, “I’m weak”. Resisting the label of ‘victim’ has been found in research with heterosexual males (Corbally, 2015), gay males (Donovan & Hester, 2014), and heterosexual females (Eckstein, 2011). Participants also linked non-recogni

tion of IPA with a reluctance to associate themselves with the label of victim. For example, Saoirse’s account suggests that media representations of female victims, one in which women allow abuse to “gain traction” (victim blaming), informed her recognition of abuse in her relationship, she explains;

...you see it on the television, well, I’ll never be one of them women that will say you know, “I’d never be one of those people that would let it happen”

Previous research has established that those working in the DV sector and experiencing IPA from a female partner report difficulty recognising the behaviour as abusive (Ristock, 2003; Walters., 2011). Walters (2011) reported participants not identifying their relationships as abusive because of their formal DV training that insists on a male component for IPA to exist. Eabha described her experience of working in a DV shelter while she was being abused at home, yet she still did not recognise her experience as IPA. Her quote below draws attention to the predominance of the heterosexual experience of
violence in her work practices and how this influenced non-recognition of violence in her relationship:

...it was never spoken about as possible between two women or even two men actually and, so it never occurred to me because it wasn’t part of the dialogue around it, it wasn’t part of the way it was presented or the way it was talked about, or theorised about or anything like that, it was purely a gender issue.

Eabha also acknowledged her professional position as a DV sector worker as impacting on her ability to acknowledge the abuse in her relationship;

...there is that thing of working in the sector as well you know, you can’t be in an abusive relationship and be working with women in abusive relationships, you know it’s not, it’s not ok (Eabha)

Allied with heteronormative understandings of IPA, participants described feeling isolated in their experience of IPA with a female. This experience was linked to the lack of visibility of same sex IPA, and a lack of awareness of another woman with a similar experience. Girshick (2002) and Giorgio (2002) have reported similar findings.

7.5.3 Factors influencing recognition of IPA

Participants also disclosed an awareness of abusive behaviour as IPA during relationships. As Table 23 demonstrates, recognition of IPA was associated with the experience of physical violence, professional knowledge informing recognition, being older, and DV services promotional material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition of IPA P1</th>
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<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
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<tr>
<td>physical abuse</td>
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<td>role professional knowledge</td>
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<td>older &amp; recognition of IPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS IPA poster</td>
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Contrasting the previous example where Eabha’s professional knowledge acquired in the DV sector impeded her recognition of abuse in her relationship, Roisin indicated that her
professional knowledge as a police officer was instrumental in her recognising her experience as abusive, as she recalls:

*“I’ve enough experience with domestic violence to know that if you’re in a relationship and somebody is hurting you, that is domestic violence.”* (Roisin)

While participants described the lack of physical violence as encumbering their recognition of abuse, physical violence in the relationship was also linked to recognition of IPA, as Aoibhinn recollects:

*“Then I mean the physical, yeah, I definitely knew that was domestic violence yes”* (Aoibhinn)

Clodagh described how her understanding shifted as she got older following years of violence and abuse;

*“...it [abusive behaviour] got progressively worse as the years went on, and I got older and started to realise this isn’t right you know”* (Clodagh)

This following section details the participant’s awareness of being part of a marginalised community and the impact this had on their ability to seek and receive support.

### 7.5.4 Context of a marginalised community

Allen and Leventhal (1999) argue that the uniqueness of the LGBT community, created in response to oppression and marginalisation, makes the experience of IPA different to that of heterosexuals, in that, “batterers can use the conditions created by homo/bi/transphobia and heterosexism to wield highly effective weapons against the partners.” (p.76). Previous research has established that the gay and lesbian community have a shared responsibility for keeping same sex IPA in the “closet”, whereby the community sought to keep the issues concealed due to shame, and a reluctance to provide ammunition to a homophobic majority (Elliot, 1996; Russo, 1999). Older participants in the current study acknowledged their awareness of belonging to a marginalised community. They also drew attention to their perception of the silence surrounding lesbian IPA in the community as an attempt to avoid further community stigma. This finding is well established in the literature (Barnes, 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006). In this next quote, Niamh
describes how she perceived the lesbian community as lacking the “moral courage” to address issues related to lesbian IPA:

...maybe when you are in an oppressed group [deep breath in] you’re not very good at tackling your own, it’s us against them rather than looking at each other and kind of within you know. (Niamh)

Niamh made further reference to the lesbian community’s attempts to silence the issue of IPA:

I would hope that it has changed that you know, that we’re all great you know, we’re all so proud of each other and we support each other, and we’re all together in this and that, that kind of overrode everything so any shit that was going down it was can’t deal with this at all, and we’re certainly not going to put it out there for people to throw more shit at us. (Niamh)

The previous examples highlight the community silence and inactivity in response to lesbian IPA to avoid further community stigma at the LGBT community level. Echoing Patzel’s (2006) findings, at the individual level, Caoimhe gave an account of not disclosing her abusive experience to her family because she didn’t want to propagate a negative community image, as she recalls;

...I didn’t want them [family] to judge me really, and I didn’t want them to think that all gay relationships were like that, and you know, because they were fine with me being gay, I didn’t want them then to start questioning whether you know it was ok (Caoimhe)

As previously indicated, the DV public story (Donovan & Hester, 2010) suggests that the bigger/stronger male partner is the archetypical abuser. In the following quote from Eabha, she alludes to both a stereotypical image of butch (masculine) lesbians and idealised myths about female to female relationships as impeding her ability to disclose her experience of IPA. She locates this barrier within the confines of a minority community, she explains,

...that thing about lesbians being butch and tough and all of that, we don’t want to kind of make that visible as real, I’m not saying that’s the right way, but I think the image of lesbians actually plays against us being able to say, “Yeah, we’re not always perfect and we’re not always lovely, and we’re sometimes a bit shit, we’re just human” so yeah, that’s fairly typical in a minority community I think. (Eabha)

In the section that follows, it will be argued that notions of a lesbian utopia and gendered understandings of violence established by radical and cultural feminists in the 1970s,
impacts upon participant’s ability to recognise their experience as abusive, and further impacts on their opportunities for support.

7.5.5 The perception of a lesbian utopia & non-violent women

Societal beliefs that only men are aggressive and violent has been found to act as a discourse to conceal violence happening in lesbian relationships (Walters., 2011). Such beliefs bolster the myth that lesbian relationships are more egalitarian without power and control, where partners do not abuse one another, and where two women are incapable of inflicting serious harm (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001). Physical acts between two women have been framed as nothing more than a ‘cat fight’ where the extent of their capability to harm and maim has been minimised (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). The myth that women cannot hurt one another was present not only in the participants’ accounts but also in their accounts involving their heterosexual support networks. The following quote from Caoimhe exemplifies how societal beliefs surrounding men and women’s capacity for aggression, impacts on participants support from their families,

...some of my sister’s kind of were like, “Well you know, how hard really can a woman hit you?” That was the kind of reaction (Caoimhe)

As discussed in Chapter three, radical and cultural feminism of the 1970s contributed to discourses that reinforced the view that only men are violent, and that women are essentially peaceful and non-violent (Barnes, 2011; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2013). The following quotes reveal strands of thought from the older participants that suggest their understanding of lesbian relationships was informed by notions of a ‘lesbian utopia’ that position women as non-violent. Eabha recalled that her idea of lesbian relationships as non-violent contributed to her not identifying her relationship as abusive, she explains;

...I hadn’t identified any of this as abusive cause I was going along, “Well lesbians aren’t abusive to other lesbians” you know, but they are. (Eabha)

During her interview, Saoirse described a situation whereby her parents were in daily contact with her abuser. This contact between her parents and ex-partner was linked to her ex-partner having visitation access rights to her young daughter which was used by the partner to continue her control post-separation. This finding mirrors the female
heterosexual experience of post-separation abuse (Radford & Hester, 2006). Saoirse described her parent’s response to her ex-partner as being a constant source of frustration for her and as exerting strain on her relationship with both her parents and her current partner. The response of Saoirse’s parents suggests they were of the belief that female perpetrated violence is not as serious or harmful as that of male perpetrated. Saoirse felt that the response of her family would be markedly different if her abuser was male. She states:

I can only come from what I feel with my parents. I guarantee you if that was me and married to a man, and the man was doing that, they would not be...number one, talking to them on the phone, talking to them when they come to the house, allowing him, or allowing that person into their home, their front door knowing how I feel, how much it upsets me, and they still continue to this day (Saoirse)

The chapter proceeds to discuss limited support options within contexts of heterosexism and homophobia.

7.5.6 Contexts of limited support

Participants described the experience of isolation during relationships that clearly pinpoints the influence of contexts of heterosexism and homophobia in shaping both their understanding of the abuse, and their help-seeking behaviours. This type of isolation was associated with concealing a lesbian sexual identity, and a lack of visibility, awareness, and silence surrounding lesbian IPA. For example, Aobhinn acknowledged the hidden nature of lesbian IPA which she identified as contributing to limiting her options for support. Her next quote highlights the difficulties she experienced with access to informal and formal support options due to isolation and the silence surrounding lesbian IPA:

I didn’t really feel like I had anyone to turn to either, and it wasn’t something that was kind of acknowledged, you didn’t hear about you know same sex domestic violence being talked about (Aoibhinn)

Internalised homophobia has been positively related to physical and sexual IPA victimisation among lesbian and bisexual women (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). Furthermore, internalised homophobia may contribute to the belief that abuse may be deserved (Patzel, 2006; Renzetti, 1997) which has also been attributed to not seeking support (Irwin, 2008). The following quote from Clodagh highlights the homophobic
context in which she and her partner were negotiating their relationship. Her quote also evidences the association between her experience of minority stress, and the impact this had on her ability to access support:

You know, I didn’t know how to sit down and talk about the problems you know because I was so, so scared, so embarrassed you know. I suppose it was a stigma to be gay, you know what I mean, it was nearly like you had leprosy. (Clodagh)

Research suggests that internalised homophobia where a perpetrator is concealing a sexual identity, is positively related to physical, sexual, and psychological IPA perpetration (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Carvalho, et al., 2011). Eabha’s account suggests she experienced predominantly emotional sexual abuse and emotional/psychological abuse. Her narrative provides evidence of her partner’s internalised homophobia during the relationship,

She was quite scathing and disparaging towards the end, she was nasty actually about lesbians and sort of insulting in a way, you know sort of lesbians are this, lesbians are that. (Eabha)

Conclusion: Chapter seven

In agreement with other researchers (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Irwin, 2008; Ristock, 2002), an exploration of the context in which the abuse is occurring is crucial to understanding violence in lesbian relationships. Considering the participants lived experiences and their specific contexts allowed the researcher to see a broader picture of how the participants entered, became embroiled in, and how they managed to escape violent relationships.

This chapter has demonstrated that there are similarities between heterosexual females and lesbian women in their experience of IPA, regarding an escalation and continuation of violence when they indicate their intention to leave a relationship (Kimmel, 2002), and feeling to blame for a partner’s abusive behaviour (Barnes, 2011; O’Leary, 1999), or feeling complicit in a partner’s abusive behaviour (Lozanoska, 2016). Similarities also

317 Clodagh stated her relationship started in the 1970s.
318 Minority stress can be understood as a psychosocial stress derived from having a minority status. When applied to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people, a minority stress framework suggests that prejudice based on sexual orientation is stressful and may lead to adverse mental health outcomes.
emerged between heterosexual males and females with the lesbian experience of IPA in terms of their reasons for remaining in relationships (Eckstein, 2011), and with gay males and heterosexual males with regard to resisting the label of ‘victim’ (Corbally, 2015; Donovan et al., 2014).

The chapter provided evidence that there is some commonality between the participant reports of their female partners' behaviours and characteristics and what is known in the literature about male batterers with regard to having low self-esteem (Capaldi, et al., 2012; Merlis & Linville, 2006), and substance misuse issues (Glass et al., 2008; O’Leary & Schumacher, 2003). The participants described partners as having a “Jekyll and Hyde” type personalities where they would project charming personalities to friends, family, and colleagues for the purposes of manipulation. This type of behaviour was cited as creating a barrier to disclosure of abuse. Comparable tactics have been found in studies of male heterosexual perpetrators (Zink, et al., 2006), and previous research of lesbian IPA (Renzetti, 1992).

The chapter also identified issues specific to lesbian victims of IPA which can be located within the larger social context of heterosexism and homophobia. Researchers argue that the lack of understanding, limited language (particularly around sexual violence), and a general lack of discussion about this issue has contributed to a difficulty in identifying, naming, and speaking out about violence in lesbian relationships (Barnes, 2008; Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002; Kelly, 1991). Moreover, participants in this study, acknowledged that challenges associated with a lack of language to describe sexual violence from a female act as a barrier to accessing support. Consistent with previous research (Barnes, 2008; Donovan & Hester, 2010; Irwin, 2008; Ristock, 2002), the public story of DV as heterosexual, gendered, and largely physical in nature influenced the participants non-recognition of abuse in their relationships.

Older participants in the sample drew attention to their recognition of belonging to a marginalised community and their experience of community silence around the issue of lesbian IPA. Community silence as a mechanism to avoid further stigma is well established in the literature (Barnes, 2011; Elliot, 1996; Hassounah & Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Russo, 1999). Remaining silent and inactive on the issue of IPA at the community level is contradictory to the ethos of a community established to eradicate the oppression of its
members. Community silence is contributing to, and compliant in, reinforcing the heteronormativity of IPA.

Finally, in accordance with other studies (Hassounah & Glass, 2008; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001), myths about lesbian relationships as egalitarian, peaceful, and non-violent influenced both the participants understanding of the abuse in their relationships and the response they received from their families.

Another objective of the current study was to explore the participants’ help-seeking strategies in response to IPA. Chapter eight considers these findings.
8 CHAPTER EIGHT: THE EXPERIENCE OF SEEKING SUPPORT

This chapter is concerned with the participants’ help-seeking activities, with a focus on identifying the key sources of supports utilised during relationships. The support is grouped as either formal support including health professionals, the police, specialist DV services, and LGBT community organisations, or informal support including friends, family, and colleagues. Supports were explored to establish what was experienced by the participants as a helpful or an unhelpful response.

The chapter begins by highlighting the key sources of informal and formal support options utilised and experienced by the participants. The chapter then moves on to explore the participant’s positive and negative experiences when they engaged with the various support options and concludes with participant identified barriers that were stated to impede their help-seeking abilities.

8.1 Key sources of informal supports

Resonating with Mayock et al.’s (2009) findings examining an LGBT samples mental health and well-being, participants in this study identified three key sources of informal support: friends, family, and colleagues. Consistent with the lesbian IPA literature, participants disclosed that friends and family were their primary sources of support (Barnes, 2009; Donovan & Hester, 2011; Irwin, 2008; Renzetti, 1988, 1992; Ristock, 1994; Turrell, 1999). In their review of the empirical literature examining IPA in lesbian and gay relationships, Burke and Follingstad (1999) reported that eighty per cent of battered lesbians sought support from informal sources. This finding is not surprising as lesbians often avoid mainstream formal supports because of the fear of a homophobic response or the possibility of the abuse not being taken seriously (Balsam, 2001; Ristock, 1994; Turell & Herrmann, 2008). Within this context, the preference for informal support may appear as their only sensible option. As Table 24 shows, six of the nine participants reported
seeking support primarily from friends whilst the remaining three women sought support primarily from family and colleagues.

**Table 24 Key sources of informal supports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key sources of informal support</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>friends</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colleagues</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-help</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neighbours</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Echoing Turrell’s (1999) finding that self-help books were a source of support in response to IPA, two participants provided examples of support that were categorised as self-help. Informational reading around IPA, personality disorders, positivity and living healthy, and taking self-defence classes were cited by participants as measures they took to personally address an abusive experience. For example, one participant, Aoife, spoke of having no support from her family during her abusive relationship. When asked about her family as a support option, she replied, “categorically no”. She remained silent on her abuse and did not seek out any assistance from family or friends. Similar to the research that identifies distrust in service providers and childhood abuse and neglect as reasons for not seeking support (Oswald, et al., 2010; St Pierre & Senn, 2010), Aoife connected her reluctance and inability to seek help to a previous abuse history and to her experience of a mother and baby home which she claimed instilled in her a sense of shame, as she recalls:

...Like when I became pregnant with my [child], I went to a mother and baby home. I was ostracised from my family and the church, and my friends disappeared, and I was categorically told you’re, you’re out. So [pause] that’s where I was. I’ve learned that’s how it is, and basically been made to feel at every level nobody listens, that I should be ashamed of how other people conduct themselves (Aoife)

Consistent with Turrell’s (1999) findings, instead of reaching out to others for help, Aoife provided examples of ‘self-help’ where she accessed knowledge that helped her to

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319 41% of Turrell’s sample (n=499) reported reading self-help books as a support option.
320 Mother and Baby Homes have their origins in Ireland as far back as the 1920s where discussion regarding ‘unmarried mothers’ coincided with the foundation of the Irish Free State. (See Smith, 2004). The solution to the problem of illegitimate births was believed to lie in the establishment of antenatal homes for expectant unmarried mothers run by religious orders and institutions. The mother and baby homes operated from 1922 until the 1970s Smith (2004).
understand her partner’s behaviour and how to interact with her abusive partner, as the following quote demonstrates:

So, when I read the book, 

and it was exactly her, they were talking about you know one of the sorts of borderline personality disorders, she was in there, in the book. So, I knew what I had to do. I started doing what I could do in the situation as opposed to dealing with her (Aoife)

Mirroring the participant’s response to IPA in Girshick’s (2002) US study, Aoife also reported that she enrolled in self-defence classes post-relationship and she acknowledged the positive impact this had on her self-confidence, as she explains;

What I didn’t expect was the level of confidence it [self-defence] gave me... It changed how I walked, it changed how I was, posture, everything changed, and it was noticeable after the fourth class, mind-blowingly noticeable... I realised that I had it in me to fight back, that it was ok to fight back (Aoife)

As the subsequent section reveals, the key ‘others’ involved in the participants support were not reported by the participants to necessarily offer appropriate and constructive help in their responses.

8.1.1 Helpful responses from informal supports

Participants described helpful and unhelpful responses from friends, family, and colleagues. The support from family and friends received the most positive appraisals. Other research has found unhelpful responses from informal supports. For example, family, friends, and social networks have been found to offer minimal support and participate in the abuse through passive observance, and minimising and rationalising the abusive behaviour of perpetrators (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Lobel, 1986). Two themes emerged from participants’ accounts to encapsulate a helpful response; firstly, providing emotional support and advice, and secondly, providing practical support. Table 25 illustrates the main types of responses received from informal supports that participants deemed to be helpful or unhelpful.

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322 See Appendix 39 for a comprehensive list of helpful responses from informal supports.
323 See Appendix 40 for a comprehensive list of unhelpful responses from informal supports.
Table 25 Informal supports: helpful & unhelpful responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpful responses</th>
<th>Unhelpful responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing a place to stay</td>
<td>siding with abusive partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering advise</td>
<td>Not being believed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a space to talk about abuse</td>
<td>Not wanting to get involved/ talk about the abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being believed and listened to</td>
<td>not taking abuse seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=5)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating awareness of IPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.1.2 Emotional & practical support from family and friends

Six participants gave accounts of friends offering advice during their abusive relationships. Echoing findings from Barnes (2009) UK study, advice from friends encompassed warning participants of a partner’s previous abuse history, stopping participants retaliating, advising them to leave, to seek professional help, and to report the abuse to the police. Saoirse recalled friends warning her about her partner’s behaviour at the start of their relationship, as she explains in this next quote:

*I remember, it always sticks in my head, her [partners] friends, they’re a couple, and [friend’s name] said to me, “I’m telling you watch her because she’s absolutely crazy and she’ll show her true colours someday”* (Saoirse)

The support from friends was reported as paramount in terms of providing a safe place away from an abusive partner, providing support to access medical assistance, providing space to talk through their abusive experience and their options to leave a relationship, and providing practical support to leave the relationship. Participants also reported being accompanied by friends when they returned to homes shared with a partner to collect belongings. These findings contrast with Turrell and Herrmann (2008), who reported unhelpful responses from friends such as encouraging women to leave but offering no specific guidance or assistance to leave. However, convergence occurred where participants opted for LGBT friends as a support option during the initial experience of abuse and after the crisis was over (Ibid, 2008).
The existing research shows that friends play an important role in providing practical help and supporting women to leave the relationship Irwin (2008). Ciara described the emotional and practical support she received from her friends while living abroad. Following a sexual assault by an older female partner, her friends supported her in exiting an abusive relationship, as she recalls:

...after waking that morning [after a sexual assault] I spent two days with friends and they said, “You have to get out” and one of them actually drove me down to Holyhead to get on a ferry to come back to [Dublin Region] (Ciara)

Family members were reported to have played a pivotal role in helping participants make the decision to end abusive relationships. Clodagh’s next quote makes evident the influence of a family member in her decision to end a long-term abusive relationship:

I’d have to ring me sister because the rows that was going on...and me sister would say, “Come out to me” and I’d go out and I’d have a chat with me brother-in-law, he was brilliant, he was like a father to me. I’d tell him, he was more aware of what was going on really than me sister was and I stayed in their house that night...she was ringing and he [brother-in-law] said to me, “turn that phone off” and then the next morning he said to me, because I didn’t want to go home, once I was away from it and the peace with other people I was happy you know. But he said, “Go home and tell her to get out”. (Clodagh)

This next extract describes the scene in the aftermath of a violent assault in which Caoimhe received broken ribs amongst other physical injuries that required medical attention. Her partner left their shared home after the attack despite Caoimhe’s plea’s that she was unable to physically move. Immobile and in a lot of pain, she called her friend to come to her aid, as Caoimhe recalls:

I rang my friend and I said, “Look it, I’m in trouble [emotional], I said, “I need your help right now”, I said, “She’s really hurt me and I can’t get off the floor”...she [friend] arrived at the door and I couldn’t get the door open cause I couldn’t get up, she was shouting through the letterbox to me and she was looking at me through the letterbox, and I was like, “I just can’t get up”. I was practically screaming in pain now trying to get up and, and I dragged myself up you know, and she was talking in [letterbox] and trying to keep me calm (Caoimhe)

Friends were also acknowledged as being instrumental in stopping a participant retaliate against an abusive partner. Ciara relayed her feelings of anger after a sexual assault:
I suppose out of anger, I wanted to wreak revenge and, like I wanted to thrash the house or something on her and, “No Ciara, you can’t do that. Sit down and you know don’t be stupid” (Ciara)

8.1.3 Demonstrating an awareness of IPA

Friends were reported to demonstrate an awareness of IPA and this was deemed as helpful by participants in naming an experience as abusive. For example, Caoimhe’s older friends voiced their concerns about her relationship, telling her, “This [relationship] isn’t looking healthy”. Their observations were warranted as this next quote from Caoimhe highlights:

...there were two friends in particular that started to notice signs, you know they’d come around to the house and you know the way she would speak to me around them, they were kind of going, “Ok, I’m not liking this”

Victims of lesbian IPA report that when services are tailored to lesbian victims, they are perceived as helpful (Irwin, 2008; St Pierre & Senn, 2010). As previously mentioned in Chapter 7 (see non-recognition section), seeing a visual image of same sex IPA enabled Aoibhinn to relate and connect her experience of abuse, as she stated:

...all the images and literature I had seen before were showing straight couples, women being beaten by men, this was different, I could relate to the message

Unlike specialist DV service provision facilitating female victims of male perpetrators, a female perpetrator has the capability, by way of her gender, to access a safe space for victims. Previous research has established that female abusers have used this tactic to further control a victim (Giorgio, 2002; Merlis & Linville, 2006). This study found evidence that what would typically be a safe environment for women to discuss details of an abusive experience, a DV workshop, was transformed into one of fear and silence, where the abuser once again maintained control. After gaining access to the workshop, Caoimhe reported that her partner took control of the meeting by revealing she was an abuser. This admission ensured that Caoimhe remained silent throughout the workshop. Her narrative contained reports of repeated sexual violence and rape over a three-year period. Considering this context, one can better understand Caoimhe’s partner’s motivation for silencing her in a formal support setting, the quote below illustrates the impact on Caoimhe;
My friend organised the workshop and she [partner] appeared at the workshop. I was in shock, I couldn’t say anything, I froze, it was the first time I’d seen her three months. She stood up and she said, “I was in an abusive relationship for nearly three years and I was the abuser” (Caoimhe)

Colleagues were also reported to have demonstrated an awareness of IPA. They were described as expressing concern, demonstrating an awareness of a change in behaviour, and providing the opportunity to discuss the relationship violence. In the aftermath of a second abusive relationship with a female, Caoimhe described moving a significant distance away from the city where she had previously lived with her partner and where she also worked. Her work colleagues noticed a change in her behaviour and provided the space for Caoimhe to discuss what was happening, as she recalls:

...yeah, I moved to [Border Region1] and just commuted to work and they were very concerned, they sat me down and said, “Look, we were just really concerned about what was happening because you were just totally different” [what way were you different?] I was quieter, and I was taking days off which I would never ever do you know (Caoimhe)

Participants also identified reasons why they didn’t disclose the abuse to family members. They reported not wanting to worry their families, reluctance to disclose their sexuality, not wanting to perpetuate further community stigma, and feeling stupid because their abuser was a woman. These reasons for non-disclosure are well supported in the existing empirical literature (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Patzel, 2006; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 1994; Turell, 1999).

The participants also acknowledged experiencing unhelpful responses from family, friends, and colleagues following disclosure of IPA. The next section describes their negative experiences.

8.2 Unhelpful responses from informal supports

8.2.1 Siding with an abusive partner

In their exploration of support victims of IPA received from the LGBT community, Turell and Hermann (2008) found that fearing friends would side with a partner acted as a barrier to disclosure. Five participants reported friends siding with a partner despite having knowledge about their abusive behaviour. Throughout Niamh’s interview, she expressed
her sense of frustration that friends, primarily acquaintances of her partner, would take her partner’s side. Niamh repeatedly commented during the interview, about what she needed:

“...what I needed from somebody else was that this is not ok Niamh, you know this is not ok, you shouldn’t have to be putting up with this”.

Fortunately, she found the ‘validation’ that she desperately needed from friends in the LGBT community, as she recalls:

...pair of dyke friends...I rang them up, really distressed, and I went over to their house and I hadn’t told them before, five hours I talked with them and it was just different. I know what I needed was people to just take what I was saying, validate what I was saying was what was going on, and it wasn’t about bitching, “oh she’s terrible, she’s a bitch and she’s evil”, it wasn’t about that and they did that, and it was just fucking wonderful, it just gave me such a good feeling, and you know I was thirsting for it, I just felt I was thirsting for that you know. (Niamh)

8.2.2 Not being believed about the abuse

Similar to the heterosexual experience of IPA where women fear their claims of abuse will be trivialised (Wolf, et al., 2003), studies show that lesbian women fear their IPA claims will not be believed in both informal (Girshick, 2002) and formal settings (Donovan & Hester, 2011). Participants in this study stated that their friends did not believe them about the abuse, and similar to Renzetti’s (1992) findings, friends claimed that they did not know who to believe between the couple. Saoirse recalled feeling angry with her friends because they continued to socialise with her partner and they didn’t believe her when she disclosed the abuse. However, as the following quote illustrates, her friends observed first-hand the violent behaviours of her partner. For Saoirse, this event witnessed by her friends validated her claim of abuse during the relationship. Because friends initially did not take her claims seriously, Saoirse felt she was ‘exaggerating’ her abusive experience,

...then they [friends] saw with their own eyes the night out when she [partner] lost it [assaulted a bouncer] ...sometimes you feel like that it’s all in your own head. I feel like that sometimes and I feel people maybe say, “Oh she’s exaggerating the story or she’s making it up”. I sometimes feel like that and that night when she done that, I was actually glad because they saw what she really was (Saoirse)
8.2.3 Friends not wanting to get involved

Research indicates that friends of lesbian victims sometimes minimize violence and refuse to get involved Ristock (2003). Participants reported similar findings. Niamh interpreted her friend’s response as akin to accepting her partner’s abusive behaviour against her, as she explains:

...I was the only person I ever heard confronting her and taking her on about what she was doing...what I felt right, this is just my perception of it, that what I see here is that people are letting, are behaving like it’s ok for her to treat me like this and I really feel it’s not (Niamh)

However, when a friend confronted a partner about her behaviour, in some cases, there was evidence of a negative consequence for the participant, as Caoimhe’s next quote illustrates:

So, she [friend] sat her [partner] down and had a talk with her and that made things worse...cause then she cracked my ribs and threw me down the stairs after having a conversation with my friend (Caoimhe)

Mirroring the existing evidence on the responses of friends (Ristock, 2003), participants in this study also acknowledged unhelpful responses they received from colleagues when they disclosed abuse in their relationships including an unwillingness to get involved or discuss the issue further, as Aoife experienced in this next quote:

...two women, two managers who I had a great working relationship with, and I told them simply because I thought I had built up a sufficiently good relationship with them, and they said, “That’s tough, I hope it all goes well”, and that was it (Aoife)

Ciara who met her second abusive partner in the workplace recalls here telling her manager about her partner’s behaviour on the day she was leaving her employment and not feeling her concerns were taken seriously,

I remember referring to her as being a very, very dangerous and controlling woman and the manager was saying, “You’d want to be careful what you’re saying” (Ciara)

Participants further reported experiencing female friends and family members wanting to retaliate against a partner as an unhelpful response. Upon seeing Caoimhe badly beaten in a hospital bed, Caoimhe explains in this next quote how she felt about her friend’s reaction to retaliate with violence,
...she [friend] was absolutely going to kill her and I spent most of my energy then trying to keep her calm, she left then and made a promise she wouldn’t go and find her. (Caoimhe)

8.2.4 Unhelpful responses from family

Family members were also reported to respond by not taking the abuse seriously, not listening, and not wanting to get involved. None the less, family responses were reported as markedly different from friends. In agreement with Hassouneh and Glass (2008), the findings indicate that gender role stereotyping shapes participants experiences of IPA by influencing familial responses. For example, participants reported that because the perpetrator was female, there was an inherent assumption that the violence posed no physical harm or threat to the participants. Similar findings were reported by McLaughlin and Rozee (2001).

The participant’s narratives indicate that family members blamed them for the abuse and prioritised their financial over their social well-being. Family and friends have been reported to offer minimal support, participate in the abuse through passive observance, and to minimise and rationalise the abusive behaviour of perpetrators (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Lobel, 1986). Aoife described disclosing details of the violence and abuse at a family gathering. As this next quote demonstrates, her mother’s response was dismissive of her partner’s behaviour, and instead focused upon Aoife retaining her home;

*I started to explain what [partner] was doing and my mother said, “Well we don’t give a shit about her”, she said, “You know this is about you leaving, and you’re letting her win” and she just reinforced - who listens? (Aoife)*

In this study, interviewees claimed that their partner’s family members made threats to pressure them to take a partner back after a relationship breakdown. Clodagh gave an account of living with a partner who was addicted to prescription medication and alcohol which she claimed, “really messed her up mentally”. She described numerous incidents of receiving threats from her partner’s family when she indicated she wanted to end the relationship. This quote from Clodagh explains:

*...her mother actually had a conversation on the phone, not a conversation, she was screaming on the phone to me, she wanted me to take her back and eh, “you put my daughter out” and all this. (Clodagh)*
In the context of a partner’s alcohol and prescription drug addiction, this next quote from Clodagh reveals the threats she received from her partner’s family that were devised to ensure she maintained “responsibility” for her partner so that family members could eschew their duty of care:

…it was like too that the family wanted me, like she was my responsibility, that I wasn’t to put her back on them, that they were ok once she was getting looked after by me you know, it was crazy (Clodagh)

This section has demonstrated that informal supports were pivotal in providing both practical and emotional support that helped participants to leave abusive relationships and to recognise the behaviours they experienced as abusive. The chapter now moves to consider the sources of formal support participants availed of during and post abusive relationships.

8.3 Key sources of formal support

This study identified five key sources of formal support: counselling, the health services, LGBT organisations, the police and specialist DV services. Table 26 provides an overview of the key sources of formal support accessed by participants during and post relationships. Nine women reported accessing support from counsellors (couple counselling and psychotherapist), including two women who attended joint counselling with their partners, and six women reported attending counselling after the relationship ended. This reported preference for counselling type support is well documented in the existing literature (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 1994; Turell, 1999) with studies demonstrating an inclination for friends first followed by counselling support. Four participants reported seeking support from the health services, two participants respectively attended a General Practitioner and an Accident and Emergency department.324

324 See Appendix 41 for a comprehensive list of positive experiences with formal supports and Appendix 42 for a comprehensive list of negative experiences with formal supports.
Three women contacted the police during their relationship. However, one participant disclosed that she did not reveal the nature of her relationship when making a formal complaint to the police. Another participant reported the police attending her home following an escalation of violence. An escalation of violence has been found to act as a catalyst to seeking help from police for lesbian and gay victims of IPA (Donovan & Hester, 2011). Two participants sought support from LGBT community organisations. Consistent with the research suggesting that lesbian women do not seek support from DV services (Bornstein et al., 2006; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Patzel, 2006), only one participant in this study reported contacting a DV support service for assistance.

The following section provides an overview of the participants positive and negative evaluations of the formal supports they approached.

### 8.4 Positive & negative experiences with counselling support services

As Table 26 illustrated, the majority of participants recalled their experience with counsellors as a support option. In the main, women gave positive evaluations of this type of support. Four sub-themes were derived from the women’s accounts to explain a positive experience with counselling, (1) rebuilding self-confidence; (2) having their concerns taken seriously; (3) recognition of partners as culpable for the abuse in their relationships; and (4) receiving a non-judgemental response.

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**Table 26 Key sources of formal support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key sources of formal support</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
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*Two women reported finding the counselling experience uncomfortable and painful while another suggested her negative experience with counselling was connected to her opting for counselling too soon after her relationship ended.*

*See Appendix 43 Barriers to counselling support.*
8.4.1 Rebuilding self-confidence/ self-esteem

Six participants associated counselling support with rebuilding their self-confidence. According to the participants, self-confidence was associated with feeling stronger, experiencing clarity in thinking, learning to be more assertive about their needs in a relationship, gaining an understanding of their behaviour during the relationship, understanding the impact of concealing their sexual identity, and maintaining personal power during relationships. Turell (1999) reported that 35 per cent of her sample (n=499) perceived counselling services as the most needed support option as participants believed that they were responsible for the problems in their relationships. Turrell found that her respondents felt that an increase in their self-esteem would end the abuse in their relationships.327

In this study, Roisin reported that following a second abusive relationship, she experienced a period of not being able to socialise. Other work reports that lesbian women distance themselves from family and friends during and following an abusive experience (Walters., 2011). Roisin stated that she met her partner through a social group for lesbian, bisexual and queer women, and a large part of her socialising related to the group’s social events. She explained that part of the reason for her not socialising was because her partner was claiming to other group members that she was the victim in their relationship. Female perpetrators claiming victimisation has been found in previous studies (Giorgio, 2002). Roisin identified the support accessed through a psycho-therapist as providing her with the strength to re-engage socially, as she explains here:

*I was still going through the counselling so that’s why I actually went that night [group social event] because I was going through the counselling and I was stronger* (Roisin)

In two cases, participants reported their experience with counselling as enabling them to leave an abusive relationship. Caoimhe described her experience of counselling in the third year of her violent relationship as enabling clarity in her thinking which she stated influenced her decision to end her relationship, as she recalls:

*I was finally thinking clearly for the first time in fucking three years... It was a lot to do with the counsellor, yeah, I mean the counsellor was really supporting me.* (Caoimhe)

327 Turell’s (1999) sample consisted of 39% lesbian, 11% gay women, 43% gay men, 5% bisexual, and 2% heterosexual.
Roisin connected her experience of abuse in relationships with her lack of assertiveness and “letting things slide”. She attributed her experience with counselling as providing her with the tools to be more assertive about her needs within relationships, and she applied this learning in her subsequent partnerships, as she explains:

...thanks to the counselling, I had gotten to the stage that I knew if I was with somebody, and if I wasn’t liking things, I could say it to them...if she did something that I didn’t like, it was sort of the case of I’m more able to sort of turn around and go, “No, we’re not doing”. (Roisin)

During her abusive relationship, Clodagh described attempts to access counselling support but because she was concealing her sexual identity, she explained that she never felt able to disclose the violence she was experiencing. Fear of a homophobic response from formal supports has been found to impact access to services for lesbian women (Balsam, 2001; Turell & Herrmann, 2008). After her relationship ended which coincided with her ‘coming out’, Clodagh began two years of intensive counselling support. She acknowledged that her experience with a counsellor assisted her in recognising her self-esteem issues and understanding the personal impact of concealing her lesbian sexual identity, as she explains here:

...here’s the real crux of it which I learned with the counselling. I never thought enough of meself. I never thought I was worth anything cause if it was now, I wouldn’t put up with that. But I had no self-confidence or self-esteem., I never, ever, felt good enough, and particularly then the double whammy then was being gay and hiding that through the years (Clodagh)

Participants also associated counselling support with creating a sense of awareness around their personal power in relationships and the need to protect and maintain this power. This next quote from Roisin describes her attempts to manage the abuse in her second abusive relationship by recalling skills she had learned from a previous counselling experience:

I was trying to learn from what I’d learned in counselling and trying to basically sort of talk through things and whatever, like you know, and at the same time, not let myself get trampled on, maintain my own power. (Roisin)
8.4.2 Taking IPA claims seriously & recognition of partners as culpable

The second subtheme associated with a positive counselling experience was reported as counsellors taking the participants IPA claims seriously. For counsellors, this included listening to, and believing participants, and taking their side. The following quotes illustrate the point:

*I didn’t feel different or anything, she [counsellor] just listened to me, took what I said, she believed me* (Saoirse)

*She [psycho-therapist] didn’t make me feel like you know it was nothing or anything like that, she listened to me, she believed me you know* (Roisin)

Three participants acknowledged the role of counselling in increasing their sense of not feeling at fault for their partner’s abusive behaviour. Roisin gave an account of two separate experiences of IPA with a female partner. After her first relationship experience, she attended counselling. She opted to return to counselling after her second abusive relationship following an awareness that she was blaming herself for the abuse. In this next quote, she recalls her thought processes after her second relationship;

*“What is it with me? Why me?” … “What did I do?” Once I started having those thoughts that’s when I went back to counselling again and I learned, “No this isn’t you, it’s not you, it’s them”* (Roisin)

8.4.3 Receiving a non-judgemental response

Studies suggest that counsellors open acceptance of lesbians and knowledge of their issues is conducive to a good therapeutic experience and growth for the participant (Smetana & Bigner, 2005). Five women indicated that a positive response from counsellors consisted of experiencing a non-judgemental response when they disclosed their sexuality. Non-judgemental responses from counsellors were classified as providing an objective response and making participants feel at ease regarding their sexuality. The following quotes from Saoirse and Roisin exemplify this point:

*It was positive yeah, I didn’t feel like she [counsellor] treated me differently, I didn’t feel anything negative about my sexuality, I didn’t feel different or anything* (Saoirse)
...she [psycho-therapist] didn’t make me feel like it was my fault, she didn’t do anything like that, she didn’t try and shy away from the fact that I was gay or anything like that, she was very, very good. I felt very comfortable with her after the first session (Roisin)

In contrast, the participants also reported that they received a judgemental and/ or a homophobic response from counsellors. Ristock’s (2001) focus groups with 70 feminist counsellors found that counsellors employ heteronormative discourses and feminist categories and constructs to think about IPA. Ristock (2001) argues that this approach impedes their understanding and their ability to respond effectively to same sex IPA. In this study, receiving a judgemental/ homophobic response was interpreted by participants as being refused support on religious grounds, not providing information for further support options, being made to feel unwelcome and uncomfortable, and refusing to offer further support.

Saoirse described her partner’s attempts to access support following a violent assault during their honeymoon. Her partner’s efforts to seek help could be interpreted as a desperate move to keep her in the relationship, as Saoirse claimed the violent assault was pivotal to her ending their Civil Partnership. However, as this next quote from Saoirse reveals, the couple were refused access to counselling support on religious grounds:

...when we came back from [honeymoon], [partner] contacted [organisation], it’s for married Catholic people, [partner] rang them for help, that the two of us go you know like for mediation, go, and talk, and they refused us because we were a same sex couple. They said they couldn’t support us because they are a Catholic funded organisation, they turned us away. (Saoirse)

Following this rejection, Saoirse explained that she felt her experience, of what she termed “domestic violence”, was undermined. Her next quote highlights another area identified by participants as a negative response from formal support services, such as, not providing a referral or information for another service that could provide appropriate support.

...maybe that wasn’t the best we could call because it’s a Catholic one, but they were of no help, and it’s not to say they even turned around and said, “Well we know another group that could help”, they didn’t you know, there was no help whatsoever, it was a complete straight out no. So maybe they don’t even value it, like there probably is no such thing as domestic violence do you know?

Participants also gave accounts of counselling professionals refusing to provide any further support once they had disclosed a sexual assault by a female partner. The next extract
highlights the lack of diversity in training of professionals and how this counsellor felt out of her professional depth and unable to support Ciara through a traumatic experience,

I went to see her [counsellor], I think at the third occasion she said, “I can’t see you again. You’ve completely disabled my counselling skills” [Ok what does that mean?] I don’t know. I think I freaked the fuck out of her (Ciara)

Professionals demonstrating a lack of awareness of same sex relationships and the same sex experience of IPA was acknowledged by participants as unhelpful. This aspect of counselling support is discussed next.

8.4.4 A lack of awareness of same sex relationships and same sex IPA

Five participants indicated that counsellors demonstrated a lack of awareness of SSIPA and same sex relationships when approached for support. This lack of awareness influenced the participant’s willingness to disclose experiences of physical and sexual violence, and further, contributed to a delay in participants seeking help.328 Eabha recalled seeking counselling support in the aftermath of her thirteen-year relationship. Her relationship involved primarily emotional sexual abuse. Yet when she sought support, she disclosed, “I didn’t probably talk about the sex bit at all”. As her next quote conveys, she found it difficult to discuss the issues in her relationship with a “straight” counsellor:

I’ve been to counselling but it was a straight counsellor and I found it really difficult with a straight counsellor. I found it very difficult to talk to her. I actually found it really difficult to talk to her about anything, so I stopped going to her (Eabha)

According to Eabha, part of the difficulty she had with disclosing the abuse in her relationship was due to her counsellor’s lack of understanding of same sex relationships in general, as she recalls;

...as long as they [counsellors] understood lesbian gay issues because that was the thing with the straight [counsellor]...I’m sure she would have been doing her best but there was always a sense that she didn’t really get that you know (Eabha)

Similarly, Niamh described her experience of couple counselling in a negative manner, stating that the counsellor, “hadn’t a clue about the dynamic”, and was therefore unable to

328 Two participants recalled not returning to counselling following a negative experience.
offer appropriate support which left Niamh feeling the support did “more harm than good”. Therapeutic professionals are critical of couple counselling as a support response to lesbian IPA (Leeder, 1988; Morrow and Hawxhurst, 1989). Following recommendations from the NCADV, Morrow and Hawxhurst (1989) argue that couple counselling facilitates victim-blaming in that the victim must share the responsibility for the abuse, may allow the abuser to deny responsibility for her actions, and even escalate the violence, as what the victim says in the session may be used as a catalyst for further violence. Leeder (1988) further recommends the victim seek help elsewhere while counsellors work solely with the abuser. Despite this recommendation, there is a tendency for lesbian couples to address violence in couple counselling contexts (Hammond, 1988; Walters, 2011; Wise & Bowman, 1997). In their exploration of counsellor’s responses to lesbian and heterosexual IPA, couples counselling was the most recommended option for lesbians and the next to last option for heterosexuals (Wise and Bowman, 1987). Walters (2011) found that participants in her study colluded with their partners to keep the violence a secret from counsellors, which she argues, further empowers the batterer by minimising their behaviour and the seriousness of the situation.

Having reviewed the participants experiences with counselling support services, the succeeding part of this chapter moves on to describe participant engagement with professionals in the health services.

8.5 The health services: positive & negative responses

8.5.1 A negative response

International and Irish research suggests that lesbian women are reluctant to seek help from health care services due to fear of a homophobic response from professionals or the experience of judgements made by health care professionals on sexual identity (LEA & Western Health Board, 1999; Marrazzo & Stine, 2004). Consistent with Irish research (Duffy, 2011; Gibbons, et al., 2008) indicating lesbian women attending hospital emergency departments were assumed to be heterosexual by staff, one participant in this study described her experience with a female nurse in A&E where the nurse assumed her

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attacker was male. As well as suffering two broken ribs, Caoimhe recalled attending A&E in the following condition:

\[ I \text{ had to get two stitches over my eye, and two stitches under my lip, and just one stitch above it [lip], and it was all bruised and swollen (Caoimhe) } \]

The public story of DV and contemporary DV services are based on a heterosexist model of abuse involving a violent, controlling violent male aggressor and a non-violent passive female victim (Van Natta, 2005), where the abuse experienced is purported to be primarily physical in nature (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Considering this background and Caoimhe’s physical state arriving at the hospital, the nurse’s assumption that her attacker was male is plausible.

Three participants recollected their experience of attending GPs during relationships. None of the participants reported that they disclosed the true nature of their injuries to GPs. Participants gave accounts of not reporting the nature of injuries to GPs to protect partners and their employment status, as Saoirse explains:

\[ I \text{ didn't tell the doctor the real truth of how I sustained those injuries. I never told anyone the real truth because stupidly I didn't want [partner] to get into trouble } \]

8.5.2 A positive response

The participant accounts suggest a positive response from health professionals consisted of being asked questions to empower; providing the option to formally report an assault; emotionally supporting participant’s and encouraging them to disclose the abuse; making a referral to a professional counselling service; exhibiting empathy and understanding when a participant disclosed their sexual identity; and demonstrating an awareness of IPA.

Two participants described attending A&E departments with injuries they sustained during relationships. The participants identified female nurses as a source of emotional support. This involved nurses gently trying to persuade participants to disclose the nature of their injuries and make a formal report to the police. The following quote from Saoirse recalls the scenario:
Another aspect of positive support from nurses identified by the participants was their awareness of potential IPA, where they questioned the participants on the nature of their injuries, as Saoirse recalls:

*I said I was out drinking, and I fell on a curb, but a nurse came to me and said to me, “The angle of that cut it doesn’t add up the way…”, they could tell by looking at the cut, that it didn’t look like I had fallen on a curb* (Saoirse)

Consistent with previous Irish research (Gibbons et al., 2008), participants noted that GPs provided a non-judgemental response to a disclosure of a lesbian sexual identity. Clodagh emphasised the importance of the GP response particularly in the context of ‘living in the closet’, as she explains:

*He [GP] was good, he was good, and he was understanding you know that kind of a way and for somebody to sort of understand it was good* (Clodagh)

Turrell (1999) explored the help-seeking experiences of an LGBT sample of which fifty per cent self-identified as lesbian and gay women. One of the most helpful responses from service providers was reported as the experience of being empowered through empathetic listening. In general, Aoife stated that she never looked for support during her abusive relationship because she explained that “I don’t want to be enveloped in sympathy”. She recalled her experience with clinical depression after her relationship ended, and how her GP’s response was experienced as empowering:

*“What can we do to help you?” that is probably one of the most empowering questions...It was a locum doctor and I was hysterical, I mean hysterical, losing it, and she listened very patiently and then she said, “What can I do?” and it was the first time anybody, I mean anybody had ever asked me that. It was powerful, it was powerful because suddenly it wasn’t pity and sympathy and that that changed my mind set* (Aoife)

Participants also provided accounts of seeking support from An Garda Síochána. The next section outlines what participants deemed a positive and negative response from the police. Women also discussed their perception of the police as influencing their decision to formally report.

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330 31% of Turrell’s 499 participants cited this response as helpful.
8.6 Police responses: positive experiences and the perception of support

8.6.1 Police support: A positive response

As previously demonstrated in Table 26, three participants gave accounts of contacting the police about the violence and abuse in their relationships. In contrast to other studies indicating a negative police response (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Giorgio, 2002; Hassounah & Glass, 2008; Wolf, et al., 2003), in the main, women in this study provided positive assessments of police support. Two main themes emerged to describe a positive police response, (1) providing emotional support, and (2) taking the participants claims seriously. Emotional support was cited as making a participant feel safe and protected, and that they were on their side. For example, Niamh exclaimed that the support she received from the police represented the first time that anybody validated her experience as wrong. Throughout her interview, she referred to needing this validation and not receiving it, as she states:

"...I kind of felt I had that back up there, and I felt they [police] were on my side...what I hadn’t been getting from anybody up until I talked to the Guards...they just heard what I said and said, "Ok, this is not ok" you know, you know what do we need to do here kind of thing, you know that was all I was looking for [laughs]."

Following her experience with the police, Aoife recalled, “I felt safe with their presence in the house and not because of their authority but their presence. They were very, very good”.

Taking the participants claims seriously included listening to, and believing them when they reported abuse, and offering to confront a partner about her behaviour. Providing the option of a female officer was also acknowledged as a helpful response. Aoife reflected on her experience with the police. On the morning she was leaving her relationship, she informed the local police that she anticipated a violent response from her partner. An escalation of violence has been found to act as a catalyst to seeking help from police for lesbian and gay victims of IPA (Donovan & Hester, 2011). The next extract describes the scene when the police arrived at her home, according to Aoife, their actions demonstrated to her that they took her prior report seriously;

"They didn’t ask me to repeat what I had already repeated at the station, that was huge because that for me said that they listened...So, when they came in there was no need for
them to say, “What’s your name?” or to ask her what her name was, they knew. So, I had furnished them with information, and they came into the house equipped with that information which means one, they heard me, two, they took me seriously (Aoife)

Niamh described her experience when she decided to report her partner’s violent behaviour. Like the previous example, she expressed the opinion that the police took her claims seriously by offering to confront her partner about her behaviour, as she explains:

*I came in and told them [police] and they got a woman guard…and it was great I have to say. She just took everything that I said, it wasn’t questioning me, it was just taking what I said…they said, “Do you want us to go and talk to her and just warn her or something?”* (Niamh)

8.6.2 Police support: A negative perception

In contrast to the positive police responses, four participants spoke about police support at the level of perception. Participant’s perception of police support comprised three themes, (1) a perception the abuse would not be taken seriously, (2) the perception that the participants claim would not be believed, and (3) fear of a homophobic response. Non-reporting to police authorities for the reasons previously outlined is well established in the same sex IPA literature (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Walters., 2011; Wang, 2011). For example, Donovan and Hester (2011) talk about the ‘gap of trust’ between lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities, and the police. The author’s highlight the ways in which those who are non-heterosexual have been controlled and regulated through legislation that criminalised male same sex sexual behaviour, and where non-heterosexuals have been excluded from the armed forces, marriage, adoption, and family law, and preventing their engagement in activities. Similarly, prevalence data from the US National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey (Tjaden & Thonnes, 2000) reports that most intimate partner victimisations are not reported to the police. Using a representative sample with 8000 women and 8000 men, the author’s found that approximately one-fifth of all rapes, one-quarter of all physical assaults, and one half of all stalking perpetrated against female

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331 Similarly, in Ireland, the Employment Equality Act, 1998, 2004 contained derogation, known as Section 37(1), for organisations which have an explicit denominational ethos (such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes). Section 37(1) permitted them to take ‘reasonable action’ to protect that ethos from being undermined. The Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2015 amended the provisions of Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act making it illegal for religious-run institutions to discriminate against employees who were non-heterosexual.
respondents were reported. The authors argue that victims of IPA don’t consider the justice system as an appropriate vehicle for resolving conflict with partners.

The heteronormative construction of ‘domestic violence’ consists of a gendered embodiment of victim and perpetrator (Barnes, 2008). The impact of the DV public story on the participants in this study is that they would not report their experiences to the police (or other services) because their experience did not fit this model of understanding. Participants expressed the view that because their abuser was female, particularly in cases where there had been sexual violence, this influenced their perception that their claims would not be believed and would not be taken seriously. Research shows that negative past experiences with police that include IPA claims being trivialised and not taken seriously act as a barrier to reporting for heterosexual women (Wolf, et al., 2003). Similarly, this next quote from Caoimhe illuminates the various intersecting reasons why she chose not to formally report to the police.

...I didn’t want to [report sexual violence], especially because I thought they [police] are going to view it very fucking differently because it’s a woman you know, I knew that, I knew there’s no way they are going to take this seriously. You know if I couldn’t get them to take it seriously that I was abused my entire childhood you know; they’re not going to fucking take this seriously

Ciara revealed that she considered contacting the police after a sexual assault. Like the previous example, she felt that reporting sexual violence would not be taken seriously because the perpetrator was female. Donovan and Hester (2011) found participants negative perception of the police response to heterosexual IPA was influential in their decision to not formally report to the police. Similarly, in this next quote, Ciara’s critical attitude toward the police in terms of their response to heterosexual rape, influenced her decision not to formally report, as she explains:

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332 The survey found that even fewer rapes, physical assaults, and stalking’s perpetrated against males were reported (Tjaden & Thonnes, 2000). Studies show that masculine lesbian women are less likely to report IPA compared with feminine lesbian women. See Walters (2009).

333 Heterosexual women cite a reluctance to report rape with having to reveal injuries to private parts of the body and the unwillingness to undergo a physical examination (Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003).

334 As is demonstrated further in the chapter, Ciara referenced what she described as the narrow legal definition of rape that was prevalent at the time of her assault (comprising penile penetration only), as influencing her decision to formally report. Her negative perception of police attitudes to heterosexual rape could be contextualised within a legal context where it was not a crime for a man to rape his wife. In Ireland, marital rape became a crime under section 5 of the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990.
...well, I suppose given the attitude that the police tend to have towards heterosexual rape, I didn’t have much faith what response they would have to two women. I didn’t think for a moment that they would take it seriously, I thought, “ah fuck it, leave it” (Ciara)

Saoirse recalled considering formally reporting an experience of online abuse where her partner made demeaning comments about her ability as a mother on social media. As her next quote conveys, she too perceived her claims would not be taken seriously:

I was going to go to the Guards but then I was like what’s the point, they’re not going to do anything, I couldn’t be bothered do you know. I couldn’t be bothered humiliating myself in that way, embarrassing myself talking about it. So, I left it off (Saoirse)

Aoibhinn is one of three participants who contacted the police during her abusive relationship. Unlike the other two participant accounts, Aoibhinn disclosed that she did not reveal the nature of her relationship for the following reasons:

Well, I didn’t think they [police] would take it seriously you know being two women, I thought it would be handled better if they didn’t think it was a lesbian relationship (Aoibhinn)

However, her next quote suggests that her motives for keeping the nature of her relationship concealed from the police related to her attempt to avoid a homophobic response;

I didn’t put it as we were lesbians or in a relationship...I talked about us having been friends and neighbours as opposed to it being a relationship [Why didn’t you say anything?] ...because I guess I kind of would have thought that would have maybe brought a lot of negativity into the situation, and I didn’t want to kind of further complicate it. I just thought it would make it you know a lot worse (Aoibhinn)

The following section outlines what participants deemed as positive and negative responses from LGBT community organisations.

8.7 LGBT community: positive & negative responses

8.7.1 A negative response: Avoiding community stigma

The literature reviewed in Chapter 3 indicates that the response of the lesbian community, to date, has been less than adequate, with studies indicating LGBT communities remain silent and inactive on the issue of IPA (Bornstein, et al., 2006; Girshick, 2002; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Merlis & Linville, 2006; Patzel, 2006). Two older participants in this study
described their experience of support from LGBT community organisations as negative.\textsuperscript{335} This negative experience is best understood in the context of being in a marginalised community and not wanting to generate further community stigma. Attempts to protect the community by perpetuating and sustaining a positive community image is known in the literature as ‘myth of a lesbian utopia’ (i.e., a belief that relationships between and among women are non-violent and egalitarian) (Barnes, 2011; Girshick, 2002; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). The following quote from Niamh illustrates the point,

\textit{...the lesbian community there was kind of an impression that we’re all friends because we’re dykes, we all love each other and we’re all great and everything else and sure we aren’t, we are just human beings, we got the good, the bad, and the ugly going on} (Niamh)

Additional negative response from LGBT community organisations was reported as their silence on the issue and a refusal to acknowledge and provide support to participants.

8.7.2 Emotional and practical positive support

Two participants recalled accessing support from members of LGBT community groups. Their experience of a positive response from this support option is classified as emotional and practical support. Emotional support consists of believing a participant, confronting the abusive partner about her behaviour, building resilience, and making the participant feel protected. Practical support involved providing accommodation and assisting the participant to move home after a relationship. Niamh recounted the emotional support she received from a female member of an LGBT community organisation, as she recalls:

\textit{...when I decided to move back, one of those women said, “I’ll go with you” and physically she came with me and [partner] was there and she didn’t take [partner] on, she didn’t abuse her or anything, but it was very clear from her behaviour that she was very assertive, and I think just by being there...I felt looked after like she was watching out for me.} (Niamh)

Research demonstrates that social support within LGBT communities is associated with positive self-identification, greater social and psychological well-being (DiFulvio, 2011), and positive self-esteem (Ceatha, 2016; Detrie and Lease, 2007). Following thirteen years of being ‘closeted’ in an abusive relationship, Eabha recalled a dark period after the

\textsuperscript{335} See Appendix 44 Barriers to LGBT community support.
relationship ended where she self-harmed and felt suicidal. Lesbian women have reported to attempt suicide and feel suicidal following an abusive relationship experience (Irwin, 2008). Re-connecting with the LGBT community through a social group was instrumental in Eabha regaining her personal strength, as she states:

*I had joined [LGBT group] which was my first step back into lesbian and gay life, it was just, it saved my life, to be honest with you it saved my life* (Eabha)

The support she received from members of the organisation, such as providing her with a place to live and space where she explained, “*I could be lesbian again you know and openly*” was pivotal in Eabha regaining her self-confidence and re-connecting with her sense of self as a lesbian woman.

Only one participant out of the nine interviewees’ spoke of seeking support from a DV service, her experience is discussed next.

### 8.8 Specialist DV services

As was demonstrated in Chapter 7 (see section ‘non-recognition of IPA’), participants spoke about DV services generally at the level of perception where such services were largely understood as available to heterosexual women only. This finding is supported by previous research (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 1994). Participants in Renzetti’s (1992) study reported feeling very isolated because they did not perceive there were services available to them as lesbians, and therefore, DV shelters were not seen as a viable option. In this study, only one participant provided details of contacting a DV service for help. Her account communicates an overall positive experience. Niamh explained that the DV sector professional was, “*a dyke as well, she was totally clued in*”. Other work demonstrates lesbian and bisexual women favour help from those of the same sexual orientation (Turell, 1999; Walters, 2009). As Niamh’s next quote illustrates, providing the space to talk through the abusive experience and advising how best to respond, were cited as a positive experience with DV services, “*we had a good talk and that really helped in my response to it all, and it was fine, good that [sic] good*”.

The findings from this study with regard to lesbian women experiencing IPA and their access to DV support services are consistent with previous research (Bornstein et al., 2006;
Merlis & Linville, 2006; Patzel, 2006) suggesting that lesbian women are reluctant to use DV services in response to the experience of IPA.

Having reviewed the help-seeking strategies employed by the participants, the chapter now moves to consider barriers to help-seeking that emerged from the interview data.

8.9 Barriers to help-seeking

In accordance with previous SSIPA research, the participants narratives illustrate that living in a heterosexist and homophobic society creates specific barriers for those seeking support who are non-heterosexual (Balsam, 2001; Donovan & Hester, 2011; Hardesty, et al., 2011; Turell & Herrmann, 2008). As previously indicated in Chapter 3, Liang et al.’s (2005) theoretical framework to understand the processes of help-seeking for IPA, has been adapted by lesbian IPA researchers (Hardesty et al., 2011; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). In harmony with the aforementioned studies, the results of this study further support the idea of barriers to support for lesbian survivors operating at three separate levels, societal, institutional, and individual (Hardesty, et al., 2011; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). As will be evidenced in this section, the barriers that materialise are complex and interconnected, and each level was found to influence the other.

8.10 Societal barriers

Previous lesbian IPA research has pinpointed the inclusion of contexts of heterosexism and homophobia as a means to understand help-seeking (Donovan, et al., 2014; Irwin, 2006; Ristock, 2002). Studies report that societal barriers result from the heterosexism of society and its social and cultural systems (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005). Within this current research, participants acknowledged the societal barriers that influence both institutional and individual barriers identified in this study. Societal barriers in the current study emerged under the following two themes, (1) cultural attitudes toward women, and same sex relationships, and (2) assumptions surrounding what constitutes IPA.

8.10.1 Social & cultural attitudes about women & same sex relationships

The participants identified social and cultural attitudes toward women that comprised of attitudes about the female capacity for aggression, attitudes about same sex relationships,
and the existence of homophobia. Such pervasive societal attitudes impacted on their ability to access services and access support from family and friends. In this next quote, Saoirse refers to the assumption that two women fighting will be interpreted as nothing more than a ‘cat fight’ (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008), where the violence is not taken seriously.

...people think it’s just two women or sure two women scrap like, pulling hair and that’s it like you’re done do you know, like it’s no big deal (Saoirse).

Social and cultural attitudes that position women as non-violent influenced the participant’s ability to recognise their partner’s behaviour as abusive, and further impacted on them receiving appropriate support from their families. There was evidence in this study of parents continuing relationships with violent partners despite knowledge of the violence and abuse. In such cases, participants stated this would not be the case if their partner was male which suggests an understanding that violence from a female is somehow not as serious or dangerous as that from a male aggressor. Participants expressed the opinion that they had difficulty with naming their partners behaviour as abusive due to an assumption that IPA cannot occur between two women because of myths about lesbian relationships as egalitarian. Participants also identified the stigma associated with having an LGBT identity, such stigma resulted in participants not seeking any support options. For those providing services in the LGBT community, stigma associated with an LGBT identity resulted in services not acknowledging the issue for fear of adding further shame to an already marginalised community. In agreement with Hassouneh and Glass (2008), overall, the findings from this study suggest that living in heterosexist/ homophobic society shapes participants experience of LIPA by influencing individual, familial, community, and societal perceptions and responses to IPA.

8.10.2 Heterosexist assumptions surrounding IPA

Participants noted that heterosexist assumptions surrounding what constitutes IPA, promulgated primarily by DV services, impacted on their ability to access supports. These heterosexist assumptions include IPA as occurring primarily between men and women. These findings are consistent with Hammond’s (1988) concern about lesbian invisibility in shelter services and written materials. The pervasive public story to describe what constitutes IPA acts to conceal abuse occurring in same sex relationships, contributes to its
invisibility and hidden nature, and for lesbian survivors, it fosters an understanding that their experience is undermined.

Merlis and Linville (2006) argue that contexts of homophobia and heterosexism make DV shelters an unsafe place for lesbian women. One participant described working in the DV sector. She identified numerous barriers from a service provider perspective that exist because of societal barriers linked to heterosexism and homophobia. Eabha observed that the current DV theory utilised by the sector, the lack of training and awareness on lesbian IPA, and using male pronouns to describe partners creates barriers to services for non-heterosexual women:

...all the written material, and including the ones we produce where I work, have always said he as partner or husband. So, the very fact of defining an abusive partner as a man immediately excludes women who have women as partners (Eabha)

Ristock (1994) argues that lesbian shelter workers remain closeted due to the homophobia of residents and shelter senior staff, and the lack of protective anti-discriminatory policies. Eabha similarly stated that the lack of visibility of lesbians in the sector due to professionals concealing their sexual identities, works to maintain the silence and hidden nature of lesbian IPA;

...lesbians that work in the sector have to be more open themselves because our quietness and our not working with each other and talking about the issue [LIPA], why would straight people think of it if we don’t? (Eabha)

8.11 Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers were described by the participants as those that happen specifically within formal support organisations policies and procedures. Influenced by systematic barriers, themes connected to institutional barriers consisted of, (1) a lack of awareness of same sex IPA; (2) applying a heterosexual assumption in professional practice; and (3) regarding DV services, DV theory, practice and training, the use of heterosexist language and literature, promoting a heterosexist public image, a lack of awareness of same sex

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336 DV shelters that are not culturally sensitive to lesbian IPA are unsafe due to the homophobia of existing staff and clients, and where a violent partner may access a refuge.

337 Chapter 7 Meaning making, discussed in detail the institutional barriers experienced by participants. See Section ‘Contexts of heterosexism and homophobia’.
relationships and same sex IPA.\textsuperscript{338} Finally, historical heterosexist laws of the criminal justice system were cited by participants as creating barriers to seeking formal support.

8.11.1 Lack of awareness of same sex relationships & SSIPA

In accordance with Donovan et al. (2014), participants in this study referred to the lack of awareness and visibility of SSIPA in general exhibited by formal support sources. Echoing findings from Turell and Herrmann (2008), when professionals in the health sector demonstrated a lack of awareness of SSIPA, participants were assumed to be heterosexual and their abuser was assumed to be male.\textsuperscript{339} This happens when professionals don’t inquire about the gender of the partner and assume the victim is in a heterosexual relationship. In this study, the ‘heterosexual assumption’ (Weeks, et al., 2001) by professionals was found to accentuate feelings of isolation, cut off the potential for disclosure of abuse, and made women feel more marginalised in their experience of lesbian IPA.

Speaking about her experience of sexual violence with a female partner, Ciara highlighted the heterosexist laws of the criminal justice system at the time of her assault. Narrow historical legal definitions of rape as heterosexual, impacted on her ability to formally report, Ciara explains,

\begin{quote}
...Irish law at that time [1980s], the legal definition of rape, you know penetration of the genitals, and had nothing else to do with any digits or implements or anything else
\end{quote}

8.11.2 DV services theory, practice & training

In this study, non-recognition of IPA related to the participants feeling like their encounter of abuse from a female partner was an isolated experience. Similar to what Barnes (2008) describes as a ‘remote experience’, most women cited they did not know of another lesbian woman in a comparable situation. The lack of visibility of SSIPA was understood as reinforcing their sense of isolation. This was particularly noted when participants referenced DV service provision. DV services visual media such as posters, online websites, and advertising outreach materials, were cited by participants as predominantly referring to the heterosexual experience of IPA that referred to batterers as males and

\textsuperscript{338} See Appendix 45, Barriers to DV support services.
\textsuperscript{339} See Appendix 46, Barriers to health care supports.
survivors as females. The participants felt excluded from DV service supports because of their heterosexual public image, and they commented that not being able to see themselves in the service resulted in feelings that the services were unavailable to them. Donovan et al. (2014) reported similar findings regarding the ‘public face’ of a service provider. Not being able to find a reference point for their experience of lesbian IPA further contributed to the participants not naming their experience as such. Consequently, this led most participants to determine that the services provided are not relevant to their relationships, leaving women feeling further isolated.

Simpson and Helfrich (2005) argue that when service providers wrongly assume IPA is more pervasive in relationships between men and women, this reinforces heterosexual stereotypes about what constitutes IPA. Concurring with previous work exploring DV services (Giorgio, 2002; Merlis & Linville, 2006), this study found that assumptions that abusive partners are male endangers the safety of a victim. An example of this was demonstrated earlier in this chapter with Caoimhe’s account of attending a DV workshop, and specifically, the fear she experienced when her female partner accessed the ‘safe space’.

8.12 Individual barriers

The reasons provided by the participants to explain their non-disclosure of abuse to informal and formal supports concur with previous research suggesting that living in a social context of heterosexism and homophobia, LGBT individuals may feel stigmatised, and that their lives and experiences are undervalued by society (Barnes, 2009; Donovan & Hester, 2011; Hardesty et al., 2011).

8.12.1 Individual barriers: An overview

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that women in abusive same sex relationships may be unwilling to disclose abuse in their relationships to either informal or formal supports due to fear of an abusive partner’s reaction if they learned of the disclosure (Hardesty, et al., 2011), being young and inexperienced (Renzetti, 1992), feelings of self-blame (Patzel, 2006), shame, and embarrassment (Irwin, 2008), disassociation from abuse (Girshick, 2002), a desire to keep the abuse hidden and protect an abusive partner
(Donovan & Hester, 2014), for reasons of isolation (Irwin, 2006), and where there is a previous negative experience with the police (Donovan & Hester, 2011). The participant accounts clearly demonstrate their partner’s efforts to break down their support networks, particularly with female friends. Isolation was also related to having limited support options when moving to a new location, and not maintaining existing friendships once they entered the relationship. Furthermore, practices of love as a form of abuse in relationships ensured the participants remained silent, prioritised their partner’s needs over theirs, and protected their partner from the criticism of others (Donovan & Hester, 2014).

Influenced by both systematic and institutional barriers, themes to describe individual barriers consisted of, (1) the heterosexual public story of IPA; (2) a perception the abuse would not be believed or taken seriously; (3) gender norms that position women as non-violent; (4) myths about lesbian relationships as egalitarian, and (5) internalised homophobia. These five themes are a consequence of living in a predominantly heterosexist societal context whereby societal gendered assumptions construct women as non-violent, passive, caring, and as a victim. Such assumptions around gender negates the possibility that women perpetrate violence and negatively impacts on a lesbian survivor’s ability to reach out for and receive adequate assistance.

8.12.2 The heterosexual public story of DV

In this study, social-cultural factors that acted as a barrier to disclosure on an individual level included understandings of IPA based on its ‘public story’ where IPA is constituted as heterosexual with a male perpetrator involving predominantly physical violence (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Specifically, participants connected their non-recognition of IPA to the heterosexist public story. Several lines of evidence support this view (Bornstein, et al., 2006; Donovan et al., 2014; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Patzel, 2006; Walters, 2011). A consequence of this understanding meant that, in some cases, women did not seek any assistance in a formal capacity. The absence of both a male partner and the existence of physical violence in the relationship was also cited as influencing recognition of IPA.

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340 See Appendix 47 for a comprehensive list of barriers identified by participants that explain their reason for non-disclosure to informal supports and Appendix 48 for barriers to explain non-disclosure to a formal support option.
Conversely, the occurrence of physical violence facilitated recognition of IPA. This finding also reflects the female heterosexual experience of IPA, where studies report a perception the abuse must be physical to be believed (Wolf, et al., 2003).

8.12.3 Perception abuse not taken seriously

Common across interviews was the fear of disclosing the experience of abuse to either formal or informal sources of support because of the perception that claims would not be believed or taken seriously. As shown in the previous chapter, this was particularly apparent when the participant’s friendship networks were made up of her partner’s friends in which the partner was described as “attractive”, “charming”, “popular”, “gregarious”, and a “likeable” individual.

Participants disclosed a reluctance to report abuse to the police authorities because their abuser was female and where there was a previous negative experience with the police. Barriers to police support were also linked to the participant having a larger physical stature than their partner. This finding is consistent with previous work (Giorgio, 2002).

8.12.4 Gender role stereotypes & women as non-violent

Mirroring existing research (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001), socio-cultural constructions of women as non-violent and passive shaped the participants perception that their experience of violence from a female would not be believed or taken seriously, or that their claims would be downgraded to a mere ‘cat fight’ devoid of any serious physical harm. In addition, socio-cultural myths that construct lesbian relationships as egalitarian and non-violent were reported as influencing decisions about disclosure. In such cases, participants felt they would not be believed, or the abuse would not be taken seriously.

In terms of individual barriers to formal support services, participants noted social discourses that position women as non-violent, and concerns about sexual orientation being revealed as influencing their help-seeking decisions. These barriers to accessing formal

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341 See Appendix 49 for a comprehensive list of barriers to seeking support from the police.
342 See Appendix 48 for a comprehensive list of barriers associated with reporting to formal supports.
supports are well established in the literature (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Simpson & Helfrich, 2005; Turell & Herrmann, 2008).

8.12.5 Internalised homophobia & contexts of homophobia

Previous research has established that closeted individuals may be reluctant to seek help from family, friends, and service providers due to anticipated discrimination or rejection (Hammond, 1988; Kulkin, et al., 2007). Women alluded to contexts of homophobia where it was “still taboo to be gay” (Caoimhe), as influencing their decision not to seek help where they feared a homophobic response from friends and family. Lesbian survivors of IPA experience, what some researchers describe as a ‘double bind’ (Walters, 2009), where the disclosure of abuse in an intimate relationship means an individual must also disclose their sexual orientation. Turell and Herrmann (2008) found that lesbian and bisexual women are reluctant to seek help from formal supports due to the fear of having to educate service providers on their sexual identity. This next quote from Clodagh illustrates how concealing sexual identity creates a barrier to disclosure to family supports,

...then I couldn’t tell them [family], “When I went home last night do you know what happened?” you know, I wasn’t able to say that [What was stopping you saying it?] Embarrassment, embarrassment because I was gay (Clodagh)

Previous work has established that DV service providers identified both their own discomfort with working with lesbian clients, and homophobia prevalent in the shelters, as restricting their ability to reach out to lesbian women (Merlis & Linville, 2006). Eabha described working in the DV sector and having a homophobic colleague as an obstacle to seeking support. Her quote reveals her attempts to protect the community from further negativity:

...she [manager] wouldn’t have considered herself homophobic - she was...I was partly not wanting to expose lesbians as being abusive because that would have played into her homophobia (Eabha)

343 For women of colour experiencing IPA from a female, this has been described as a ‘triple jeopardy’. See Kanuha (1990).

344 See Appendix 47 for a comprehensive list of barriers to disclosing to informal supports.
The abovementioned individual barriers appear to be consistent with the existing research in the field suggesting that socio-cultural factors associated with living in a heterosexist/homophobic society, such as feeling excluded from mainstream services, anticipating an inappropriate response, the public story of DV, and having a previous negative history with professionals in the criminal justice system are pivotal to understanding LGBT help-seeking decisions (Donovan & Hester, 2011, 2014; Hardesty, et al., 2011).

**Conclusion: Chapter eight**

Consistent with the existing empirical research, participants opted for informal rather than formal support options and primarily sought help from friends, family, and colleagues. The emotional and practical support provided from these sources enabled participants to recognise their experience as abusive, attain some respite from the abuse, access medical attention and a safe space, and eventually leave abusive relationship contexts. Unhelpful responses comprised of not taking their claims seriously, not being believed, and not wanting to get involved or talk about the abuse. Such responses led participants to feel that their experience of IPA was undermined. Feeling that their experience of IPA was undermined deprived the participants of the validation they needed from their support networks to say that what they were experiencing was wrong, and that they were not at fault for the abusive behaviour.

A positive experience with a formal support included rebuilding self-confidence/self-esteem, having their concerns taken seriously, and receiving a non-judgemental response. Unhelpful responses implied demonstrating a lack of awareness of same sex issues and receiving what was perceived as a judgemental and/or a homophobic response. Participants who sought police and DV support differed from those who did not, in that, they reported a largely positive response with services. Negative responses were recorded at the level of perception.

The negative perceptions of police and DV services were shaped by dominant heteronormative assumptions of DV, femininity, and heterosexual rape. Participants felt that because their experience fell outside of these modes of understanding, their claims would not be taken seriously. Silence and inactivity from those in the LGBT community organisations contributes to the vulnerability of women experiencing IPA, and further, acts
to reinforce dominant understandings of IPA as a heterosexual issue. Considering these findings, the preference for informal supports are not surprising considering the negative perceptions disclosed by participants toward formal support services.

The chapter provided some insights as to why lesbian IPA remains largely hidden, and further, why incidents go unreported to formal authorities. The perception that a claim of female perpetrated sexual or physical violence will not be taken seriously, or where an individual will not be believed once they formally report, has very real impacts on a person’s ability to report to a formal authority. The participant’s narratives clearly demonstrate that those involved in the perpetration of sexual and physical violence were not held accountable. Unfortunately, by participants purposefully withholding information from the police, this further empowers the perpetrator, who is not held responsible for their criminal behaviour.

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that living in a heterosexist/ homophobic society shaped the participants experience of IPA by influencing individual, familial, community, and societal perceptions and responses to the issue.

The subsequent chapter, the discussion, represents the final chapter of the thesis. The chapter will draw on an ecological perspective to theoretically conceptualise the participants’ accounts of IPA.
9 CHAPTER NINE: THE DISCUSSION

In this concluding chapter of the thesis, the findings from the four preceding chapters are broadly considered and explained in the context of the empirical evidence base explored in earlier chapters. As specified in Chapter 1, an ecological perspective has been adapted to the current study as this approach recognises the multiple factors that work together to impact survivors of IPA (Krug, et al., 2002). An ecological perspective forms the basis for the structure of this discussion chapter. Consequently, the findings of this research will be located within the various environments of the social ecology that were found to influence the participants understanding and experience of IPA, such as, The Individual (participant/survivor), Informal Groups (friends, family, and colleagues), Formal Groups (counsellors, the health services, An Garda Síochana, LGBT organisations, and specialist DV services), and Societal Structures (heterosexism and homophobia). The chapter is organised by laying out the issues pertinent to each environment, highlighting the interplay between the environments, and demonstrating the effect they have on the participant.

The discussion then moves to consider the study findings in the following areas, the contexts of power in relationships, perceived homophobia as a barrier to help-seeking, and the participant’s accounts of retaliation. The chapter proceeds to summarise the original contribution to knowledge in the IPA field. Finally, the chapter concludes by deepening the discussion of findings to discuss the implications of the findings for domestic violence theory, the lesbian/ same sex community, policy and practice development, and future research directions.

The chapter begins however by reminding the reader of the initial research questions posed and the methodological framework applied to this exploratory study concerning non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA.

9.1 A return to the beginning

9.1.1 The research questions

As stated in Chapter 1, this exploratory study set out to: (1) Document participants’ experience of IPA from a female partner; (2) Capture how women made sense of their abusive experience; (3) Discover what support services lesbian women access in response
to an abusive relationship; and (4) Identify barriers and opportunities for lesbian women accessing and using informal and formal support options. To be able to answer these questions, an interpretative phenomenological analysis was chosen as the analytical framework for the study. The method permits the analyst to firstly understand, and secondly, to interpret, the personal and lived experience of a participant in terms of how a phenomenon is experienced, how an individual makes sense of their experience, and how they apply meaning to their experiences in a form that is understandable to them (Smith, 2004). Therefore, this approach to analysis is committed to understanding how a phenomenon (event, process, relationship) has been understood from the perspective of an individual in a particular context.

9.1.2 An interpretative phenomenological analysis

Applying an interpretative phenomenological analysis to the current study data was important for several reasons. Firstly, little is known from an Irish research perspective about the female experience of IPA from a female partner. The phenomenon is under-researched and consequently, not well understood. These represent factors that have been identified as conducive to an interpretative analysis design (Carpenter, 1995). Secondly, in the context of an under-researched issue, this approach allowed the researcher to gather information about IPA from a participant perspective. Thirdly, IPA is a highly complex issue that can surge in complexity when occurring in combination with having a marginalised minority status (Walters, 2009). The ideographic component of a phenomenological interpretative analysis is concerned with the particular and unique experience of a phenomenon for individuals. The primary focus is not necessarily on findings at the group level but more concentrated on the individual experience. Thus, the method permits the complexity of each of the participant’s unique experience to unfold. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 4, each participant transcript data underwent the same five-stage analysis process. In the role of researcher, an important task was to focus solely on the participant and what they were saying during the interview. This meant that if an issue emerged in one interview that was already said in a previous interview, the researcher is advised not to probe looking for commonality with previous data but to stay committed to the participant and their experience (Smith, et al. 2009). Moreover, as indicated in Chapter 4, this study adopted the hermeneutic (Heidegger) rather than the
The descriptive (Husserl) strand of phenomenology. Therefore, a focus on contexts of abusive relationships was a central concern during the interviews.

An examination of the empirical literature related to lesbian IPA proposes that lesbian women do not recognise abuse in their relationships as IPA and that this can act as a barrier to accessing formal support services (Donovan, et al. 2014; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Patzel, 2006). Essentially, an interpretative phenomenological analysis is concerned with how an individual makes sense of an experience, how they experience, describe, interpret, and understand what has occurred in their lives (Duffy, 2011). Gathering accounts of how the participants made sense of their abusive relationships, and if they recognised the behaviour as IPA or not, allowed the researcher to capture the participants’ understanding of the abuse, and crucially, what was influencing understanding of their partner’s behaviour.

The chapter proceeds to broadly discuss the findings from the current study within the confines of an ecological perspective and other relevant empirical literature.

9.2 Theoretical approach: an ecological framework to understanding LIPA

Following the foundational components of an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and existing research modelled on this framework to examine lesbian IPA (Walters, 2009), the current study adopts an ecological perspective to understand and explain the experience of lesbian IPA. As illustrated in Figure 6 below, this approach facilitates focused attention on the different environments that participants occupy and interact with during abusive relationships; identify issues pertinent to each environment; demonstrate the interplay between the environments; and the impact they have on the participant, along with the participant impact on the various environments.
In this study, four different levels of the social ecology emerged from the interview data: The Individual (participant survivor), Informal Groups (friends, family, and colleagues), Formal Groups (counsellors, the health services, An Garda Síochána, LGBT organisations, and specialist DV services), and Societal Structures (heterosexism and homophobia). Figure 7 below illustrates the four levels of the social ecology that represent the different environments that participants occupied during their relationships. What is important to note is the reciprocal relationship between the four concentric circles. Each level was found to impact the other, however, how the levels interact is not a straight-forward process and create what has been described as ‘complex linkages’ (Krug et al., 2002) between the environments. As will be discussed further, there is an intricate reciprocal interplay between the four separate environments.
The chapter now moves to consider what factors emerged at each level of the social ecology, starting with the innermost circle, the individual environment.

9.2.1 The Individual Environment

As Figure 7 demonstrates, the innermost circle is the individual environment that encompasses the participant, their face-to-face interactions, and their personal histories. In the context of lesbian IPA, this environment consisted of their proximal interactions with their partners, their friends, families, colleagues, and those outside of the relationship, including counsellors, healthcare workers, An Garda Síochana, LGBT agencies, and those in the DV sector. This level of the ecological model focuses on the characteristics of the individual that were found to contribute to the experience of IPA.345

9.2.2 Family of origin experiences

The Individual environment encompasses the unique personal histories that each participant brings with them when they enter relationships. Participants in this study acknowledged that they had a previous physical and sexual abuse history occurring within their family of origin, within previous adult heterosexual relationships, and a childhood sexual abuse experience perpetrated by a family friend. These previous abuse histories affected how the participants perceived the abuse happening in their adult relationships,

345 See Appendix 50 Comprehensive list of factors occurring at the Individual Level.
their response to the abusive behaviour, and their face-to-face interaction with partners and others outside of the relationship. A previous abuse history also impacted upon the participant’s interaction with An Garda Síochana (Formal Group). A previous negative experience with the police, connected with sexual abuse as an adolescent, was found to influence participant’s help-seeking behaviour where the police were not perceived as a viable support option.

The existing empirical evidence suggests that lesbian women who experience or witness violence in their family of origin are more likely to experience IPA (Lockhart, et al., 1994) and more likely to perpetrate IPA following a childhood violence and physical abuse experience (Fortunata & Kohn, 2003). These findings resonate with the experience of survivors in this study. The experience of physical and sexual violence in their family of origin (Informal Group) influenced how participants perceived the abuse in their relationship, how they responded to the abuse and their interactions with both the Informal and Formal groups. Participants tended to blame themselves for the abusive behaviour, and consequently, they never sought support from any source.346 This finding corresponds with Eaton et al.’s (2008) study that found respondents with a history of IPA were more likely to believe that IPA is the victims fault.

In contrast, the participant’s personal histories included no experience of any form of violence prior to their abusive relationship. The lack of any experience of violence affected the participant’s comprehension of the abuse in their relationships and they struggled to make sense of the violence, describing their ability to understand as like a “rabbit in the headlights”. Participants without a previous abuse history differed from those in the study who did. They did not blame themselves for their partner’s abusive behaviour and they constantly sought validation from Informal and Formal Groups that what was happening in their relationship was unacceptable. Conversely, as previously mentioned, those in the study with a previous abuse history, never sought help from any source during their relationships.

346 More than half of the participants reported their abusive partners had come from a family origin where there was violence. They also had knowledge of their partners having an abusive history with both male and female previous partners. See Appendix 31 ‘A note on abusive partners.'
The participants position as being young and older in a first-time same sex relationship influenced their understanding of the abuse they experienced. Mirroring previous research (Bornstein, et al., 2006; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Ristock, 2003), being in a first-time relationship led participants to remain for longer. Without prior knowledge of a healthy relationship to counter their abusive experience, participants perceived the abuse as simply how relationships are, and they tolerated the abusive behaviour of their partners. Previous research has also reported this finding (Donovan & Hester, 2008; Irwin, 2008). Interestingly, four participants gave accounts of experiencing physical violence prior to cohabiting with partners. This finding could be explained in the context of the small size of the LGB community in comparison to the larger heterosexual society, resulting in a relatively small number of partners from which to choose (Girshick, 2002).

9.2.3 The influence of heteronormativity on a marginalised identity

Personal histories involving belonging to a marginalised community influenced the participant’s perception of the abuse in their relationships. Older participants in the study acknowledged their awareness of belonging to a marginalised community. They associated this marginalised identity with the lesbian community’s (Formal Group) silence and denial of lesbian IPA, and ultimately, their lack of support from members of the community during abusive relationships. Chapter 3 discussed the denial of IPA at the lesbian community level as a tactic to protect the community from further negative stigma associated with homophobia. The findings from this study demonstrate the interplay between the individual, the lesbian community (Formal Groups), and the larger Societal Structures. Contexts of heterosexism and homophobia shape how lesbian communities respond to violence in lesbian relationships which in turn affects the individual, their understanding of IPA, and the quality of support that they receive.

In addition, silence at the level of LGBT community organisations places other lesbians and lesbian abusers at risk of victimisation. The existing research suggests that a risk factor associated with victimisation is perpetration of IPA, and vice versa (Girshick, 2002; Ristock, 2003; Walters, 2009). Lesbians who have been victimised in relationships report perpetrating abuse in subsequent relationships. Remaining silent at the community level

347 See Appendix 25 ‘Participants relationship profile’.
increases the risk for those young and old engaging in first-time relationships and permits violence in lesbian relationships to continue unchallenged.

Heterosexist gender norms that construct women as embodying caring, nurturing, and non-violent innate characteristics shaped the participant’s understandings of their partner’s behaviour during relationships. Older participants provided accounts that suggest an awareness of ideals surrounding lesbian relationships as egalitarian and non-violent. There is wide consensus in the literature that the myth of a ‘lesbian utopia’ silences victims and negatively impacts help-seeking (Barnes, 2011; Girshick, 2002; Hardesty, et al., 2011; Irwin, 2008). From the lesbian community perspective, previous researchers have identified that upholding a ‘lesbian utopia’ is part of a process of promoting the illusion of what lesbian relationships can be instead of recognising the reality in communities (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Russo, 1992). These processes of promoting a positive community image have evolved in the context of a heterosexist socio-cultural climate that stigmatises female to female relationships. Similar to other work in the field (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008), in this study, the perception of lesbian relationships as egalitarian contributed to confusion, shame, silence, and non-recognition of IPA.

The participant’s personal histories influenced their recognition and non-recognition of behaviour as abusive. The evidence from this study confirmed divergence in the sample regarding the participant’s professional position influencing their understanding of IPA. For example, working within the DV sector, that consists of a largely heterosexist approach to IPA was reported to impede recognition of abuse. While working as a police officer informed recognition of IPA. The previous example referencing the participants working in the DV sector highlights the interplay between the Formal Groups environment and the Societal Structures and how they impact on the individual. This finding further illuminates the pervasiveness of the DV heterosexual public story that consists of a male perpetrator and a female victim and emphasises the experience of physical violence. Despite her professional knowledge acquired over a substantial period working in the DV sector, the participant gave an account of failing to recognise her partner’s behaviour as IPA due to the absence of a male partner and physical violence, and the dominant gender-based analysis that informs her professional practice. The absence of a male aggressor in an
abusive relationship acting to impede recognition of IPA is consistent with other empirical research concerned with lesbian IPA (Walters, 2009).\textsuperscript{348}

In the societal context of heteronormativity, it is understandable why a lesbian survivor would decide not to disclose her experience of abuse or tackle the ‘double bind’ (Walters, 2009) of disclosing both sexual orientation and IPA simultaneously. Participants remained silent on their abusive experiences for a plethora of reasons including, feeling shame, embarrassment, concealing sexual orientation, fear that their claims would not be taken seriously, or that there would be a negative repercussion connected with their sexual orientation. Failing to take a victim seriously when they seek help is associated with re-assault in the existing literature (Glass et al., 2008).

Remaining silent on the abuse, however, gives rise to more serious negative repercussions that impact the participant’s interaction with both the Informal and Formal Groups. Silence permits the denial of LIPA to continue unchallenged within the lesbian community. Remaining silent on an abusive experience has also been linked with re-assault in abusive lesbian relationships (Glass et al., 2008). Silence also denies those in the Formal and Informal Groups the chance to acknowledge the serious nature of female-to-female IPA and to re-evaluate their approach to support, training, practice, and service provision. Moreover, staying quiet on the issue allows the pervasive public story that constitutes DV as a heterosexual phenomenon to continue unabated, ensures a lesbian abuser is not held accountable for her behaviour, and facilitates the continuation of support service provision as primarily geared toward heterosexual women and their children.

Again, linked to the heteronormative societal context, an additional factor found at the individual level to impede disclosure of abuse centred on stereotypical norms of femininity and masculinity. Participants reported feeling shame and embarrassment because they had a larger physical stature than abusive partners. In such cases, they spoke of the societal perception that having a large physique, typically associated with masculine gendered traits, afforded an individual the ability to take care of oneself physically. Such understandings influenced their ability to disclose the abuse and seek support. This finding is in agreement with studies that examine male victims of female abusers (Corbally, 2011)

\textsuperscript{348} Interestingly, this finding from Walters also derived from the experience of a DV shelter worker.
and gay male IPA (Finneran & Stephenson, 2012). In a similar vein, this study’s findings suggest that stereotypical feminine norms create challenges for non-heterosexual women recognising their experience as abusive and impact negatively on help-seeking. Research shows that lesbians who present with a masculine appearance and whose abusers were more feminine have been found to experience tremendous obstacles when seeking support (Renzetti, 1999).

The following section explores the factors, interplay, and the impact of the Informal Group environment on the participants’ experience of lesbian IPA.

### 9.3 The Informal Groups Environment

The Informal Groups represents the level of the ecological framework where there are connection and interaction with two or more Individual level interactions. For example, Informal Groups in this study comprised of the participants’ interaction with those closest to them, such as their partners, family, friends, and colleagues. In keeping with the objectives of the current study and demonstrating what the experience of lesbian IPA was like for participants, this section will address the factors, interplay (between participants and the environments) and the impact on participants following their interactions with their Informal Groups. This level of the ecological model explores how proximal relationships increased the participants risk for IPA.\(^{349}\)

The section begins by addressing the issues pertinent between the couple, along with the impact of these issues on the participants.

#### 9.3.1 The interplay between the couple

In terms of the participants face to face interaction with their partner, having a previous abuse history was exploited by female partners to further violate and control. Participant accounts suggest that their intimate disclosure to partners of details associated with a previous sexual assault became part of a partner’s repertoire of abusive behaviours. Partners re-enacted, both verbally and physically, intimate details of physical and sexual violence

\(^{349}\) See Appendix 51 Comprehensive list of factors occurring at the Informal Group Environment Level.
experienced prior to the relationship. This finding concurs with the existing empirical evidence in the field (Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002; Walters, 2011).

Another aspect of the face-to-face interaction between the participants and their partner involved partner’s claiming victimisation after a relationship had ended to those in the Informal Groups. Other studies support this finding (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Giorgio, 2002). When a partner claimed that they were the victim in relationships, this act served to further isolate and silence participants, creating what Donovan and Hester (2014, p. 94) describe as a “skewed/warped context of coercive control”. In this study, the fear of being labelled an abuser by friends resulted in participants isolating themselves from support networks for prolonged periods. As was indicated in the last section, remaining quiet on an abusive experience contributes to negative repercussions within both Informal and Formal Groups. Furthermore, silence about relationship abuse serves to further empower the abuser by victims actively participating in the sabotage of potential outside assistance (Walters, 2011). 

The participants provided accounts of friends who were initially friends with an abusive partner before becoming friends with the participant siding with the abusive partner, and not supporting the participant following a disclosure of abuse. This finding is corroborated in the existing literature (Duke & Davidson, 2009; Turell & Herrmann, 2008). Siding with the abusive partner and continuing friendships, despite knowledge of the abuse in relationships, served to minimise the experience of IPA, and further, denied participants the validation that what they were experiencing was unacceptable. The existing research suggests that negligible support from friends to victims of lesbian IPA involves minimising the abuse and rationalising the behaviour of abusive partners (Allen & Leventhal, 1999; Lobel, 1986; Merlis & Linville, 2006). This type of a response from friends allows the abusive partner’s behaviour to continue without any reproach and places other lesbians at risk of violence who may unknowingly begin a relationship with a violent partner.

350 Additional factors involved in the interaction between participants and their partners that increased the likelihood of IPA included partners drinking and drug taking (prescription and recreational). Five participants reported cases of substance abuse.
9.3.2 How heterosexism influences responses to lesbian IPA

The interactions between the participants and members of their family created a distinct set of issues and impacts for the participants to contend with. For example, participants provided accounts of receiving a homophobic response from parents which created contexts of limited support options and further contributed to concealing lesbian identities from their family members. Consequently, participants experienced severe difficulty with a disclosure of abuse to those closest to them, as this would also involve disclosure of sexual identity. This specific example demonstrates the relationship between the participant, the Informal Groups, and the larger Societal Structures of heterosexism and homophobia. Contexts of heterosexism and homophobia created tangible negative effects for participants as they remained in abusive relationships for extensive periods of time rather than disclose their abusive experience at the hands of a female partner.

In this study, the participant’s narratives suggested that family member’s response to the participant and their experience of IPA was influenced by heterosexist understandings of violence in relationships. For example, participants acknowledged that family members continued to have relationships and continued to be cordial to abusive partners after their relationships had ended. Participants stated that this familial response would be markedly different if their abuser was male. The existing research provides evidence that societal ideas that lesbian relationships are a utopian and uncontaminated by a male influence (Ristock, 2002), co-occurring with gendered assumptions about the female capacity for aggression (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001) and a view that two women cannot really hurt each other (Elliot, 1996) impact negatively on the familial responses to lesbian IPA (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). Irwin (2008) argues that heteronormative discourses interact with discourses idealising lesbian relationships that constitute women as passive, and further, erase the possibility of violence between women. Such responses from family negatively impacted on the participants relationships with their immediate families and their relationships with their existing partners. In agreement with previous research (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Walters, 2011), findings from this study indicate that gender role stereotyping shapes participants experience of IPA by influencing the familial response to the phenomenon.
Corresponding with the findings indicating that a heterosexist understanding of IPA, coupled with stereotypical assumptions of femininity influences familial responses to IPA, family supports were stated as understanding the violence occurring between two women as less serious and less harmful as that perpetrated by a male. This finding is well supported in the existing literature (Elliot, 1996; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Walters, 2011). The lack of perceived support or perceived negligible support from family and friends further abuses lesbian women by removing their ability to access appropriate assistance. This finding is alarming considering the limited formal support options available to non-heterosexual women experiencing IPA (Bornstein et al., 2006) and the positive role that informal supports have been reported to play in influencing decisions to seek formal assistance (Hardesty et al., 2011). Moreover, societal beliefs that construct lesbian relationships as egalitarian, women in general as non-violent, and the mistaken belief that violence only occurs in relationships where there are men present, supports and reinforces the status quo that DV is a heterosexual phenomenon, and further, perpetuates and enables lesbian IPA to continue unchallenged.

As will be established in the following section, in the context of limited support options from those in the Formal Groups environment, the lack of appropriate support from those in the Informal Group environment intensified the isolation felt by the participants and made it increasingly difficult to escape the violence. The subsequent section explores the factors pertinent to the Formal Groups environment, and further, how issues within this level of the social ecology impacted the participants.

9.4 The Formal Groups environment

In keeping with the tenets of an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the third level of the social ecology represents the Formal Groups environment. This level explores how the actions of each member relate to the participants experience of IPA. This environment refers to more distance influences on the individual. What is important to note about this level of the model is the individual does not participate directly in these environments but may be directly affected by them. As will be discussed in the subsequent

351 See Appendix 52 Comprehensive list of factors occurring at the Formal Group Environment Level.
section, training, practice, and policy decisions emanating from the DV sector have a direct impact on lesbian victims of IPA.

9.4.1 Impact of DV services on lesbian victims of IPA

Van Natta (2005) argues that feminist organisations reproduce ablest, classist, heterosexist, racist, and sexist organisational forms and practices that reinforce the dominant culture. As discussed in Chapter 3, shelter workers make decisions on service provision based on a ‘normal case’ analysis that positions white heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class women at the top of the social hierarchy (Ibid, 2005). Having said that, there is evidence from a service provider perspective that DV services support women with disabilities, migrant women, and traveller women (Women’s Aid, 2016).

Van Natta (2005) further proposes that DV refuge workers’ conceptions of the ‘normal case’ are developed in conjunction with practical decisions to keep the refuge running smoothly, through articulating the guiding ethos of the organisation and through interaction with clients. In this study, Eabha recalled her experience of working in a DV shelter. She highlighted the impact of the DV sector (Formal Groups) in shaping her response to a lesbian victim (individual) of IPA and the institutionalised heterosexism (Societal Structure) via a patriarchal analysis of violence, that shapes the DV sectors ethos, theory, practice, and guidelines.

It is understandable why a DV service provider would be reluctant to adapt services to include the experiences of lesbian women. Irish DV services operate on limited funding in contexts of increased demand for services. In Ireland currently, nine counties are without specialist DV refuges, and twelve counties lack a specialist sexual violence service (Forde, 2016).

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352 Van Natta (2005) argues that although ‘normal cases’ are not simply stereotyping, they typically embody many of the biases that are pervasive in the dominant culture.

353 Women’s Aid Ireland reported 550 helpline calls from migrant women (90%), disabled women (6%), and traveller women (4%) (Women’s Aid, 2016).

354 As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Women’s Aid provides no lesbian IPA training to incoming volunteers. However, that is not the case for all DV and SV service providers. Miner (2013) reported that 89 per cent of Rape Crisis Centres and 45 per cent of DV services indicated training of staff and volunteers to increase awareness of female same sex IPA knowledge.
et al., 2017). Services have experienced an increase in demand while simultaneously experiencing a substantial decrease in state funding. To publicly acknowledge female perpetrated violence in intimate relationships may negatively impact service providers existing funding streams that are already overextended. Moreover, recognising female perpetration of violence challenges the core ethos of DV service provision by suggesting that women can be both victim and abuser. This challenge presents in a context where the female has been constructed as victim and non-violent. Conversations between the researcher and DV service providers suggest that services are of the understanding that they will provide support to any woman who contacts them. However, as will be demonstrated further, DV services send out a very clear message about who they serve and who they don’t serve at refuges.

Another aspect of insider knowledge from the DV sector that emerged during interviews, concerned lesbian refuge workers silence about lesbian IPA and concealment of sexuality within their working environments. Participants acknowledged homophobic colleagues as a reason for concealing their sexual orientation. Previous research demonstrates that lesbian victims have experienced a homophobic response from DV refuge workers (Renzetti, 1989). One of the primary reasons lesbian women do not seek support from shelters is fear of a homophobic response and not wanting to contribute to a negative view of lesbian relationships (Balsam, 2001; Bornstein et al., 2006; Patzel, 2006). Participants attributed their silence on the issue of LIPA within the DV sector as reinforcing the hidden nature of the phenomenon. There was an awareness however, of the need for lesbian shelter workers to take the lead and bring the issue to the surface within the sector.

It is understandable why a lesbian shelter worker would be reluctant to disclose both her sexual orientation and her experience of IPA from a female. DV services promote violence against women and children as a direct consequence of inequalities associated with living in a patriarchal society. Within this construct of DV, women are victims. The experience of LIPA is a challenge to the feminist analysis of DV and its construction of women as victims. The emphasis on a male aggressor, supported within a patriarchal societal system,

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355 There are currently 21 refuges in the entire country providing a mere 31% of the minimum recommended in the Istanbul Convention.
356 Since 2008, DV (38%) and sexual violence (30%) services have had their funding cut by the State (Forde, et al., 2017). More recent figures suggest a 70 per cent decrease in sexual violence funding since 2015 (Murray, 2017).
contributes to the invisibility of lesbian IPA; the logic being without a male aggressor there is no violence or abuse. Heterosexist societal structures position males as innately violent and females as innately non-violent (Girshick, 2002). These innate constructs have informed the development of the feminist analysis of DV (Kelly, 1991). Girshick (2002) argues that societal beliefs that position women as non-violent and incapable of perpetrating violence leaves lesbian survivors isolated, invisible, and imaginary. Consequently, the reluctance of survivors to come forward and disclose their experiences, particularly in the DV professional services, allows LIPA to continue unrecognised and unchallenged by those in the Formal Groups environment.\textsuperscript{357}

There is a certain irony connected with the previous point, in that lesbian and bisexual women have been instrumental in the development of DV and sexual violence services within Ireland (Crone, 1988; Mears, 2016). However, their initial participation has occurred in societal contexts where there was no vocabulary to demand that lesbianism be acknowledged as a political issue (Crone, 1988). A preference for lesbians to work behind the scenes has been attributed to lesbians being, “unwilling or unable to court publicity because to do so may have invited violence, rape, or even death” (Crone, 2002, p. 1068). Like the evolution of DV services, set up primarily to combat violence against heterosexual women, silence from those in the lesbian community working within DV services may also be related to how the services were initially organised and structured.

Consistent with previous research (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 1994; Walters, 2009), participants in this study did not recognise DV services as a viable option for support, instead, they perceived services are geared toward heterosexual women exclusively.\textsuperscript{358} This example further illuminates the impact of lesbian survivors (Individual) on the DV services (Formal Groups). Not choosing DV services as a support option impacts shelter workers expertise and their ability to provide an appropriate service response to lesbian victims. However, explanations given in this study for not using DV supports exposes the relationship between the Formal Groups and the Societal Structures environments where IPA is constructed as gendered and heterosexual. This has a direct

\textsuperscript{357} There is also the complexity of disclosing the experience of an abusive relationship whilst providing services to a victim of IPA.

\textsuperscript{358} Walters (2009) found that geographical location was a factor in deciding if a DV service was a viable option. Respondents living in metropolitan areas compared with non-metropolitan areas were reported as more likely to believe services were available to them.
impact on DV refuge policies that serve survivors based on a heterosexual paradigm. Such policies send a clear public message about who services support and who they don’t support.

It is clearly not the sole responsibility of lesbian survivors to take the lead in educating DV services about their experiences of IPA. If lesbian women are not presenting to DV services for help and support however, DV services are not going to adapt their programmes or ‘public face’ (Donovan et al., 2014) to account for the experience of LIPA. As one participant working in a DV shelter stated; "...why would straight people think of it [LIPA] if we don’t?" (Eabha). This point is particularly pertinent in the context of increased demand for DV services while concurrently experiencing a substantial decrease in state funding (Forde et al., 2017).

9.4.2 The exclusionary DV ‘public face’

Participants in this study gave accounts the DV ‘public face’ (Donovan et al., 2014) comprised of promotional material and literature, and online media platforms that was understood as conceptualising and reinforcing DV as a heterosexual problem. Moreover, the study concluded this ‘public face’ to impede recognition of abuse in lesbian relationships. When service providers included the same sex experience of IPA in their ‘public face’ this aided with recognition of abusive behaviour, and crucially, it provided the opportunity for participants to relate and validate their experience of IPA. Furthermore, the ‘public face’ of DV services that target a particular demographic, marginalises other groups experiencing IPA. For example, participants in this study positioned lesbian and male heterosexual victims of IPA as having a “subclass” victim status in comparison with heterosexual female victims, thus, falling outside of what Van Natta (2005) calls the ‘normal case’.

The public face of DV, constructed as primarily physical abuse involving a weak female victim, is being challenged by women whom DV services are designed to support. Acknowledging similar issues with the overriding public representation of DV, a recent project involving female heterosexual survivors is challenging media representations of DV
as physical and victims as weak (Jessie, 2017). This further demonstrates an awareness of the strict boundaries encased around current conceptualisations of DV from those who DV services target in the delivery of supports.

When DV services project a public face that excludes lesbian or male and transgender victims experiencing IPA, this has an impact on the public perception, awareness, and education of what constitutes IPA. Moreover, not being publicly inclusive of other voices and their experience of IPA, in an organisation charged with informing and educating the public about the issue, has serious implications for other professional groups connected with IPA, like the political body, the healthcare system, the judicial system, the police and other service providers. Considering their expertise, domestic violence services are best placed to educate professionals and the general public about the dynamics of an abusive relationship. Publicly portraying DV as a heterosexual phenomenon exclusively is articulating a partial and a one-sided picture of the expanse of IPA.

The approach to DV as a heterosexual issue, reinforced by DV service provision using feminist theory, literature, training, and practice, creates a disturbing potentiality for lesbian victims who do choose to access DV service support. In this study, participants recalled a female abuser accessing a safe space for survivors facilitated by a DV service, a tactic already highlighted in the literature (Giorgio, 2002; Merlis & Linville, 2006). Previous studies highlight the increased risks for lesbian victims based on this potentiality. For example, Walters (2009) argues that if a lesbian abuser gains knowledge of a refuge location, the inner workings of the shelter, and the shelter resources, this affords the abuser with greater power and control over a victim where the abuser can use the information to further manipulate and convince a survivor to stay in a relationship. Moreover, studies show that bisexual and lesbian female victims are reluctant to use DV shelters for fear of a partner gaining access (Bornstein, et al., 2006).

The findings from this study expose an uncharted issue for specialist DV services in Ireland. Unlike DV service provision facilitating female victims of male perpetrators, a female

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359 The project called ‘One Thousand Words’, commissioned by Scottish Women’s Aid and Zero Tolerance, collaborated with survivors of DV to produce a photography project that challenges media representations of DV as physical and victims as weak. [http://www.lauradodsworth.com/a-thousand-words/](http://www.lauradodsworth.com/a-thousand-words/)

360 The familial response experienced by the participants can be better understood in this context.
perpetrator has the capability, by way of her gender, to access a safe space for victims. If a female abuser gains access to the same refuge as her partner this creates the potential for abuse to continue within the shelter. This example shifts the discussion beyond the responsibility of those working in the DV sector and points toward the policies and theories, informed by heteronormativity, that assume domestic violence is a male perpetrator and a female victim phenomenon. This example clearly demonstrates the interplay between the various levels of the social ecology. The Societal Structures of heterosexism shape the Formal Groups ethos and practice, and in this case, create a serious risk for a lesbian survivor (Individual) when accessing a formal support.361

The next section considers the issues pertinent to other members of the Formal Groups environments, such as, An Garda Síochana, the healthcare, counselling support services, and LGBT community organisations.

9.4.3 The interplay with other professionals

In this study, when participants approached the police for support their experience was largely positive. This finding contrasts with other studies suggesting there is a ‘gap of trust’ between the LGBT community and those in the police forces that impacts negatively on help-seeking (Donovan and Hester, 2014).362 The existing LGBT research consistently demonstrates that the police force is not seen as a viable support option in response to the experience of IPA (Bornstein et al., 2006; Brown, 2007; Giorgio, 2002; Wolf, et al., 2003). Regarding the impact of police support (Formal Group) on the participants (Individual), accounts were provided of being believed, feeling safe and protected, having their claims taken seriously, and receiving offers to confront an abusive partner. For some participants, being believed by the police represented the first time their experience of IPA was validated as wrong by anyone over the course of their relationships. In contexts of limited support options, the conduct of the police in response to IPA provided participants with the endorsement that what they were experiencing was unacceptable and criminal.

361 An additional problem identified with shelter services in the literature suggests that shelters that are run by an overriding Catholic ethos create further barriers for lesbian women accessing support (Walters, 2009).
362 Similar findings have been reported in studies with ethnic minority women and traveller women (Pavee Point Travellers Centre, 2005).
Participants, however, spoke negatively about police support at the level of perception. For example, they perceived their claims of IPA would not be believed or taken seriously, and they feared a homophobic response from police. This finding related to the DV ‘public story’ that constructs IPA as a heterosexual phenomenon where women are victims and men are abusers. As previously indicated, DV services have been formulated using a heterosexist ideology (Van Natta, 2005). Such influences from both the Formal Groups and the Societal Structures coalesced in the participants meaning-making and ensured they did not report the violence in their relationships to the police. Furthermore, societal engrained gendered beliefs about females and their capacity to be violent also acted as a barrier to seeking support from the police. At the Individual level, a personal history involving a negative experience with the police further impeded the participant’s ability to formally report.

The existing research suggests that professionals in the healthcare services have a key role to play in providing the space and opportunity to disclose IPA. For example, two Irish studies reported that both women and men agreed that it would be acceptable to be asked about IPA during a consultation (Bradley, et al., 2002; Paul, et al., 2006). Similar findings have been reported concerned with minority ethnic women. In this study, participants stated that positive support from health professionals comprised of providing a non-judgemental response to the disclosure of sexuality, demonstrating an awareness of IPA, and providing the option to formally report a physical assault. However, positive support from healthcare professionals was provided in tandem with the assumption that participants were involved in heterosexual relationships.

Lesbian, bisexual, and gay individuals being assumed heterosexual by healthcare professionals concurs with the existing Irish research (Duffy, 2011; Gibbons, et al., 2008; Gleeson & McCallion, 2008). In this study, heterosexist assumptions (Societal Structure) in healthcare settings (Formal Group) contributed to participants remaining silent on the nature of their injuries and the identity of the perpetrator. The ‘double bind’ (Walters, 2009) of disclosing sexual orientation together with IPA proved too great an obstacle. This

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363 The Women’s Council (2009) survey reported that one-third of GPs reported that at least one disclosure of Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Violence had been made to them by a minority ethnic woman at some stage in the past. 93% of GPs reported disclosures in the past year.
example demonstrates the impact of the heterosexual DV public story, emanating and perpetuated by the DV services, in informing professionals within healthcare settings. It further suggests that those in the Formal Groups responsible for educating others about IPA have a role to play in educating other professionals. So long as DV services do not publicly acknowledge and promote the existence and experience of lesbian IPA or indeed other victim experiences, this leaves professionals working in a support capacity in the dark about the phenomenon.

The existing research highlights that feminist counsellors employ heteronormative discourses in their assessment of IPA that impede understanding and effective support provision (Ristock, 2001). In this study, participants gave accounts of support from counsellors that suggest they used a heterosexist ideology to understand IPA. In the examples provided participants stated that counsellors lacked awareness of same sex relationships in general, and more specifically, lacked an understanding of the dynamics of abusive female-to-female relationships. This served to impact negatively on relationship building between counsellors and clients and further impeded disclosures of abuse in lesbian relationships, particularly around disclosure of sexual violence.

Considering that the nine participants in the current study opted for counselling support, this would suggest that this group of professionals should be prioritised for training and awareness raising about same sex IPA.

A recent UK study exploring abusive behaviours in LGBT relationships (Donovan et al., 2014) recommended an online LGBT resource should be developed to provide information and guidelines on same sex IPA to practitioners and those working in relationship services across sectors. The authors suggest that one of the ways of developing awareness of this issue is through the exchange of knowledge between services, i.e. between LGBT and DV service providers for example. In this study, participants recalled the silence and denial about LIPA at the lesbian community level. Typically, an organisation charged with representing the needs of a specific group in a community may work in collaboration with another service provider to exchange expertise and knowledge and further increase their

364 Previous sections of the discussion have identified the issues related with the LGBT community, and the impact on the participant.
capacity to engage and represent a specific group. The silence, denial, and inactivity of the LGBT community regarding IPA removes the opportunity for the exchange of knowledge, particularly with sexual violence and DV service providers that could help promote awareness and understanding of SSIPA.\textsuperscript{365}

The discussion chapter now moves to consider the outer layer of the social ecology, the Societal Structures.

\section*{9.5 The larger Societal Environment}

The final level of the ecological model examines the larger societal factors that influenced the participants’ experience of IPA.\textsuperscript{366} The Societal Structures encompasses the environment in which all other environments operate within. This level of the ecology “refers to the broad set of cultural values and beliefs that permeate and inform the other three layers” (Heise, 1998, p. 277) and further represents the larger societal and cultural views where the person lives but has no control over. In this model, societal structures are defined as factors that “create and sustain gaps between different segments of society” (Krug et al., 2002, p. 13). In this study the two main Social Structures that form the basis for this environment are heterosexism and homophobia.

\subsection*{9.5.1 Impact of heterosexism and homophobia: A recap}

As an ideology, heterosexism privileges the ‘natural’ superiority of traditional gender roles through heterosexual relationships and marriage (Pharr, 1998) where institutionalised power overtly favours heterosexuality and conformity to masculine and feminine traditional gender norms (Lindhorst, et al., 2010). Walters (2009, p. 159) argues that while “heterosexual victims of domestic violence can begin to heal once they leave the abusive relationship, lesbian survivors cannot escape a society that believes heterosexism and homophobia are foundational elements”. This discussion chapter has repeatedly demonstrated how these societal contexts lead to practices that contribute to inequalities for non-heterosexual women experiencing IPA.

\textsuperscript{365} In 2016, the researcher was involved in a collaborative exercise between the Gay Switchboard and the Rape Crisis Network Ireland that promoted the experience of LGB sexual violence.\textsuperscript{366} See Appendix 53 Comprehensive list of factors occurring in the Societal Structures Environment.
The chapter proceeds to review the main factors identified from the various levels of the ecological model that were found to affect the experience of IPA for participants and are a direct consequence of living in a heterosexist and homophobic society.

This study found that contexts of actual and perceived homophobia shape lesbian victim’s ability to report IPA, with evidence of non-disclosure to Informal Groups and non-reporting of IPA to Formal Groups due to fears of a homophobic response. This finding related to internal homophobia at the individual level and barriers associated with disclosing sexual orientation and abuse simultaneously. At the individual level, stereotypical understandings of masculinity linked to size, strength, and toughness shaped participants help-seeking strategies. In such cases, having a smaller abusive partner acted as a barrier to help-seeking and exacerbated feelings of shame and embarrassment for the participants. When participants feared a homophobic response from Formal Groups they did not disclose the nature of their injuries in healthcare settings and they did not disclose the nature of their relationships when engaging with the police. Furthermore, a homophobic colleague in the workplace was found to influence participant non-disclosure.

Contexts of heterosexism and homophobia shape how lesbian communities respond to violence in lesbian relationships which in turn affects the individual, their understanding of IPA in relationships, and their access to services and support. In an attempt to avoid bringing further stigma to a marginalised community, silence at the community level places lesbian victims at further risk of violence. Furthermore, community silence removes the opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and expertise with other Formal Group organisations that could potentially work toward generating awareness, understanding, and an appropriate professional response to the issue.

Heterosexism in the family of origin affected the support participants received from family members. Stereotypical norms of femininity and masculinity were found to influence the family response to IPA. Such understandings were linked to ideas that females are non-violence and that violence from a female partner was less serious or harmful as that from a male partner. Partners were also described as displaying, and exploiting, feminine traits such as timidity and passivity and this was interpreted by the participants as creating a barrier to disclosure at the Informal Groups level. Stereotypical norms of femininity were also found to influence non-reporting to the police.
This study found that heteronormativity influenced the professional practices of counsellors, healthcare professionals, and those in the DV sector where assumptions that participants were heterosexual blocked the opportunity for disclosure. As stated earlier, this study found that DV services underpinned by a heterosexist ideology serve to marginalise and indeed endanger lesbian victims of IPA. A heteronormative approach to DV service delivery creates the potential for female abusers to access a safe space for lesbian and heterosexual victims alike.

The examples provided in the previous section demonstrate the ways in which the Societal Structures of heterosexism and homophobia permeate all the levels of the ecological model. What this finding alludes to is that there is a perception at the level of the Informal and Formal Groups that is consistent with stereotypical features typically associated with traditional representations of femininity. The discussion now moves to review additional factors that emerged in the various levels of the social ecology that this thesis considers as significant in addressing the issue of lesbian IPA; the critical differences between the heterosexual and non-heterosexual experience of IPA, and the experience of female perpetrated sexual violence.

9.5.2 Lesbian IPA: Critical differences with the heterosexual female experience

The findings from this research has highlighted that there are striking similarities with the experience of IPA for heterosexual and non-heterosexual women. Aside from the experience of identity abuse and availability of appropriate support services, how abuse manifests in relationships suggests commonality for both groups in terms of abuse tactics, impacts, and individual help-seeking patterns. However, there are also some critical differences that are primarily connected with having a marginalised identity within a heteronormative context. What follows is not a comparison of the two groups rather an acknowledgement of those critical differences so that this population can be accurately embraced and understood.

Adapting an ecological perspective to study lesbian IPA makes evident that what is happening in each level of the social ecology, each environment in which the participant interacts, is framed, and influenced by the larger social context of heteronormativity. This
study found that heteronormative understandings of women and violence contribute to non-heterosexual women’s claims of IPA being rendered invisible, minimised, not taken seriously, and understood as not as serious or harmful as male perpetrated violence. Furthermore, discourses suggesting that lesbian relationships are non-violent and egalitarian because of the absence of a male partner create distinct barriers with disclosure and access to service support.

The intersection of a marginalised lesbian identity, IPA, and heteronormativity renders lesbian IPA invisible. This study established that inactivity and silence from those in the LGBT community agencies in response to lesbian IPA acts to reinforce IPA as a heterosexual phenomenon. When those with marginalised identities remain silent on their experience of IPA due to contexts of heteronormativity, this permits those in charge of public policy, DV services, and other related professionals to continue with the delivery of service provision based on a heterosexual ideology.

The help-seeking patterns between heterosexual and non-heterosexual women in response to IPA suggest similarities however, there are critical differences in the availability of appropriate support services. There are clear signposts available in the public domain for heterosexual women directing them to an appropriate service provider. At present, the signposts promoting the experience of female-to-female IPA are non-existent. In comparison, when a heterosexual woman experiences a rape or sexual assault, she has available to her a vocabulary to name and identify her experience as rape. The same cannot be said for women experiencing sexual violence from a female partner. The acknowledgement of females as a perpetrator and as a sexual perpetrator has been slow to emerge. Such characterisations of female runs counter to the stereotypical view of femininity (Richardson, 2005) and traditional sexual scripts that act to conceal and deny women’s capacity for sexual violence (Denov, 2004), a view that is reinforced and supported by heteronormativity.

As was demonstrated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, at the political and policy level, a heterosexist bias underpins the delivery of support services. This heterosexist approach to service provision at the policy level creates direct inequalities for non-heterosexual women experiencing IPA and their ability to access appropriate service provision. The dominant heteronormative gender-based analysis that informs practice and
training contributes to the invisibility of LIPA. In such environments, women are always constructed as a victim leaving no room to incorporate the experience of female perpetrated violence into the analysis of IPA. Although participants in this study were female victims of IPA, their sexuality, and the female gender of their partner, excluded them from services designed to manage and support victims of IPA. Crenshaw (1994) would describe this as a structured intersectional form of discrimination where the combination of a gendered policy informing gendered practice and training excludes the experiences of a group, in this case, non-heterosexual women.

Recognition of the commonalities between the heterosexual and the non-heterosexual female victim experience of IPA leads this thesis to critically question if women are experiencing the same types of abusive behaviours from male and female partners surely this is evidence that IPA is not a gender-based phenomenon exclusively? While cognisant of the empirical research suggesting that the majority of IPA is male-perpetrated, that women experience more serious injuries than male victims, and that women’s violence is often committed in self-defense or retaliatory (Archer, 2002; Kimmel, 2002; Straus, 1997), how we are defining IPA however, determines what we find. Until IPA is considered as a gender-neutral phenomenon that can affect any gender or sexuality we will continue to collate data that over-represents male perpetration of IPA. How can we continue with the argument that IPA is a gender-based phenomenon when we have no structural supports in place to capture other victimisation experiences?

9.5.3 Understanding power in relationships through an ecological lens

Markers of structural power typically engaged with to understand power in abusive heterosexual relationships such as, the division of household chores, decision making, financial resources, and contributions to household finances (Stark, 2007) did not necessarily indicate whom the perpetrator was in the participant relationships. Participants provided accounts of being victimised by partners who were older and younger, or when abusive partners had more and less financial resources. It is when we take into consideration the larger societal context of heterosexism, the environment in which all other environments operate within, we begin to understand the issue of power in female-to-female abusive relationships.
Corbally (2010) argues that it is necessary to consider how power and the subsequent abuse of power are exercised within relationships. Studies show that IPA can surge in complexity when occurring in combination with having a marginalised identity (Walters, 2009). In this study, a marginalised identity status was found to create a unique manifestation of power in relationships, i.e. the experience of ‘homophobic control’ (Hart, 1986) also described as ‘identity abuse’ (Donovan & Hester, 2014). In agreement with Donovan & Hester’s (2014) argument, the long-term impacts from this type of abuse would be devoid of any potential to harm were it not for the socio-cultural context that reinforces heteronormativity. Interestingly, female abusive partners in this study exhibited an awareness of the concomitant female gender norms associated with heteronormativity and exploited the ideology by appropriating feminine characteristics to deceive and manipulate key others about their behaviour in relationships.

Power is a fundamental concept to feminist theory (Yllo, 1993). A feminist conceptualisation of power has resulted in a focus on women’s lack of power and men’s access and abuse of power within the overarching societal structures of patriarchy (Millett, 1977). Walby (1990) argues that heterosexuality acts as a central institution in men’s domination over women. As a result of feminist theory proposing that women are always the victims of male power, women’s desire for power and their exploitation of it is downplayed (Young, 1993). Nonetheless, in this study, the retaliation accounts reflected on by the participants and their accounts of their partner’s behaviours demonstrates that women do engage in behaviours to seek out power and control and furthermore, that women can be sexually aggressive. Other work in the field provides the evidence that women engage in such behaviours in both non-heterosexual and heterosexual relationships (Byers & O’Sullivan, 1998; Corbally, 2015; Edwards et al., 2015; Neal & Edwards, 2017).

Conceptualisations of power that fail to account for women’s agency, and their use and abuse of power while at the same time suggest that male domination in a system of patriarchy is the sole explanation for female aggression (Denov, 2004) are grossly ill equipped to theorise about female-to-female IPA. The emphasis on patriarchy and male domination to understand power in relationships is narrow and restrictive and removes the potential to explore women’s capacity for aggression, and sexual aggression. If feminist concepts of power were expanded to include women’s desire and abuse of power, outside
of a patriarchal context, this would contribute to a more balanced account of why men and women are abusive.

The findings from this study challenge the existing IPA literature and the feminist analysis of IPA by demonstrating that women are not always the victim in abusive relationship contexts. To be effective, feminist theory and research should strive to incorporate female perpetration of violence and sexual violence in the analysis of IPA. With the growing body of empirical research emerging around same sex IPA (Edwards, et al, 2015) it is no longer adequate or acceptable to argue that all forms of violence and sexual violence should be viewed within the context of patriarchy, male power, and masculinities (Kelly, 1988; Radford & Stanko, 1996). Feminist perspectives of IPA are in danger of becoming outmoded if it cannot remove the restrictive, narrow focus that works to deny the possibility of female-to-female IPA, and female sexual perpetration. Feminist theorists should acknowledge the existence of IPA and sexual violence between female couples and configure ways to adapt their current theoretical perspectives so that they are more reflective of IPA experiences occurring outside of heterosexual relationship contexts.

9.5.4 Female-perpetrated sexual violence

Barnes (2008) argues that non-heterosexual women struggle to articulate their experiences of domestic and sexual violence due to three specific factors: the constraints of narrow definitions of domestic and sexual violence; the implications of heteronormativity in language; and gendered constructions of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’. Participants in this study gave accounts of experiencing sexual violence during relationships that included forced sexual penetration and sexual coercion. Throughout their accounts they expressed their inability to articulate what they had experienced and so they remained silent on their experience of sexual violence.367 These findings can be better understood utilising the concept of ‘sexual scripts’ referred to by Denov (2004) in her examination of female perpetrated child sexual abuse. Denov (2004, p. 5) asserts that “female sexual offending challenges traditional sexual scripts concerning ‘appropriate’ female behaviour”. Female sexual perpetration challenges long held beliefs about what constitutes sexual violence.

367 This struggle with articulation was evident during the interviews and is particularly significant as the incidents they described had taken place over ten years, and thirty years respectively. It was evident that participants had yet to address and overcome their experiences of sexual violence.
how we view women in society, and their capacity for violence, abuse, and sexual violence. In agreement with Denov (2004), this study found that traditional sexual scripts that position women as sexually passive and innocent has the potential to play an important role in the underreporting of female sexual perpetrators.

The heterosexist construction of DV is based on a male abuser and a female victim. This ‘public story’ offers an important context for heterosexual women to make sense of their abusive experience, relate their experience of abuse, access an understanding and knowledgeable support option, and to hold abusers accountable for their behaviour. Barnes (2008) argues that because this ‘public story’ relies on these gendered constructions of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ its applicability to non-heterosexual relationship contexts is limited. There is also evidence emerging from the UK that such dominant constructions marginalise male experiences of sexual violence (Weare, et al., 2017). Participants in this study referenced their inability to connect or relate their experience of sexual violence from a female with any framework available to them. In the absence of any public signposts to make sense of their experience of sexual violence participants referenced considering taking criminal proceedings. However, heterosexism in the judicial system, in the form of historical heterosexist rape laws and heterosexist legal definitions of rape were found to influence the decision not to formally report female perpetrated sexual violence.

It is important to note that the participants in this study used the word “rape” to describe their experiences of sexual violence (69). Conventional definitions of rape include the act of penile penetration. When a heterosexual woman uses the word rape, her experiences are clearly understood. However, for a non-heterosexual woman, her experience prompts more questions about the act to establish what ‘rape’ entails. This aspect of the abuse suffered by the participants in this study was the most challenging. While sexual violence is problematic to talk about for any individual, if the signposts are made publicly available, this affords a victim of sexual violence the opportunity to relate their experience and extract the language to verbalise the abuse. A heterosexist bias in the provision of DV and SV services ensures there are no signposts available to describe the experience of female

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368 A recent UK study explored the experiences of heterosexual, bisexual, bi-curious, and gay males, and their experience of forced penetration. See [https://t.co/hhl8TaCawp](https://t.co/hhl8TaCawp)

369 In one case, the participant described being penetrated by her partner’s hand. I would suggest that the term ‘rape’ expresses the severity of the experience on the participant.
perpetrated sexual violence. Similar to previous research from the UK and Ireland (Barnes, 2008; Miner, 2003), this study has identified the need to first acknowledge the issue so that we can develop a greater understanding, develop a language to explain and define the experience, and finally, develop clear professional protocols. This study has demonstrated that the task of developing such changes would require a societal change in terms of how we understand women and their capacity for violence.

These findings concerned with sexual violence highlight the parallels between the DV ‘public story’ and traditional ‘sexual scripts’ that appear to be reflective of rigid societal perceptions of women and what is deemed as acceptable female behaviour. A previously mentioned, Denov (2004) argues that traditional sexual scripts that position women as sexually passive and innocent has the potential to play an important role in the under recognition and underreporting of female sexual perpetrators. In this study, traditional sexual scripts concerning females appear to have penetrated the participant’s informal and formal supports networks – including professionals in healthcare settings, counsellors, and DV service professionals. This finding is significant as professionals play a crucial role in the official recognition of the problem.

This concluding section of the thesis addresses the implications of the findings for feminist DV theory, the LGBT community, for DV policy and practice, and offers some suggestions for future research directions.

9.5.5 Implications for DV theory, the LGBT community, DV policy & practice development, and future research

As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, feminist activists have been largely responsible for bringing the issue of IPA into the public domain. As such, the significance of the feminist contribution to the IPA discourse cannot be underestimated. The evolution of feminist domestic violence theory and its service response has influenced our understanding of domestic violence and what constitutes a domestically violent relationship. Having said that, feminist explanations that propose male perpetrated violence toward females is attributed to men’s power over women in a patriarchal society does not adequately respond to the issue of female-to-female IPA. There appears to be a consistent failure to recognise women’s agency and to accept that women perpetrate abusive
behaviour (Denov, 2004). Furthermore, studies demonstrate that there is resistance to addressing the issue of female-to-female IPA (Kelly, 1991; Renzetti, 1997; Taylor & Chandler, 1995).

From a feminist analysis perspective, the rationale for failing to recognise and resist incorporating female same sex IPA into their analysis creates real challenges. Research evidence to support the existence of female perpetrated IPA has been used to critique the feminist analysis with researchers claiming that battering is more common in lesbian than in heterosexual relationships (Dutton, 1994). The findings from Steinmetz’s (1977) article claiming that husbands were also victims of domestic violence and that this victimisation experience was more under reported that wife abuse, were used as evidence to argue against funding domestic violence shelters (Gelles & Straus, 1988).

It would appear that to incorporate the experience of female-to-female IPA into the feminist analysis of the issue has the potential to threaten the core ethos of the feminist perspective and presents tangible negative implications. However, that is not reason enough for feminist researchers to abandon or avoid the issue of female same sex IPA. This would be a disservice to both female victims of female perpetrated IPA and to the female abusers. Although there is a growing body of literature related to female same sex IPA (Edwards et al., 2015), victims of female sexual perpetration have received minimal recognition in the empirical research and one of the implications of this may be reflected in the harmful responses of professionals to participants disclosures of sexual violence in this study. Following decades of expertise on the issue of IPA, feminist researchers are best placed to study female-to-female IPA. Failure to include this relationship context into a feminist analysis is a missed opportunity to expand IPA knowledge concerning female perpetrated characteristics and motivations and may further result in inaccuracies and misconceptions about the phenomenon.

With specific regard to female perpetrated sexual violence, feminist perspectives need to move away from restrictive understandings of sexual violence as occurring solely within contexts of male power and masculinities whereby men use their power as males to oppress and subordinate women (Kelly, 1988). Narrow definitions of who can perpetrate sexual violence work to validate a core ethos of the feminist analysis, i.e. violence within a
patriarchal context, however, such restrictive definitions contribute to the invisibility of female perpetrators of sexual violence.

One of the ways a feminist analysis could incorporate non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA into their area of study would be to focus analysis on the significance of context in the study of female same sex IPA. Similar to the ways in which patriarchy has been used as the context to understand heterosexual male perpetrated violence, contexts of heterosexism are key to understanding non-heterosexual women’s experience of the issue. Additionally, Denov (2004) argues that a feminist analysis could accommodate female perpetrators by employing the adaptive theory approach. By engaging with this theoretical perspective, feminism can build on existing knowledge by acknowledging feminist theory is not immutable, adapt to new research that challenges the theory’s assumptions, and expand the existing theoretical framework in light of recent empirical developments, such as the existence of female-to-female IPA.

*The LGBT community*

The findings from this study highlight the need for those working within LGBT community organisations to take ownership of the issue of intimate partner abuse in same sex relationships. Taking ownership of the issue to generate awareness and understanding of IPA is important for numerous reasons: to make members of the community aware of the types of abusive behaviours and what such behaviours look like, to help LGBT individuals recognise abusive behaviour and name it as intimate partner abuse, to facilitate recognition of how power and control manifests in same sex relationships, and to direct those experiencing abusive relationships to appropriate support resources.

Those working within an advocacy role in the LGBT community should create opportunities within their service provision to inform individual members of what to look out for in an abusive relationship context, to provide information on how best to respond to a disclosure of IPA, and where to access available services. Community organisations are best placed to challenge stereotypes implying that women cannot be violent, or that abuse, violence, and issues of power and control are absent from female-to-female relationships due to the lack of a male intimate partner. Such organisations should target individuals, young and old, who are coming out for the first time to ensure that they are made aware of the warning signs of abusive behaviours. They should assist individuals in
identifying what a healthy loving and respectful relationship involves as compared with an unhealthy abusive and controlling relationship. The limitations of providing services to a small community should also be recognised as a barrier to disclosure for LGBT victims of IPA and organisations should develop strategies that overcome these barriers. Finally, support and assistance should be made available to help those in the community who blame themselves for their abusive experience, and to challenge interpretations that associate the experience of IPA with a non-heterosexual sexual or gender identity.

Implications for practice & policy interventions
The feminist conceptualisation of intimate partner abuse as an extension of patriarchy that assumes a male aggressor and a female victim creates a heteronormative bias in policy implementation and practice intervention services. Such a focus results in specific policies that guide the response from law enforcement and dictates to whom and what services receive state funding and the types of services and treatment options that are available. Domestic and sexual violence policies and practices could prove to be more effective if they were inclusive of other experiences such as, same sex male and female relationships, heterosexual male, bisexual male, and female, and those of trans men and women. To target the diverse experiences of domestic and sexual violence for these groups, policies and practices should be examined to see if they reflect a heterosexist and gendered institutional response to such issues. Institutional policies and practice reflect an understanding of domestic and sexual violence as a male perpetrated issue, as such, practice responses are geared toward the heterosexual female victim experience. Policies and practices should reflect the reality that women can be both victim and abuser in relationships, and further, capable of sexual violence. Existing treatment programmes for perpetrators of violence should also reflect the reality of female perpetration of violence and abuse. Acknowledging the potential for female perpetration at an institutional level could further contribute to professional recognition of the issue.

Professional education and training is needed for professionals whose remit falls within the scope of domestic and sexual violence. Specifically, professionals working in the criminal justice, healthcare, domestic and sexual violence, and counselling professions should seek to acquire training on how best to respond to an individual experiencing IPA in a same sex relationship. Training and education should aim to expand their knowledge of abuse in relationships that is inclusive of abusive relationship contexts that fall outside the
heterosexual male perpetrated experience. Professional education and training should incorporate evidence to support the existence of female same sex IPA and female perpetrated sexual violence. This study found that perceived homophobia acted as a barrier to seeking support from formal support options. Professional should be advised and trained to display a sensitive and non-judgemental attitude toward victims, place emphasis on the importance of creating a space where victims can disclose their experiences in a trusted environment and make enquiries about female aggression and sexual violence. Professional agencies and organisations should also display visual aids that include images of the same sex experience of IPA in their places of work and on their available digital platforms. Such strategies proved effective for participants in the current study to name and recognise their experience as IPA. By engaging in these strategies, professionals can challenge any pre-conceived understandings or misconceptions they may have acquired in their professional practice and training related to the DV ‘public story’ or of traditional ‘sexual scripts’ related to women and men.

Further discussion and debate is required from counsellors, An Garda Síochana, domestic and sexual violence frontline staff, social workers, victims, and other professionals in the field to exchange knowledge and experiences of the issue. However, as this study has demonstrated, silence from victims and those within the LGBT community to recognise and acknowledge the reality of female same sex IPA needs to be addressed to have any real opportunity for policy and practice implementation.

Directions for future research
As a result of the paucity of research available on intimate partner abuse by females, more research is needed to expand our understanding. This concluding section suggests some directions for future research, particularly as it pertains to victims, abusers, and professionals working in the area of intimate partner abuse.

Victims of female intimate partner abuse
In an Irish research context, more large-scale studies of female perpetrated intimate partner abuse would be beneficial to ascertain whether the experiences of the participants in this study reflect that of the wider female non-heterosexual population. Is disclosure problematic because of larger societal structures of heterosexism? What is the relationships
between concealing a non-heterosexual sexual identity and the experience of IPA? Research comparing the experiences of heterosexual women and non-heterosexual women would be advantageous in highlighting the similarities and differences in the experience of IPA. Furthermore, what are the impacts of intimate partner abuse on non-heterosexual women abused by a female perpetrator? What strategies have victims devised and utilised to help them overcome abusive experiences? What motivates victims of female IPA to formally report their experiences or not? There is a need to examine the current support services available to female victims of IPA and sexual violence. Are there supports available for this cohort of women, and if not, why? How does the issue of power and control manifest in a female same sex relationship context? Asking such questions would greatly expand our knowledge of intimate partner abuse and would assist professionals and policy makers to fund and create support initiatives for victims which best address their needs.

Future research is needed to investigate sexual abuse by females and its impact on victims. Research is necessary to understand how victims are understanding this type of intimate partner violence. Two participants in this study described a previous child sexual abuse experience being exploited by abusive female partners. This type of abuse by women needs to be explored further to understand the contexts in which sexual victimisation occurs in female-to-female relationships. Future research should also strive to establish whether and how factors related to age, class, disability, race, and sexual orientation influence the impact of intimate partner abuse in non-heterosexual female relationship contexts, and whether or not these factors affect the response of professionals working in the area.

**Female perpetrators**

With regards to female perpetration of IPA, more research is needed to establish what motivates women to be violent and controlling in relationships. How do female perpetrators understand and explain their actions? Is female perpetration different to male perpetration of violence, and sexual violence? In cases of female sexual perpetration, again, research is needed to explore their motivations and to establish if women are sexually aroused when they perpetrate such violence.

There is a need to examine the current treatment and support services available to female perpetrators of IPA and sexual violence. Are there treatment supports for this cohort of
women, and if not, why? Research is needed to capture the perspectives of female perpetrators who have engaged with a support service on their views of both the service they received and the professional response they encountered? Research in this area would identify strengths and weaknesses in support service provision and also provide data on the types of responses they receive from professionals in the field.

_Professionals working in domestic & sexual violence services_

With regard to the professional response to non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA, several areas of further investigation appear necessary. To begin, a national study consisting of a variety of professional perspectives on female same sex IPA would corroborate if the perspectives of professionals in this study are reflective of the wider professional sector. Research is needed to expand knowledge related to how professionals understand the issue of female same sex IPA and female perpetrated sexual violence? Do personal characteristics such as gender and physical stature influence professional perspectives on female same sex IPA? Investigating these factors would greatly improve our understanding of the professional response to the issue.

This research has identified the need to first recognise the existence of female perpetrated sexual violence so that a fuller understanding of this understudied issue can be acquired. The study discovered a need to develop clear protocols to support this issue that would require a broader societal change in terms of how we perceive women, how we perceive their propensity for violence and their capacity to perpetrate sexual violence.

Finally, research exploring professional training and female-to-female IPA is necessary. What professional training is available that informs professionals of both female perpetrated IPA and sexual violence? Research could develop a protocol for professionals working with both female victims and abusers based on internationally recognised best practice procedures.

**Conclusion: Chapter nine**

This thesis set out to generate knowledge and understanding of the particular lived experience of non-heterosexual women in Ireland who have experienced intimate partner
abuse from a female partner. Specifically, this research focused on what was the experience and the nature of IPA for this group, how they subjectively understood their experience of IPA, and what were their help-seeking strategies in response to the abusive behaviour.

This thesis is bringing a considerable empirical contribution to the IPA field of inquiry, by expanding the existing frontiers of knowledge in the field and addressing a significant gap in the Irish empirical knowledge base. The IPA research available in Ireland is primarily focused on heterosexual women (and to a lesser extent heterosexual men) who are victimised by male partners, family members, or other men (Clancy & Ward, 2005; COSC, 2011; Kelleher & O’Connor, 1995; Tánaiste, 1997; Watson & Parsons, 2005). While others have focused attention on non-heterosexual women’s experience of IPA (Miner, 2003) and this populations engagement with formal support services (Miner, 2013), this study presents findings that reflect an understanding of non-heterosexual women’s unique perspectives and their subjective experiences of IPA. The present study adds to the developing body of knowledge about the female same sex experience of IPA by capturing the retaliation accounts offered by the participants in response to an abusive relationship. Such findings challenge traditional presentations of ‘victims’ as passive and helpless and offer further insights into the nuances and complexities associated with understanding abusive behaviours in same sex relationship contexts. This research included the experiences of non-heterosexual mothers and their biological children in relationship contexts of IPA, a cohort that have been identified as grossly underrepresented in the existing literature (Hardesty, et al., 2011). Studies report that minimal research focuses on the impact and recovery processes for both non-heterosexual (Barnes, 2013) and heterosexual survivors of IPA (Flasch, et al., 2017). This study explored impacts during and post relationships and the longer-term impact of an abusive relationship experience. Focusing attention on the longer-term impact yielded data that described how participants recovered, or not, from a violent relationship.

In capturing the unique and subject experience of IPA for this group of women, this thesis is telling a previously largely untold story, representing the first qualitative exploration of IPA for this group. Together with non-heterosexual women’s unique individual experience of IPA, the findings from this research also demonstrate that the larger heteronormative societal context shapes and influences the subjective experience of IPA for this population.
This thesis has established that two discourses, the heterosexual public story of IPA and the non-heterosexual story of a ‘lesbian utopia’ have contributed to the invisibility of female-to-female IPA. Both discourses, in different ways, have dominated and crowded out the debate of what constitutes IPA to the extent that there is no room left for anything that falls outside of these two discourses. These findings represent something of a paradox in that both discourses grew out of a determination to challenge abuse, discrimination and inequality associated with minority status, gender inequality, and unequal human rights. The roots and values of both discourses are now contributing to the further marginalisation of individuals that they set out initially to protect. The findings of this thesis challenge those discourses, and further challenge the various groups; academics, policy makers, researchers, and practitioners to return to the core principles that underpinned the Women’s Movement and the Gay Rights Movements concern with abuse, discrimination, diversity, and inequality. And furthermore, to embrace those values and principles in acknowledging both non-heterosexual men and women, and male heterosexual victims, who to date, don’t have a ‘public story’. In order for such populations to have a public story, there needs to be an acknowledgement of their experience of IPA and a language built around it. The process of re-writing a public story that reflects the truth of intimate partner abuse, needs at a starting point to include not only heterosexual male dominated but also heterosexual female dominated, but also the same sex male and female experiences. This process reflects the advice of, Gooch (1990), who stated:

“Things have not only to be seen to be believed, but also have to be believed to be seen.”

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10 Appendices

Appendix 1 Database search terms using PICO

Population Search Terms
(female OR females OR woman OR women OR lesbian OR lesbian OR lesbianism OR bisexual OR bisexuality OR bisexuals)
Lesbianism OR lesbian OR lesbians OR dyke OR dykes OR Women OR woman OR female OR females

Sexuality Search Terms
gay OR gays OR bisexuality OR bisexual OR bisexuals OR queer OR queers OR homosexuality OR homosexual OR homosexuals OR homophobia OR transgender OR transsexuality OR transsexual OR transsexuals OR “same sex” OR LGBT OR LGBTI OR LGBTQI OR LGBTQQI OR LGBTQ OR LGB OR “gender fluid” OR “non-binary” OR “gender identity” OR “sexual orientation” OR “sexual minority” OR “sexual minorities”

Relationship Search Terms
“same sex” OR “same gender” OR partner OR partners OR relationship OR relationships OR couple OR couples OR married OR marriage OR marriages OR spousal OR spouses

Issue Search Terms
“domestic violence” OR “partner abuse” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “lesbian battering” OR lesbian battery"
Appendix 2 Literature review matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research design</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Article focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alhusen et al 2010</td>
<td>Mixed method. FG &amp; Interviews</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>System incompetence (laughing it off) and reinforced marginalisation (we're beyond second class), and compounding abuse (If you can't protect us, at least don't abuse us)</td>
<td>Perception of &amp; experiences with DV, health care, &amp; criminal justice services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balsam 2001 USA</td>
<td>Balsam is a lesbian psychotherapist</td>
<td>Didn't provide sample details Drawing on her experience as a psychotherapist</td>
<td>-help seeking severely impacted by homophobia -re-victimisation of lesbians, family of origin, hate crime victimisation &amp; experience of IPA -impact of homophobia on the victim; interaction between self-blame from homophobic context and IPA (victim may blame herself for the abuse, for being a lesbian) - fear of a homophobic response as a barrier to help-seeking - advocating for the inclusion of the sociocultural contexts in the analysis of lesbian IPA</td>
<td>Exploring the impact of homophobia &amp; minority stress in lesbians to examine the ways it might impact the experience of IPA for the victim, abuser, &amp; support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes 2008 UK</td>
<td>Qual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Absence of language to describe FSSIPA. Constraints of narrow definitions of domestic &amp; sexual violence. Heteronormativity in definition of domestic &amp; sexual violence. Gendered constructions of victim &amp; perpetrator</td>
<td>Examining experience of abuse &amp; views on existing support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes 2009 UK</td>
<td>Qual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Women experiencing diverse forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, financial, emotional/psychological, and identity abuse. Emotional/psychological most frequently reported. Emotional and practical support from primarily friends.</td>
<td>First in-depth qual study FSSIPA in UK. Explore forms of abuse, explore wider social context of belonging to a minority, &amp; long-term impacts of abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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| Barnes 2011 UK | Qual semi-structured interview | 40          | - Highlights the greatest silence surrounds sexual violence by female perpetrators. Talking about the 'lesbian sex wars' and how the issue of forced sexual acts was not on the agenda, instead the focus was on butch/femme roles and sadomasochism in les relationships.  
  - Women’s experience of abuse is shaped by assumptions and messages which they are confronted with when they seek support.  
  - Shock & disbelief is evidence that assumptions about women's non-violence remain pervasive. Pervasiveness of expectations of mutuality & non-violence contributed to silence & denial.  
  - Arguing lesbian feminism was built upon a vision of a 'lesbian utopia' which overlooks the potential for women to be violent. Silence about abuse within lesbian feminist ideology.  
  - Acknowledgement of FSSDVA fear that it could de-centre feminist focus on male violence, & the gender-based analysis of DV. Political implications - resources directed away from women abused by men (Kelly, 1996 cited in Barnes, 2011).  
  - Highlights the greatest silence surrounds sexual violence by female perpetrators. Talking about the 'lesbian sex wars' and how the issue of forced sexual acts was not on the agenda, instead the focus was on butch/femme roles and sadomasochism in les relationships.  
  - Self-blame also common amongst heterosexual women (Barnett, Martinez & Keyson, 1996 cited in Barnes, 2011)  
  - Feminists have remained silent on the issue because of the complex theoretical &political implications of confronting it (Kelly, 1996 cited in Barnes, 2011). | Reflecting on lesbian feminist conceptualisations of female relationships as egalitarian & non-violent to identify the implication of these ideals for women’s disclosure & understanding of DVA. Exploring the contradiction between an ideology which promotes female relationships as key to liberation form oppression, equality, democracy in relationships and abusive relationships. Explanatory frameworks for women’s violence are lacking generally. Challenges which FSSIPA poses to lesbian feminist conceptualisations of female relationship as egalitarian |
<table>
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<th>Authors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Barnes 2013 UK</td>
<td>Qual semi-structured interview</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Recovery from partner abuse is not a linear process &amp; is not guaranteed to reach an end point</td>
<td>Examining life after abuse</td>
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| Bornstein et al 2006 USA | FG & semi-structured Interview | 28          | - Lack of community awareness  
- Difficulty with identifying abuse.  
- IPA minimised in community, services unable to handle non-heterosexual IPA.  
- Isolation from larger community, along with interconnected nature of smaller LGBT community, creates context of intense vulnerability for survivors. E.g. same sex partners same friends and connections  
- Isolation factor in help-seeking. Didn’t access mainstream DV due to concerns about homo/Transphobia. Participants wouldn’t seek support from DV service unless it's LGBT specific, not going to go to a straight service. Barrier: Perception of homophobic response from police. Didn’t use a DV shelter in case abuser gained access. Sought help from counsellors - negative. May not have access to institutional supports. therapists & couple counsellors are sources of support  
- Difficulty identifying behaviours as abusive. First time relationship - thinking that’s how relationships are - no info on healthy relationship to counter. Dominant DV discourse contributes to non-recognition.  
- DV awareness in community limited. Challenges identifying & responding to DV are specific to cultural context  
- Isolation increases survivors dependence, cuts them off from supports & resources. | Understanding community perspectives on DV. Assess cultural appropriateness of services for LGBT |
<p>| Brown 2007          | Interviews, phone, email | 20          | - Findings abuse by default, didn’t ask questions on abuse initially                                                                                                                                  | Experiences of partner (female-to-male) transition.                                                      |</p>
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<tr>
<td>Burke &amp; Follingstad 1999 US</td>
<td>Review &amp; critique empirical literature on LG relationships</td>
<td>Reviewed quantitative studies 19 studies with a focus on psychological, physical, and non-consenting sexual violence</td>
<td>-80% of LG survivors will seek help from informal sources, far more than will seek help if those services are unavailable</td>
<td>-Integrated findings from LG IPA with heterosexual IPA</td>
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<td>Carvalho, Lewis, Derlega, Winstead, &amp; Viggiano (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td>581 gay men and lesbians Self-identified</td>
<td>-25% of lesbians reported victimization; 9.3% reported perpetration; 9% indicated both -23% of gay men reported victimization; 8.3% reported perpetration; 7% indicated both -Participants reporting victimization reported being more &quot;out&quot; and more stigma consciousness -Those higher in stigma consciousness were almost twice as likely to perpetrate</td>
<td>-Rates -IPA victim correlates -IPA perp correlates</td>
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<td>Descamps, Rothblum,</td>
<td>Nationally representative</td>
<td>Overall IPA reported by 11.4%</td>
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<td>-Rates</td>
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| Bradford, & Ryan     | sample of 1,925 | Self-report | -8% reported ever being harshly beaten or physically abused  
-2% reported being raped or sexually attacked by a partner  
-Older age and lower education both related to greater prevalence for IPA victimization  
-Lesbians who reported IPA victimization reported higher daily stress, depression, and alcohol abuse  
-15% of lesbians who experienced childhood sexual abuse experienced IPV, while 9.8% of those not abused in childhood experienced IPV | -IPA victimisation correlates  
-IPA victimisation outcomes |
| (2000)               | lesbians from every state and region in the U.S. |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                               |
| Donovan & Hester     | 4 focus groups  |             | -First same-sex relationship viewed as a confusion between the positive experience of being with someone and the abuse  
-Minimization often occurs in first same-sex relationships  
-Tolerance of an abusive partner attributed to lack of knowledge about what to expect in a same-sex relationship  
-Most who experienced IPV victimization did not view it as such  
-Friends and family were those most often confided in, while police were least likely to be involved (less than 10%) | -disclosure  
-help-seeking  
-perceptions |
| (2008) UK            | with lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men, and 67 interviews with heterosexual men and women and people with experience in same-sex relationships |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                               |
| Donovan & Hester     | Interviews (67)  | National Community Survey (746) | -40.1% women experienced DVA in SS relationship.  
-Risk factors included age under 35, lower income levels & to some extent lower educational attainment.  
-Interviews indicated strong link to abuse and first-time relationship, tended to be associated with lower age groups. | -How processes of gendering might operate in similar or different ways in abusive gay & lesbian or heterosexual relationship.  
-Analysing context and impact of abusive behaviours. |
| 2010 UK              | 44 with self-identified LGBT  
23 with heterosexuals. FGs (4) |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                               |
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<tr>
<td>Donovan &amp; Hester 2011 (a)</td>
<td>Interviews (67)</td>
<td>National Community Survey (746)</td>
<td>- Self-defined abused in the sample scored highly on the physical, emotional &amp; sexual abuse scales. - Identified with multiple forms of abuse.</td>
<td>Investigating love &amp; DV in SS &amp; Hetero relationships. Compare SS &amp; hetero experience</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>44 with self-identified LGBT 23 with heterosexuals. FGs (4)</td>
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<td>Explores facilitators &amp; barriers to help-seeking from the police</td>
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<td>Donovan &amp; Hester 2011 (b)</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews</td>
<td>National Community Survey (746)</td>
<td>- Lack of recognition of IPA connected with public story - Gap of trust between participants &amp; formal supports (police) - Escalation, fear &amp; violence as catalyst to seeking help from police - Fear of retaliation, not be believed, unsympathetic response as a reason to not seek support from the police - ‘Public story’ leads to non-use of mainstream services &amp; DV services</td>
<td>Interviews with same sex &amp; hetero men &amp; women suggest mistaken to focus on gender &amp; power to understand IPA</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>Donovan et al 2014</td>
<td>Mixed method UK wide survey CORAL Project</td>
<td>872 questionnaires 36 SS Interviews (12 identified as LBQ and/or pansexual)</td>
<td>- Opt for friends &amp; counselling support services - ‘Experiential power’ more nuanced forms of power exist - Non-recognition due to ‘DV public story’ (participants present at agencies as perpetrator) - ‘Public story’ leads to non-use of mainstream services &amp; DV services</td>
<td>Explore similarities &amp; differences across sexuality &amp; gender of those who enact abusive behaviours in LGBT relationships Help-seeking Making sense of abuse</td>
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| Donovan& Hester 2014 UK | Mixed method National same sex community survey (n=800), FG (4), Interviews = 67 (19) lesbian. | LGBT n=800, FG= 4. | - non-recognition because of ‘public story’ of DV that emphasises physical violence & obscuring coercive control  
- gap of trust between those in SS relationships & formal support services  
- abusive behaviours can be understood as gendered: hetero women & gay men report more physical violence & physically violent sexual coercion from male perps; lesbians & hetero men more typically report experiences of emotional abuse from female perps, lesbians experienced more emotionally abusive sexual coercion  
- younger participants more likely to report isolation, age & sexuality used against them, threat of outing, finances controlled, being put down, hurt during sex, hit with object & stalked, sexually assaulted  
- difficulty with recognition of IPA related to public story of IPA, childhood or adult heterosexual experience of DV, working directly with victims of IPA  
- fighting back in self-defense  
- risk factors: low education attainment & income levels, being under 35 years | - Comparison with SS & hetero experiences of IPA |
| Fortuna and Kohn (2003)  | 100 lesbian women who had been with their current partner for at least 6 months | -38% reported physical IPV perpetration, with 8% reporting such just in self-defense so were removed from further perpetration analyses  
- Perpetrators (50%) more likely than non-perpetrators (24.2%) to have been a victim of childhood violence or physical abuse  
- Perpetrators (70%) more likely than non-perpetrators (47.5%) to have been sexually abused as a child  
- Perpetrators more likely to be dependent on drugs and alcohol, report higher levels of psychopathology, aggressive, antisocial, borderline, paranoid, and delusional personality characteristics | - Rates  
- IPA perp correlates  
- IPA characteristics |
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<td>Giorgio 2002 US</td>
<td>Qualitative in-depth interviews</td>
<td>11 abused lesbians (who have been or still are in abusive relationships). 10 DV advocates</td>
<td>- Struggle to define abuse, their identity &amp; understanding of gendered violence in context of cultural &amp; institutional stigmatisation. Arguing abused lesbians negotiate a shared &amp; concrete dissonance between their lived experience &amp; dominant DV discourse. Response &amp; subjective negotiations are markedly contrast from hetero women. Silence as a response to abuse, as a definitional dialogue, the role of silence and mutual abuse. Definitional hegemony (ability to define the moment for outsiders in an assertion of abusive power) - Physical, sexual, abuse of pets. Abusers exploit partner's jealous feelings in complex ways e.g. spending time with other women friends were time spent is suspicious. Altering actions so as not to spark jealousy in abusive partner. Abusers exploit their gender to monitor &amp; manipulate partner (e.g. exploit a site of protection for battered women). - Unlike hetero victims, when a lesbian resists her partner, victims believe abuse is mutual (Renzetti, 1992) - Moments of intervention, must listen to how DV is being defined to understand who is abused &amp; who is abuser. Without definitive markers of gender (abuser/abused) community denies, minimises or ignore the abuse. Police arrest abused as she is more masculine/ racially marked than the abuser. - Myth of mutual abuse as an obstacle for understanding DVA. Victims believe they are aggressors - reinforced by the abuser (See Lobel, 1986, Renzetti, 1992, Taylor &amp; Chandler, 1995 &amp; Giorgio 1999). - Community exclusion - abuser claiming to be the abused. Avoiding friendships with men to stifle abuser's jealousy.</td>
<td>Exploring how abused lesbians subjectively navigate IPV in light of dominant theories &amp; DV representations.</td>
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| Girshick 2002 US | Nationwide survey & in-depth interviews | 70 women Lesbian (81%) Bisexual (16%) Hetero (1%) | - Barriers to help-seeking, discrimination, stigma, disbelief, sexuality disclosure issues, even potential for further exposure to violence  
- Sexual violence concentrated at younger age  
- The social context of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia  
- No recognised vocabulary to discuss sexual violence by females (p.25), women struggle to name their experience  
- 19% (17) reported assault to police  
- Participants had previous abuse histories (71%) as incest as child/adolescents or rape, (51%) raped as adults by male perpetrator  
- Control, jealousy & power as a motivation for sexual violence  
- Blocking out abusive experience  
- Exploiting previous childhood abuse history  
- Participant fought back, abuse stopped or increased  
- Myth of lesbian utopia in silencing abuse victims & seeking help | The experience of sexual violence for non-heterosexual women, impacts & help-seeking |
| Glass et al 2008 US | Mixed method Focus Groups (41) & Interviews (11) | 93 women completed interview 84 completed follow up interview | - Reported partner as possessive & jealous  
- One third of sample reported threatened or actual physical & sexual violence  
- Reported stalking & post-separation harassment | Predict re assault in FSS relationship. Testing Danger Assessment (DA-R) Women who self-reported current or past year physical or sexual abuse from a female partner/ or those that perpetrated |
<p>| Hammond 1998 | | | - Battered lesbian would likely face a homophobic group of police officers, attorneys, legal advocates, and judges. Even if these members of the judicial system are sympathetic to battered women in general, they | |</p>
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<td>Hardesty et al 2008 US</td>
<td>Interviews (24)</td>
<td>12 African American, 9 white, 3 Latina lesbian mothers</td>
<td>are more likely to see lesbian battering as mutual, limiting the number of remedies available.</td>
<td>Explore the experience of IPA in a sample of lesbian mothers</td>
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<td>- 3 types of IPA in relationship, intimate terrorism, situational violence, mutual violent control</td>
<td>IPA characteristics</td>
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<td>- relationships with children, 48% hid abuse, 26% minimised, 26% opening communicated with child</td>
<td>Reasons for staying/leaving</td>
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<td>- relationship between abusers &amp; children, co-parental (29%), playmate (21%), abusive (21%), non-parental (21%)</td>
<td>Perceptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hardesty et al 2011 US</td>
<td>Interview (24)</td>
<td>12 African American, 9 white, 3 Latina lesbian mothers</td>
<td>- increasing severity of violence, effects of violence on children &amp; families, &amp; being tired influenced definitions of their situation</td>
<td>Explore the experience of IPA in a sample of lesbian mothers &amp; help-seeking</td>
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<td>- process of help-seeking influenced by individual, interpersonal, &amp; sociocultural characteristics (Liang at al 2005).</td>
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<td>- overt help-seeking (sexual identity)</td>
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<td>- problem with heterosexism with help-seeking were understood as discrimination, &amp; mothers pressed for equal treatment (unless compromised by fear of losing children)</td>
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<td>- covert help seeking without revealing violence</td>
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<td>- covert influenced by myths women as non-violent, les utopia, women as weak for allowing abuse to happen</td>
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<td>- covert, stigma, intersection of IPA &amp; same sex relationship</td>
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<td>- friends &amp; family complicit in maintaining silence</td>
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<td>- fear of retaliation as a barrier to formal help-seeking</td>
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<td>- legal standing in relation to children influenced help-seeking</td>
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<td>Hassouneh &amp; Glass 2008 US</td>
<td>Mixed method (reporting on qual findings)</td>
<td>52 Women (15 years and older) who self-reported current or past-</td>
<td>- Innate belief women are non-violent impacted on seeking support from DV services.</td>
<td>Identify shared &amp; unique risks &amp; protective factors for FSSIPA</td>
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<td>FGs (41) Interview (11)</td>
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<td>- Gender role stereotyping shapes women’s experiences of FSSIPV by influencing individual, familial, community, and societal perceptions and</td>
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|         | year IPV from a same-sex partner 7 perps in sample | responses to this phenomenon. Risk factors for FSSIPV exist at the individual, familial, community, and societal levels. Perpetrators would play the victim to avoid arrest employing G Role stereotyping hysterical & emotional to manipulate the police.  
- Law enforcement’s tendency to rely on gender role stereotypes butch / femme to identify perpetrators.  
- Hegemony of gender based analysis barrier to help seeking.  
- Lesbian utopia & community silence.  
- Idealised community’s protective strategies silence women, make the issue taboo  
- Innate belief that women are non-violent contributed to non-recognition & seeking support from DV services. Unable to name the violence.  
- Tendency to self-blame. "The way things are" found in first time relationship with older women  
- G Role stereotyping along with lack of relationship experience.  
- Lesbian utopia & silence in the community.  
- Cat fight -minimises seriousness of abuse connected with femininity (women can't be violent, can't hurt another) & stereotypical views of women as hysterical & emotional  
- Gender role stereotyping shapes women’s experiences of FSSIPV by influencing individual, familial, community, and societal perceptions and responses to this phenomenon.  
- Risk factors for FSSIPV exist at the individual, familial, community, and societal levels  
- Perpetrators play the victim to avoid arrest employing G Role stereotyping hysterical & emotional to manipulate the police. |
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<td>Helfrich &amp; Simpson 2006 US</td>
<td>Qualitative in-depth interviews</td>
<td>6 staff members from traditional DV service 7&amp; lesbian social service providing DV services</td>
<td>- Law enforcement’s tendency to rely on gender role stereotypes butch / femme to identify perpetrators. Police used differences in size to identify perpetrators. - Identification of barriers revealed not all survivors receive the same services with the same consistency, nor do they receive the same empathy &amp; respect from agencies, staff members &amp; clients (Simpson, 2004 Master’s Thesis cited in Helfrich &amp; Simpson, 2006) - SPs recognised the need for systemic &amp; institutional change (4 categories) Policies regarding institutional inclusion; Assessment of language &amp; literature; Training &amp; Supervision; Institutional Evaluation &amp; Quality Assurance. - Interviews revealed policy changes could occur: institutional inclusion, assessment of language and literature, training &amp; supervision, &amp; institutional evaluation &amp; quality assurance</td>
<td>Identify &amp; describe strategies that service agencies &amp; staff members can implement to provide effective services to lesbians survivors of DVA Ample recommendations for service provision change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hester et al 2010 UK</td>
<td>Mixed method</td>
<td>National Community Survey (746) Interviews (67) 44 with LGBT 23 with heterosexuals. FGs (4) LGBT &amp; Heterosexual</td>
<td>- 40.1% women experienced DVA in SS relationship. Risk factors included age under 35, lower income levels &amp; to some extent lower educational attainment. Interviews indicated strong link to abuse and first-time relationship, tended to be associated with lower age groups. Self-defined abused in the sample scored highly on the physical, emotional &amp; sexual abuse scales. - identified with multiple forms of abuse</td>
<td>Examined severity of Impact: Asked questions on impact around emotional, physical &amp; sexual abuse. Found correlation evident between emotional, physical &amp; sexual abuse. How processes of gendering might operate in similar or different ways in abusive gay &amp; lesbian or heterosexual relationship. Analysing context and impact of abusive behaviours. Investigating love &amp; DV in SS &amp; Hetero</td>
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<td>Holmes 2009 Canada</td>
<td>Multiple methods analysis of texts, semi-structured interviews &amp; FG</td>
<td>5 White, lesbian, queer-identified feminist anti-violence educators who deliver community based workshops on FSSDVA. (author included as participant)</td>
<td>-Not including the social context (public) in the analysis of SSDVA (private) leaves the hegemony of whiteness in the discourse unexamined - this framework for analysis limits the extent to which we can see 'white, middle class women' as dominant in the analysis. -Evidence of DV educators seeing lesbian battering as unidimensional, only understanding in the context of an intimate relationship not within the societal context - The social context of violence in lesbian relationships is primarily described as patriarchy &amp; heterosexism. Not including the social context (public) in the analysis of SSDVA (private) leaves the hegemony of whiteness in the discourse unexamined - this framework for analysis limits the extent to which we can see 'white, middle class women' as dominant in the analysis. Evidence of DV educators seeing lesbian battering as unidimensional, only understanding in the context of an intimate relationship not within the societal context -white feminists identified their own and other feminists' resistance to change organisational practices despite and intellectual awareness of multiple forms of oppression.</td>
<td>Explores racialised exclusions in public/private dichotomy in community-based educational discourses about 'lesbian DV'. Investigates how certain stories &amp; constructs make visible &amp; produce some subjectivities, forms of violence &amp; histories of oppression while concealing or suppressing others. Exploring ideological scripting of DV as private &amp; domestic make it hard to recognise certain forms of violence in certain bodies.</td>
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<td>Irwin 2008 Australia</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews</td>
<td>21 self-identified lesbians</td>
<td>-women remained silent as saw DVA as a heterosexual issue that didn’t affect them. -Struggled to identify DVA because of idealised notions of lesbian relationships. -Traditional understandings of power as stable etc did not fit - power experienced as relational, dispersed &amp; localised, working in complex &amp; unpredictable ways -Physical, Emotional, Sexual, economic and/or Social. -Most frequent form was emotional but also most difficult to identify. Emotional abuse posed biggest</td>
<td>Explore how understandings of lesbian DVA are constituted &amp; how these influence, shape &amp; produce lesbians experience of DV.</td>
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<td>- Challenge to their sense of self, having pervasive impact on their lives e.g. name calling cited&lt;br&gt;- Abuse in first same sex relationship, previous abuse histories, isolation&lt;br&gt;- Women described situations where power fluctuated as women resisted, managed and challenged the abuse. Power was productive &amp; created opportunities for change&lt;br&gt;- Struggled to name abuse, help seeking behaviours. - Denial, silence &amp; invisibility.&lt;br&gt;- Dominant DV discourse impact on ways they experienced &amp; responded to the abuse, questioned sense of self and took responsibility for relationship not working - self-blame.&lt;br&gt;- Sense of self linked with isolation &amp; reinforced by abuser’s negative comments.&lt;br&gt;- Abuse &amp; abuser’s messages shaped how women saw themselves &amp; felt about themselves.&lt;br&gt;- Long-term impact: Negative impacts on social and emotional well-being &amp; sense of self. Attempted suicide, disruption or undermining of their relationships with their children, friends &amp; support networks, deterioration in their mental &amp; physical health, loss of material possessions.&lt;br&gt;- Non-disclosure related to further stigma, more related to personal rather than community concerns.&lt;br&gt;- Isolation &amp; lack of support networks influenced response to abuse. Fear and shame about sexuality - unable to disclose. Family, friend’s networks, health, human and community services. More likely to seek help from friends than family. Friends played an important role in providing practical help &amp; supporting women to leave the relationship. Friends did not fully understand the trauma of the experience</td>
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- Present related to heterosexism. Unable to name the violence. Recognition post relationship. Lesbian utopia. Dominant DV discourse creates & maintains invisibility of lesbian DVA & simultaneously constitutes DV as a heterosexual issue only. Heteronormative discourses interacted with discourses idealising lesbian relationships, constituting women as passive etc, further erased possibility of violence. Discursive constitutions shaped their understanding & meaning applied to DVA.
- Negative impacts on social and emotional well-being & sense of self. Attempted suicide, disruption or undermining of their relationships with their children, friends & support networks, deterioration in their mental & physical health, loss of material possessions.
- Struggled to name abuse, help seeking behaviours. Denial, silence & invisibility. Dominant DV discourse impact on ways they experienced & responded to the abuse, questioned sense of self and took responsibility for relationship not working - self -blame. Sense of self linked with isolation & reinforced by abuser's negative comments. Abuse & abusers messages shaped how women saw themselves & felt about themselves.
- Recommendation:
  Development of tertiary, secondary & preventative services that are safe & relevant for lesbians. Encourage organisations to be more explicit about the philosophical basis that underpins their work. Within services, there is a need to question heteronormative assumptions that pervade their service delivery. Practitioner sin health & community services have access to training & supervision that increases their understanding of how lesbians can be violent in different ways, awareness of issues in lesbians lives that impact on the way they experience DVA. Some

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<td>- Present related to heterosexism. Unable to name the violence. Recognition post relationship. Lesbian utopia. Dominant DV discourse creates &amp; maintains invisibility of lesbian DVA &amp; simultaneously constitutes DV as a heterosexual issue only. Heteronormative discourses interacted with discourses idealising lesbian relationships, constituting women as passive etc, further erased possibility of violence. Discursive constitutions shaped their understanding &amp; meaning applied to DVA. - Negative impacts on social and emotional well-being &amp; sense of self. Attempted suicide, disruption or undermining of their relationships with their children, friends &amp; support networks, deterioration in their mental &amp; physical health, loss of material possessions. - Struggled to name abuse, help seeking behaviours. Denial, silence &amp; invisibility. Dominant DV discourse impact on ways they experienced &amp; responded to the abuse, questioned sense of self and took responsibility for relationship not working - self -blame. Sense of self linked with isolation &amp; reinforced by abuser's negative comments. Abuse &amp; abusers messages shaped how women saw themselves &amp; felt about themselves. -Recommendation: Development of tertiary, secondary &amp; preventative services that are safe &amp; relevant for lesbians. Encourage organisations to be more explicit about the philosophical basis that underpins their work. Within services, there is a need to question heteronormative assumptions that pervade their service delivery. Practitioner sin health &amp; community services have access to training &amp; supervision that increases their understanding of how lesbians can be violent in different ways, awareness of issues in lesbians lives that impact on the way they experience DVA. Some</td>
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<td>Merlis &amp; Linville 2006 US</td>
<td>Qualitative SS Interviews</td>
<td>15 professionals working in the DV sector (9 were lesbian)</td>
<td>- Discussing 'Lessening the load' on the les community - connected with protecting the les romantic ideal (made up of 3 categories notion women are non-violent; community safety; close-knit connections), this was seen as a form of resistance &amp; 'disunity': differences within the community on what constitutes DV. - Conditions influencing community response: institutional barriers; resources; issue ownership (debates about who is responsible for DV); language; community structure; abuse dynamics. - Consequences of Lessening the load, isolation, referring to limited choices &amp; limited access to services. - SPs noted community only acknowledge physical abuse, minimising other forms of abuse such as emotional, sexual &amp; financial - Power &amp; control - SPs discussed the fluctuation of power in relationships &amp; how this can become normalised for the victim. Eventually this dynamic inhibits a survivor’s response as their self-esteem is worn down by the abuser. - Relationship dynamics acted to either facilitate or constrain the strategies used by the community to handle, manage, and carry out the phenomenon of 'carrying the load' - Community response is to minimise the DV, e.g. relabelling DV as something else, mutual abuse, cat fights, self-defense - Disclosure of abuse connected with out- status, safety issues, internalised feelings of guilt.</td>
<td>Exploring lesbian community's response to DV by drawing on mental health professional’s perspectives who work with les experiencing DV in relationships Community response Fluctuating power Self-esteem Disclosure, help-seeking</td>
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<td>- Strategies for lessening the load in the Keeping DV in the Dark- Community: denial; silence; minimisation; delegating responsibility to a small group; prioritising. - Bringing DV to light - identification; dismantling beliefs; outreach; holding others accountable; collaboration; bridging experiences; self-care. - Family, friends, social networks, and non-mental health sectors of the lesbian community offer minimal support &amp; participate in the abuse through passive observance, minimising &amp; rationalising the abusive behaviour of perpetrators (Lobel, 1986; Lundy, 1994; Allen &amp; Leventhal, 1999 cited in Merlis &amp; Linville, 2006). - Barriers to help-seeking include institutional sexism and homophobia (Pharr, 1988) - Levels of awareness that DV occurs in les relationships varied depending on whether an individual or group was a member of the les community. - Awareness lower for non-members of community. Low level support from the community. Limited services for les women. SPs highlighted the discomfort of the shelter environments for les survivors - shelters are not culturally sensitive to les, violent partner may access shelter. contexts of homophobia &amp; heterosexism make shelters and unsafe place for les women. - Community small size adds to the challenge of providing confidential, safe &amp; comfortable access to support &amp; services for survivors &amp; perpetrators. - SPs identified their own discomfort with working with les clients &amp; their professional limitations. SPs cited homophobia as prevalent in the shelters &amp; restricting their ability to reach out to les women. SPs internalised homophobia compounds silence around DV. Community attempts to enhance the image of the les</td>
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community rather than air dirty laundry. Perpetrators benefit from silence. Validation important for lesbian women to be heard - name the violence. Highlighted need for a paradigm shift in DV field.
- Community strategies of denial, silence & minimisation are consistent with strategies researchers have documented to be the primary response of the les community since DV was first addressed (Lobel, 1986; Walber, 1988; Renzetti, 1992; Russo, 1992; Peterman & Dixon, 2003 cited in Merlis & Linville, 2006). Community's attempts to protect & maintain an idealised vision of non-violent female relationships results in continued avoidance rather than acknowledging a female's capacity for violence (Irwine, 1994 cited in Merlis & Linville, 2006). Upholding a 'lesbian utopia' are part of a process of promoting the illusion of what les relationships can be instead of recognising the reality in communities (Russo, 1992, Allen & Leventhal, 1999 cited in Merlis & Linville, 2006). Must understand the socio-political-cultural forces, including oppression, sexism & homophobia, dynamic of power & control that enable DV to occur and be sustained in the les community, can help us understand why the community's response has been stagnant since the issue was first addressed.

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<td>Patzel US 2006</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Broad open-ended interviews 10 heterosexual 20 lesbians women self-reported an abusive</td>
<td>-Factors that contribute to women staying in their abusive relationships are personal &amp; situational, in addition to cultural factors such as homophobia &amp; lesbian ideals. -Similarities to overcome/ leave an abusive relationship: feelings for the abuser; previous abuse histories; relationship dynamics, blaming themselves for abuse;</td>
<td>Factors related to remaining in &amp; leaving an abusive relationship</td>
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|         | relationship & had successfully terminated relationship 6 months prior to study | difficulty labelling the abuse; lack of support from family / friends.  
- Differences: societal & contextual factors more prominent in les decision to stay e.g. context of homophobia & heterosexist service responses & lesbian utopia myth. emotional & financial dependency, reluctance to contribute to negative views about lesbians  
- Both hetero & les women blamed themselves for the abuse.  
- Homophobia that is internalised may contribute to the belief that abuse may be deserved (Letellier, 1994 cited in Patzel, 2006)  
- Societal factors - difficulty finding support within the les community connected with a reluctance to admit violence occurs & the desire to avoid further stigmatisation of the community. Non-reporting to not perpetuate negative image about lesbians  
- Reluctance to seek support from shelters - not wanting to contribute to a homophobic view  
- Non-recognition due to ideals about les relationships, verbal experiences - not seeing women as having the capacity to be violent  
- A response to the problem of internalised homophobia has been to perpetuate belief that les relationships are violence free (Benowitz, 1986 cited in Patzel, 2006). A consequence of this is that abuse can be denial that abuse is happening - this contributes to difficulty with leaving the relationship as no support from les community. Patzel highlights merger, fusion in les relationships as making it more difficult to leave relationship. women struggled with the notion of remaining friends with abusive ex-partners - connected with feminist ideals of les relationships. Becker (1998: 212) "bond of lesbianism" cited in |
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<td>Patzel, 2006</td>
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<td>marginalised group in a heterosexist society - may be more difficult to leave relationships, smaller circle of friends etc... Didn't leave the relationship as they were not labelling experience as abuse, feelings of love, fear of being alone, &amp; self-blaming for abuse planning for safety wide variation in length of time for having been in the abusive relationship ranged from 6 months to 22 years. Variation of time may have effected participants memory &amp; perspective of the experience.</td>
<td>Correlates of lesbian IPA &amp; help-seeking</td>
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<td>Renzetti 1992 US</td>
<td>Mixed method</td>
<td>100 questionnaires 40 interviews</td>
<td>- Identified 7 factors associated with lesbian IPA: Power imbalance, dependency, jealousy, intergenerational transmission of violence, substance abuse, internalised homophobia, personality disorders (based on hetero experience) -When comparing hetero and lesbian IPV, study found lesbian IPV incidents have higher frequencies of verbal, emotional, psychological abuse than physical. -The most common form of verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse is verbal threats, such as being demeaned in front of friends, family or strangers - Lesbian batters, like all batterers, have the distinct ability to tailor their abuse to their intimate partners vulnerabilities - Social services are not always welcoming; lesbian victims of abuse report not feeling comfortable seeking DV services that are geared toward heterosexual women. -Barriers to help-seeking, discrimination, stigma, disbelief, sexuality disclosure issues, even potential for further exposure to violence. - Lack of inclusiveness within agencies as a primary reason for not seeking support.</td>
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| Renzetti 1996  | NO ACCESS to ARTICLE             | 566 IPV agency staff             | - Social myths about SS IPA impact a lesbian’s ability to access services  
- Argues intimate violence as well as the individual & institutionalised responses to that violence, is gender-based.  
- Research shows violent behaviour in women is quantitatively & qualitatively different from violent behaviour in men, thus documenting gender differences.  
- Many SPS were able to avoid the provision of services to lesbians by neglecting to directly address lesbian abuse through policy, literature & outreach. E.g. More than half the sample reported they had received training on same sex IPV - Revealed the existence of bias within agencies | Review of the existing empirical SSIPA literature                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Renzetti 1997  |                                   |                                  | - Internalised homophobia may contribute to the view that the abuse is deserved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Renzetti 1989  | Mixed methods Nationwide self-selected sample | 100 battered lesbians 40 interviews | - Psychological abuse more frequent than physical  
- 35 respondents lived with children, one-third of cases children were abused  
- Abuse of pets  
- Sought support primarily from friends followed by counsellor  
- Perception formal support unavailable to lesbians -- police as unhelpful  
- Police response as heterosexist  
- Studies of heterosexual domestic abuse, indicate that responses of third parties from whom victims seek help play an important part in either reinforcing an abusive relationship or helping victims to free themselves from the abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1984; see also Bowker, 1986; Ellis, 1988; Loseke & Cahill, 1984). | Incidence & forms of abuse Help-seeking, the response of SPS, impact of response on victims                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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|              |                 |                      | -encountered prejudice at DV shelters, reluctance to label experience as battering  
- perceive the responses of official or formal help providers, such as the police or shelter staffs, as homophobic and sexist.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ristock 1991 Canada | Qualitative     | 8 FGs                | - Research revised tradition gender-based theories of IPV to include the effects of patriarchy on lesbian relationships. E.g. since lesbian are women, women lack the cultural power of men, their oppression as both women and belonging to a sexual minority may ultimately be manifested as violence against one another.                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ristock 2001 Canada | Qualitative     | 70 Feminist counsellors who respond to abuse in lesbian relationships | - FG revealed how counsellors employ heteronormative discourses & feminist categories & constructs to think about abuse, & how this impedes their understanding & their effective response to SSIPA. Ristock found a homogenising "trauma talk" discourse that limited an understanding of the contexts and dynamics of lesbian abuse and allowed SPs to stay within dominant feminist concepts. SPs focused on similar effects of DVA on straight & lesbian women rather than focus on differences & complexities.  
- SPs perspective: Dominant Feminist understandings limit the possibility to explore certain distinctions in power dynamics that may be important in FSS relationships e.g. equal physical size, shared gender status that make fighting back more feasible than in heterosexual relationship  
- SPS acknowledged difficulty in defining abuse when examining different dynamics encountered. Tendency | SP perspective: Examine experiences & how feminist DV theory frames & shapes their response to SSDVA                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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<td>to go back to known framework (feminist) rather than make room for different experiences</td>
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<td>Context that SPS are operating within: real contexts of needing funding to keep shelters operating and the fear that the scale of male violence against women will be underestimated if we start acknowledging FSSDVA. SPS reliance on &quot;necessary speech&quot; to reassert dominant understandings that provide strong, exploratory explanatory power for the extent of male violence over women. Both &quot;necessary speech&quot; and &quot;trauma talk&quot; (Maracek, 1999) have the unintended effect of constructing &amp; affirming heteronormative frameworks to understand lesbian abuse.</td>
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<td>- From SP perspective: Focus on the violence &amp; stay with universalist feminist assumptions about what motivates the perpetrator, we erase &amp; ignore dissonance between heterosexual DV theory &amp; lesbians' experience of DV</td>
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<td>Ristock 2002</td>
<td>Qualitative interview FGs</td>
<td>80 interviews with self-defined lesbians six focus groups with a total of 45 feminist service providers who have been working to</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>- Unique element to heterosexual abuse - lesbian batterers use their partners' sexuality as an element of control</td>
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<td>Ristock 2003</td>
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<td>- Current feminist DV theories cannot adequately explain lesbian IPV</td>
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<td>- Barrier to help seeking: policies &amp; legislation are grounded in feminist theories of the dynamic of IPV</td>
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<td>- experience of combination of emotion/physical abuse most cited</td>
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<td>- emotional abuse (isolation, threats to kill, threats to pets, homophobic threats, threats to commit suicide, harassing phone calls), verbal abuse (yelling, name calling, insults, racist attacks), stalking, throwing objects, destroying property, driving recklessly to frighten, financial abuse (creating debt, stealing money, running</td>
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| Simpson & Helfrich 2005 US | Qualitative interviews | 6 service providers. 2 x LGBT agency. 4 x DV agency. 4-15 years' experience                                                                                                                                   | - Systematic barriers resulting from heterosexism of society & its cultural systems (laws & policies of criminal/justice system, social & cultural attitude, & theories regarding DV violence & dynamics.  
- Institutional barriers resulting from policies, training resources & IPV agencies services (ambiguous & inconsistent policy, assigning les clients to specific staff, & using heterosexist language.  
- Individual barriers resulting from attitudes, concerns & actions of individuals (attitudes/actions of les survivors, heterosexual female clients, staff members & police/court officers)  
- Participants identified gendered theory as limiting the recognition of SSDVA e.g. theories of dependency & aggression  
- The use of gender specific pronouns can contribute to a lesbian feeling alienation and may lead her to determine that the services provided are not relevant to her relationship.  
- Individual barriers to HS include attitudes, concerns, & actions of lesbian survivors; heterosexual female clients; agency staff members; & police & court officers. Lesbian survivors: internalised heterosexism, perception of discrimination & revealing SO.  
- Further difficulty with HS, you must give the staff your batterers name in case they turn up at the shelter - hard if you are not out. |

Study considered service barriers and needs from the perspectives of agency staff working in an urban domestic violence shelter & LGBT social service agency.  
Purpose, to illuminate the problems identified by les survivors in accessing services by discussing the barriers from the perspectives of staff member who serve them.  
Ample recommendations for service provision change.
| Authors                | Research design | Sample size                                                                 | Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Article focus                                                                 |}
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sorenson & Thomas, 2009 US | Experimental vignette design | Random digit dialled interviews in four languages 3,679 community-residing adults (most of the participants are migrants) Does not describe recruitment in this paper. A cross-sectional state-wide | - Based on their finding, authors are suggesting gay and lesbians may be able to anticipate support similar to that extended to heterosexual women who are victims of IPV. Devoid of any considerations of the fact that services are designed for heterosexual women, and that staff are not trained to deal with SSIPA.  
- Analysis of 14, 734 vignettes suggest IPV against gay male, lesbian and heterosexual women is more likely than heterosexual men to be considered illegal and that it should be illegal, police called and a barring order issued. Regardless of gender or sexual orientation, the type of abuse or whether a weapon was displayed are strong predictors of participants judgements about whether a behaviour is illegal.  
- Talking about victimisation as a social construction. Findings indicate some victims are worthier than others (remember Dianne Taylor paper) e.g. heterosexual men less likely to be perceived as worthy victims of IPV in same sex relationships.  
- Examined norms about IPV in same sex relationships. Examined psychological, sexual and physical abuse. Investigating the character of those deemed to be worthy victims of IPV. Who constitutes a worthy victim - unexplored in IPV sexual minorities. Primary RQ: Do people sued the same criteria when making judgements about male on female, female on male, lesbian and gay male? Really what this study is showing is the dominant discourse about DVA |
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<td>sample Hispanic, Blacks, non-Hispanic whites, Korean Americans, Vietnamese Americans, other Asian Americans</td>
<td>victims. Found little evidence to support the hypothesis that IPV in gay and lesbian is evaluated differently than in hetero relationships. - (Taylor &amp; Sorenson, 2005) cited in (Sorenson &amp; Thomas, 2009) study found the likelihood that both partner were assigned fault for the IPV and responsibility for changing their situation was higher if the victims were gay men or lesbians (vs. heterosexual women).</td>
<td>evidence for this is that heterosexual males are afforded less support than their gender and sexual minority counterparts.</td>
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| Turell 1999 US | 499 Surveys male 265 (53%) female 7 (1) M-F Trans* | 39% lesbian 11% gay women 43% gay men 5% bisexual 2% heterosexual | - 83% experienced emotional abuse  
- 50% selected one item for physical abuse  
- 12 % sexual violence  
- didn’t report as didn’t recognise as abuse during relationships  
- fear, shame, depression & isolation reason for not seeking help  
- 41% read self-help books  
- 35% perceived counselling services as most needed support option  
- participants believed they were responsible, & that an increase in self-esteem would end the abuse  
-Over two-thirds perceived seeking help from someone of the same gender & sexual orientation (75% of females preferred help from another woman)  
- 68% of lesbians preferred support from same sexual orientation (this finding was consistent for gay (66%) & bisexual (67%) participants)  
- 54% of sample sought services with favourable experiences  
- police & shelter interventions were problem areas (consistent with Hammond, 1988; Renzetti, 1996)  
- friends & family primary sources of support | Examining emotional, physical, and sexual violence |
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| Turell & Herrmann 2008 US | FGs 9 Interviews 2 | 11 self-identified Lesbian (9) Bisexual (1) Gay (1) women who experienced IPA by women, men or both | - unmet need within the LGBT community  
- rarely used services in the general community  
- isolation a common tool to keep women from disclosing abuse  
- negative reactions: no safe people to tell, remaining in relationship, returning to relationships, non-recognition of abuse until pointed out by someone else  
- not helpful, encouraged women to leave but offered no specific guidance or assistance to leave  
- LGBT support, perceived abuse would be seen as mutual, pressure to maintain perfect image (lesbian utopia), disloyal to partner if disclosed abuse, shame & embarrassment because abused by a woman, fearing friends would side with partner  
- General services, feared violence would not be taken seriously, fear of having to educate provider on sexual identity, lack of services for non-hetero women, heterosexual assumption  
- only access general services if they were LGBT friendly and with support from the LGBT community, unless no other option  
- opted for LGBT support during initial experience & after the crisis was over | Understand the support and service needs of lesbian & bisexual women in response to DVA. Develop a conceptual framework to reconcile, for les & Bi women, the conflict between the need to access services, the potential for homophobia/heterosexism, need for supportive peers, & overall lack of support with LGBT community. Differences in need from LGBT community & mainstream services. Help-seeking LG women |
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<td>- biggest fear was experiencing a homophobic response (similar to Balsam, 2001) &lt;br&gt; - suggested SPs need to be trained in LGBT issues (similar to McLaughlin &amp; Rozee, 2001) &lt;br&gt; - Non-recognition of abuse until it was pointed out by another person. &lt;br&gt; - LGBT peer support: mixed reaction, worried abuse be perceived as mutual, pressure to maintain perfect image of relationship (lesbian utopia myth). Felt they were being disloyal, shame if they disclosed abuse, embarrassment at abuse by another woman, fearing friends would side with the perpetrator. would only access mainstream services if there was no other option available. Participants - need for Peer Support within LGBT community &lt;br&gt; - Army Chaplain, Radio show host. Mixed reactions from friends in response to abuse disclosure. Negative reactions &amp; having no safe place to stay led to staying in the relationship longer. Encouraged to leave relationship but offered not guidance or assistance to do so. Wanted first support contact to be with a woman, preferably les or Bi. Having to educate a SP about their experience was seen as overwhelming in time of crisis. Biggest concerns anonymity/confidentiality in LGBT community &amp; avoidance of homophobia/heterosexism in mainstream services. Concerned about further stigma for LGBT community. Feared would not be taken seriously by SP &amp; would have to educate them about experience. &lt;br&gt; - Limitation of small sample size. Sample was primarily white. Only conducted 2 interviews, from the sample of 11 women in total, 6 women indicated they were abused by another woman &lt;br&gt; - Experiences of seeking support revealed tiers of unmet needs within the LGBT community. Participants</td>
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<td>Walters, 2011 Canada</td>
<td>Qualitative in-depth interviews</td>
<td>Sample size = 4. Walters doesn't discuss how she recruited her sample</td>
<td>- Exposed several recurring themes: history of violence, gendered belief of violence, the reality of lesbian IPV, help-seeking &amp; their silence surrounding the abuse in the lesbian community, the role of homophobia &amp; heterosexism in lesbian IPV. Found evidence for abuse in lesbian relationships as a myth (from the community response). Myths that violence doesn’t occur in the absence of men and lesbian relationships are egalitarian support, perpetuates and further enables lesbian IPV to flourish unrestrained. Participants felt ashamed of the abuse and self-blamed for what was happening or that abuse is just normal. - Found evidence of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Forms of mental abuse include disrupting eating or sleeping patterns &amp; abuse of others in the household such as children or pets (Poorman, 2001) cited in (Walter, 2011). Outing has real life consequences, ranging from losing support of family &amp; friends, losing custody of children or being fired from a job (Poorman, 2001) cited in (Walters, 2011). 4 women interviewed witnessed verbal/physical violence in their family of origin, 2 experienced childhood physical abuse, 2 experienced childhood sexual abuse by brothers.</td>
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<td>Sexual abuse: partner knowledge of a childhood sexual abuse history became justification for perpetrating emotional, physical, and sexual violence. Use knowledge about previous childhood sexual abuse to sexually and emotionally abuse.</td>
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<td>- Shame made it impossible to recognise the abuse as not your fault. Shame increased isolation, distancing from friends &amp; family but also from seeking a way out of the abusive relationship.</td>
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<td>- The lack of recognition, communication and accountability within the dyad makes it difficult to talk about IPV with family &amp; friends.</td>
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<td>- Speaks of long-lasting effects of childhood abuse, this previous experience combined with socially supported belief that only males are batterers, impeded recognition of their own battering as adult women, causing a delay in leaving the abusive relationship with a woman</td>
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<td>- Evidence of a relationship that was primarily emotionally abusive and controlling but one that became physically abusive when the participant attempted to leave the relationship</td>
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|         |                 |             | - Speaks of the lack of support from family, friends & the lesbian community has a negative impact on survivors - creates further barriers for the survivor especially in the context of lack of support from traditional DV agencies, law enforcement, and judicial systems - leaves women isolated, more difficult to escape the abuse. Lesbian community, friends & family blaming victim for not stopping the relationship. Whether perceived or actual, homophobia and or heterosexism are immense barriers for lesbians experiencing IPV. e.g. marginalises those not heterosexual, keeps abuse hidden, isolation from family & friends, and hinder efforts to leave abusive
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research design</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Article focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Wolf et al 2003 | Qualitative FGs | 5 FGs 41 participants Selected from DV agencies providing services to Native American, lesbian & refugee women | -Identified 3 themes associated with barriers to police support:  
  1. Victims situational & personal factors  
     - perception abuse must be physical to be believed  
     - rape & physical injuries to private parts of the body requires internal examination (women reluctant to go through with this)  
     - cultural attitudes about marriage & men & women’s rights influence reporting  
  2. Victims fears & past negative experiences with the police  
     - batterer not arrested  
     - mistaken identification of victim as batterer (failure to identify primary aggressor)  
     - victim not listened to, abuse trivialised  
     - batterer manipulation, bonding with police officer  
     - homophobic stereotyping | Barriers to seeking help from the police for IPA |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
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<th>Findings</th>
<th>Article focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- lesbian batterers threats to use the police homophobia against victim</td>
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<td>- les batterers playing on their fear the police homophobia &amp; butch/femme stereotyping could result in misidentification of the victim as batterer and wrongful arrest</td>
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<td>- threat of calling the police became a tool of control for the batterer as victims feared exposure of sexuality &amp; police bias leading to their arrest</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3 Victims fears of repercussions</td>
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</table>
Lynne Cahill  
School of Social Work and Social Policy,  
Trinity College, Dublin.  
27th October 2015.

**Invitation: Service Providers’ Forum on the subject of Female Same Sex Domestic Violence**

Dear …,

I am a PhD student in the School of Social Work & Social Policy of Trinity College Dublin. My research aims to generate awareness and understanding of domestic violence (DV) from the perspective of women who have experienced an abusive relationship from a female partner. To achieve this aim, I’m looking to talk to non-heterosexual women, over 18, who are not currently involved in an abusive relationship but have been at some stage in the past.

This is an area we know very little about in an Irish context. My aim would be to use the findings generated by the study to develop a framework that will assist services in their response to women experiencing DV from a female partner. In order to ensure that the research is conducted in a sensitive and appropriate manner, I wish to invite you to a Service Providers’ Forum where I will present the research and seek expert advice and feedback from those present on the day.

The structure of the forum is as follows:

- A presentation detailing what is known about female same sex DV
- The aims and objectives of the current research project
- Service Provider feedback on research questions
This research is being supervised by Dr Stephanie Holt, School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD. If you have any immediate questions please feel free to contact me at 086 1255500 or cahilly@tcd.ie. If you wish, you can also contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Stephanie Holt, at 01-8963908 or sholt@tcd.ie.

I hope you share my enthusiasm on the importance of the research topic and shall be most grateful for your co-operation.

Yours Sincerely

Lynne Cahill

Date: Wednesday November 18th
Time: 11am – 1pm
Venue: The Children’s Research Centre 30 Anglesea Street, (opposite the Blooms Hotel), Dublin 2
Refreshments will be served after the forum.

RSVP: Please specify if you would be available to attend the Forum by Friday November 6th
Contact details: Lynne
086 1255500 or cahilly@tcd.ie
Appendix 4 Research promotional poster

SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
END THE SILENCE

- Are you female and over 18?
- Have you experienced domestic violence from a female partner?
- Do you want to take part in a research project?

This research is part of a PhD degree based at the School of Social Work & Social Policy, Trinity College, Dublin.
If you would like to find out more information about the study please contact:
 Lynne Cahill | 086 125 55 00 | Cahill@tcd.ie

safeireland

For details of Intimate Partner Support Services in Ireland go to www.safeireland.ie.
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin. School of Social Work & Social Policy, 3 College Green, Dublin 2.
Appendix 5 Participant demographic survey data

FSSDVA – PARTICIPANT DEMO GRAPHIC DETAILS

1. Age: ____________________

2. County living: __________________

3. Area currently living (please circle one):
   - Rural/country
   - Village
   - Town
   - Suburb of a City
   - City

4. Gender identity: ____________________

5. Sexual orientation (preferred term): ____________________

6. Nationality: ____________________

7. Do you have children? (please circle one)
   - Yes
   - No

8. Are you the biological parent? (please circle one)
   - Yes
   - No

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cahillly@tcd.ie
www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie
9. Are they living with you? (please circle one)

Yes  No

10. Do you have a disability?

_______ Physical disability
_______ Mental health
_______ Learning disability

11. What is your ethnic or cultural background? Please tick one.

_______ White (Irish)
_______ White (Irish Traveller)
_______ White (Non-Irish; any other White background)
_______ Black or Black Irish (African; any other Black background)
_______ Asian or Asian Irish (Chinese; any other Asian background)
_______ Other, including mixed background: Please write in ______________

12. What best applies to your living situation? Please tick one.

_______ I live alone
_______ I live with my parent(s) or guardian(s)
_______ I live with family members other than my parents/guardians
_______ I live with my same sex partner, civil partner, or spouse with no child(ren)
_______ I live with my same sex partner, civil partner, or spouse with child(ren)
_______ I live with my opposite sex partner/spouse with no child(ren)
_______ I live with my opposite sex partner/spouse with child(ren)
_______ I live with friends or housemates
_______ I live in support accommodation/residential care
_______ Other: Please tell us ______________________

13. How would you describe your current employment status? Please tick one.

_______ Working for payment or profit
_______ CE Scheme; Job Bridge; Back to Work; Internship
_______ Looking for first regular job
14. Relationship status:

- Single and not dating
- Single and dating
  - In a monogamous relationship
    - If yes, gender of person: __________________________
  - In a non-monogamous (open) relationship
    - If yes, gender of person(s): ______________________
- Other: ______________________

15. Relationship status:

- Single and not dating
- Single and dating
  - In a monogamous relationship
    - If yes, gender of person: __________________________
  - In a non-monogamous (open) relationship
    - If yes, gender of person(s): ______________________
- Other: ______________________

16. Is this your first same sex relationship? (please circle one)

- Yes
- No

17. How old were you when you had your first same sex relationship?

- __________

18. How old were you when you first told someone (or ‘came out’) about your sexual identity?

- __________
19. Are you ‘out’ to any of the following people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None/No</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>All/Yes</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Father</td>
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<td>Other relative(s)</td>
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<td>Work colleague(s)</td>
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<td>University mate(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>People within your local community (neighbours)</td>
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</table>

20. Have you ever received a formal mental health diagnosis? If so, please write in:
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

---

*For researcher’s use only*

Interview Code

---

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www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie
Appendix 6 Illustration of the study Facebook promotional page
Appendix 7 History of FB public posts
Appendix 8 Service provider’s blog to promote the study

April 29, 2016

Same Sex Domestic Violence

Ending The Silence

On Friday 30th June 2014 the first, and hopefully inaugural, conference in Ireland on domestic violence & abuse for Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual and Transgender people and community was held in Dundalk, Co. Louth.

Domestic Abuse in LGBT Relationships Conference
Appendix 9 Illustration of Eile magazine promotional article
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: FSSIPA

1. Personal Experience of Abuse

(i) Coming out / First Abusive Relationship

- How old where you when you first came out? Explore
- Was this your first same sex relationship? If yes, what age? How long?
- If not first same sex relationship, was it first experience of abusive relationship?
- Living arrangements

(ii) When the Abuse started

- How long into relationship before abuse began?
- Can you say something on how the relationship became abusive?

(iii) Frequency of Abuse

- Could you give me an idea of how often the abuse was happening?

2. Types of Abuse Experienced

- Can you say something on the type of abuse you experienced?
- Was there anything specific that would trigger an abusive episode? (time of the month)
- Ask specifically about emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse
(iii) Sexual Abuse

- Did your partner ever make you feel uncomfortable or pressured in terms of your sexual relationship?
- Any inequalities in this aspect of the relationship? (e.g. feeling less control)
  (i.e. forced sexually, sex for peace sake, threats to sexually assault, raped, had safe words/boundaries ignored, touched in a way that caused distress)

(iv) Financial Abuse & IMPACT

- Did you have your spending controlled?
- Was there an equal contribution to household bills?

3. Relationship Dynamics

- Would you describe the relationship as an equal relationship? (decision making, division of labour, individual resources available between the couple, education, employment)
  - If yes, in what way?
  - If no, how was it an unequal?
  - Did you ever feel pressured into doing something that you didn't want to do?
  - Did you ever feel afraid of your partner during your time together?

4. Participant Reason, Response & Understanding of Abuse

(i) Participants perception of Reasons for Abuse

- What did you understand as the reason for the abuse?
- How did you feel about the abuse and your partner?

(ii) Participants understanding of Abusive Relationship
- Can you talk about what it felt like being in that relationship?
- How did you feel about yourself?
- What was your understanding of what was happening in the relationship?
- When the relationship ended, did your understanding change? If yes, can you say how

(iii) Participant response to the abuse
- What was your reaction to the abuse?
- If they respond with abuse – need to ask why (to get at motive to distinguish between intention to harm and control OR self-defence, & impact)

5. Leaving the Relationship
- During the relationship, did you think about leaving?
- If yes, can you say what was blocking you from walking away from the relationship?
- Can you talk about what happened that resulted in the decision to leave?
- Did anyone help you during that period? (own autonomy, Friends, family, services)
- Did anything happen after you left the relationship?
- Do you have any contact with abusive partner now?
- Length of relationship & how long ago it ended?

6. Experience of Seeking Support
- Did you look for support in response to the abuse?
- If yes, from whom, where?
- If no, could you say why?
- The response of friends, family, colleagues, etc
- The response of professionals (e.g., an Garda Síochana, counsellors, doctors, DV service providers, LGBT service providers)
- What would you like services to know, to help them respond to women who have been abused by a female partner?
- What would you have liked to happen in your situation?

7. Exploration of Impacts

- What would you say was the immediate impact of this experience?
- Do you feel the abuse has affected you? If yes, can you tell me how
- Has the experience of abuse changed you? If yes, can you tell me how
- Did you have any expectations of the nature of relationships with women prior to experiencing DVA?
- Have your experiences changed your expectations of future relationships?

8. Exploration of Identity

- At the time of the relationship, would you say you were comfortable with your sexual identity? Was your partner?
- Do you relate to the idea of butch/femme roles and identities? Were these identities relevant to your relationship? If yes, how were these roles negotiated within the relationship (dynamics: chosen or forced)?
- How open were you about your sexual identity in the abusive relationship? Was this more or less than your partner? Did this cause any tension?
- Is the LGBT community a relevant part of your life?
- Did you feel able to talk about your experiences to people both within the LGBT community and outside of it?
- Has it been difficult to admit to yourself and to others that you were in an abusive relationship with a woman? If yes, could you say why?
9. Background of Previous Partner

- How did the abusive partner identify? SO or GI?
- Was she out to family, friends, colleagues etc?
- Are you aware of any experiences which your former partner has been either a victim or perpetrator of abuse?
- Would you say your partner had a traditional gender attitude?
- How did she think about women?

10. Life After Abuse – Long Term Impacts

- Need to establish how much time has lapsed since you left the abusive relationship?
- Can you talk about life after the abusive relationship?
- Any impact on physical health?
- Any impact on mental health?
- Looking back, what would you say was the biggest impact on your life?
- Would you say you have recovered from the experience? If yes, how?
- Would you say you had to rebuild your life? If yes, how?
- Would you say you had to re-build your identity? If yes, how?

11. Demographics & Debrief

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Complete demographic detail form
- Provision of aftercare support material
- Check in; how are you feeling right now?
- What happens if we meet again?
- Arrange a time the following day to call and check in with them
Appendix 11 Aftercare support services

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES INFORMATION

PLEASE REMEMBER, IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS AND NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO:

- Contact Samaritans on 1850 609090
- Contact your local doctor, listed under ‘General Practitioners’ in the Golden Pages.
- Go to, or contact, the Accident and Emergency Department of your nearest hospital.
- Below is a list of organisations, if you need someone to talk to about any of the issues raised in the interview. Please note that some of the helplines and organisations have limited operating hours.

HELPLINES AVAILABLE:

Cork Lesbian Line 021 431 8318  
www.dublinlesbianline.ie/corkhtml

Dublin Lesbian Line 01 8729911  
www.dublinlesbianline.ie

Dundalk Outcomers 042 9353035  
http://www.outcomers.org/

Helpline

Gay Switchboard Ireland 01 8721055  
www.gayswitchboard.ie

Limerick LGBT Helpline 061 310101  
www.rainbowsupportservices.org/

OutWest Helpline 094 9372479  
www.outwestireland.ie
TENI Helpline 085 1477166 http://www.teni.ie/

The LGBT Helpline 1890 929 539 www.lgbt.ie

Women’s Aid 1800 341 900 www.womensaid.ie

Freephone Helpline

COUNSELLING, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & LGBT SERVICE SUPPORT:

- Up-to-date information and contact details for LGBT helplines and services nationally are available at www.lgbt.ie
- Contact www.safeireland.ie for details of domestic violence support services in Ireland
- Contact www.erichkellercounseling.com to talk to an experienced, fully accredited psychotherapist and counsellor

NATIONWIDE ORGANISATIONS:

Your local HSE Health Office will be able to provide more information about support services available in your area. Call 1850 24 1850 or go to the HSE website for contact details: www.hse.ie

Support in Dublin & East

Outhouse Community (01) 8734932 www.outhouse.ie
Resource Centre
Transgender Equality (01) 8733575 www.teni.ie
Network Ireland (TENI)

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www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie
Support in Cork & Waterford

Cork LGBT Helpline 021 4300430
Linc 021 4808600 [www.linc.ie]
sOUTH 086 2147633

Support in the Mid-West

GOSHH 061-314354 [www.goshh.ie]
(Gender Orientation Sexual Health)

Support in the North East

Dundalk Outcomers 042 9353035 [www.outcomers.org]

Support in the West & North West

OutWest 087 9725586 [www.outwestireland.ie]

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) member Rape Crisis Centres

Crisis & Counselling Centre: 1800 727 737
Donegal Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre: 1800 448 844
Galway Rape Crisis Centre: 1800 355 355
Kerry Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre: 1800 633 333
Kilkenny Rape Crisis & Counselling Centre: 1800 478 478
Mayo Rape Crisis Centre: 1800 234 900
Rape Crisis Midwest: 1800 311 511
Rape Crisis North East: 1800 212 122

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Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan:
1800 750 780

Tipperary Rape Crisis & Counselling Centre:
1800 340 340

Regional Sexual Abuse & Rape Crisis Centre Tullamore:
1800 323 232

Waterford Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre:
1800 296 296

Wexford Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Service:
1800 330 033

Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre Northern Ireland:
04890 32900
Appendix 12 Example of Phase 2: Three processes of exploratory commenting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>P: She didn’t no, she got me, she got me up and got me into her car and eh, and drove me to the hospital [ok [whisper]] and that was the first time that the hospital asked me you know what happened? So, then I just said, “Look, I fell you know” I: you still didn’t say what was going on</td>
<td>Seeking support, friends, positive, practical support, driving to the hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: I still didn’t say it and then a nurse came into me and asked my friends to wait outside and eh, and the nurse said eh, “Tell us his name, we can help you, you know, you don’t have to deal with this”. And then I was like, “Do I say it’s a woman?” and I thought, “If I say it’s a woman she’s going to judge me”, she’s going to think you know, “Ah it’s only a woman like, she should be able to fight back with a woman”. So, all this was running through my head and I just said, she said after, she asked me, “Do you want the Guards?” and I said I didn’t want the Guards [pause]</td>
<td>Didn’t disclose to medical staff Barriers to seeking support, “Tell us his name”, Lack of awareness of SSIPA, Abuser assumed to be male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: Why did you say at that point that you didn’t want the Guards?</td>
<td>Lack of awareness of SSIPA. Barriers to seeking support, perception of a judgemental response, homophobic response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Because I didn’t want it coming out that I was getting beaten up by a woman. I didn’t want my family to find out you know. I didn’t know</td>
<td>Perception of an unsympathetic response, “should be able to fight back” her experience does not fit the public story of DV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: If it had of been a man doing that would you have got the Guards?</td>
<td>Influence of a gendered understanding of violence, women as non-violent, heterosexual assumption around IPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: I don’t know you see. Like thinking back like, now, if it happened now, I would be like, “Yeah, get the Guards right now get them” but ba-back, I was just so young, so young and I didn’t really understand what would happen, you know at that time, I didn’t know what would happen if the Guards came. I didn’t know what they would ask me, I didn’t know what would happen to me, I didn’t know what would happen to her and eh, and I was just afraid [higher tone of voice], you know I was afraid of her, I was afraid, then I was afraid she was going to kill herself and I didn’t want that on my conscience either</td>
<td>Barrier to seeking support, Gardai, being young &amp; naïve, not understanding what would happen to her or *AP. Barrier to seeking support, Gardai, afraid of partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*AP – Abusive partner  *POL Practices of love

- **Descriptive** comments focused on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk (normal text)
- **Linguistic** comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant (italic)

Mental anguish, partner threatening suicide
Appendix 13 Example of Phase 3: Developing emerging themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking support, friends, positive, practical support, driving to the hospital</td>
<td>P: She didn’t no, she got me, she got me up and got me into her car and eh, and drove me to the hospital [ok [whisper]] and that was the first time that the hospital asked me you know what happened? So, then I just said, “Look, I fell you know”</td>
<td>Seeking support, friends, positive, practical support, driving to the hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-disclosure in healthcare setting</td>
<td>I: you still didn’t say what was going on</td>
<td>Didn’t disclose to medical staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support barriers, healthcare, lack of awareness of SSDVA, abuser assumed to be male, perception of a judgemental, homophobic, unsympathetic response</td>
<td>P: I still didn’t say it and then a nurse came into me and asked my friends to wait outside and eh, and the nurse said eh, “Tell us his name, we can help you, you know, you don’t have to deal with this”. And then I was like, “Do I say it’s a woman?” and I thought, “If I say it’s a woman she’s going to judge me”, she’s going to think you know, “Ah it’s only a woman like, she should be able to fight back with a woman”. So, all this was running through my head and I just said, she said after, she asked me, “Do you want the Guards?” and I said I didn’t want the Guards [pause]</td>
<td>Barriers to seeking support, “Tell us his name”, Lack of awareness of SSIPA, Abuser assumed to be male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of SSIPA, Barriers to seeking support, perception of a judgemental response, homophobic response</td>
<td>I: Why did you say at that point that you didn’t want the Guards?</td>
<td>Lack of awareness of SSIPA. Barriers to seeking support, perception of a judgemental response, homophobic response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help-seeking, influence of a gendered understanding of DV, unsympathetic response</td>
<td>P: Because I didn’t want it coming out that I was getting beaten up by a woman. I didn’t want my family to find out you know. I didn’t know</td>
<td>Perception of an unsympathetic response, “should be able to fight back” her experience does not fit the public story of DV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help-seeking, Influence of a gendered understanding of violence, women as non-violent, heterosexual assumption around DV</td>
<td>I: If it had of been a man doing that would you have got the Guards?</td>
<td>Influence of a gendered understanding of violence, women as non-violent, heterosexual assumption around IPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P: I don’t know you see. Like thinking back like, now, if it happened now, I would be like, “Yeah, get the Guards right now get them” but ba-back, I was just so young, so young and I didn’t really understand what would happen, you know at that time, I didn’t know what would happen if the</td>
<td>Barrier to seeking support, Gardai, being young &amp; naïve, not understanding what would happen to her or *AP. Barrier to seeking support, Gardai, afraid of partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barrier to seeking support, AP threat of suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier to seeking support, Gardai, didn't want family to find out POL, shaping help-seeking in how abuse is addressed, protecting partner from the police</td>
<td>Guards came. I didn’t know what they would ask me, I didn’t know what would happen to me, I didn’t know what would happen to her and eh, and I was just afraid [higher tone of voice], you know I was afraid of her, I was afraid, then I was afraid she was going to kill herself and I didn’t want that on my conscience either</td>
<td>Mental anguish, partner threatening suicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 14 Example of the process of clustering themes

**Extent & Nature of Abusive relationship**

**Demographic & relationship profile**

Coming out, positive overall
Negative response from family & friends, lost friends
26 years old meeting AP
2nd SS relationship abusive
Context meeting AP, on the rebound from long-terms relationship
Met AP through LGBT community group
Friends first – developed into relationship
Context of start of relationship, pregnant from one-night-stand, vulnerable place, needing support
Physical abuse, high level, not an odd slap/punch
Frequency of abuse, multiple times
Duration relationship, 4 years
Felt nervous during interview & difficulty with explaining/ articulating experience
Context, start of relationship P3 as vulnerable, unplanned pregnancy, just finished a long-term relationship
Co-parenting
Living together from 6 months
Renting house with AP
Context of start of relationship, moved quickly after discovering pregnancy, vulnerable time for P3, needing support
Latter stages of pregnancy, alcohol, mood changes, aggressive
Frequency of abuse, once, twice a month
No financial abuse
No sexual abuse present in relationship
Out status, AP & P3 fully out
LGBT community, not relevant part of life

**Emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse, name calling throughout pregnancy
Relationship issues 1 month before arrival of child, arguing more frequently
Emotional abuse impact, decided not to allow AP at the birth
Exploitation of a personal experience, birth
Relationship deteriorated after birth of child
name calling
undermining physical appearance
Tailoring abuse to vulnerabilities
exploiting P3s paranoia about her weight
paranoia about weight/ body image
strained relationship with mother
Accuse P3 of being jealous of relationship with mother
undermining physical appearance, degradation
constant name calling, pattern of controlling behaviour
Family & friends noticed bruising
Disrupting relationship with children,
isolating children from her, f
feeding time,
taking child to mothers overnight,
disrupting intimacy between mother & child
Physical abuse

First physical assault, 2 days after giving birth
Locked out of the house
Damage to property, clothes
Exclusion of AP from birth, start of physical violence
Physical abuse, 2 days prior to CP
PA, kicking, biting, whacking head against objects, throwing things at her
Endangering safety, left at the side of the road in the dark, 7-8 miles from home, no mobile
Endangering child, biting P3s hand while driving
Daughter in distress
numerous black eyes, bruises on her face
pushed against a wall

Severe physical abuse

punched in the chest 2 days after birth
2nd night of honeymoon, whacked head off porcelain tiles, head injuries, feared for her life
kicked in the vagina
Bleeding for a week, bruises around upper-thigh
hit with an object, bottle in the face
Attended A&E, required stiches, scars from incident
bitten on the lip, scars on her mouth
bit on the hand in front of daughter
bites to finger, lost nail

Identity abuse

Identity abuse, controlling what she wears

Relationship dynamics

AP as extrovert, P3 as introvert
AP in between butch & femme
AP identified as butch prior to relationship
Varied identity, AP butch start of relationship
Relationship dynamic, AP as butch
Unequal relationship, spending every weekend with AP family, never spending time with her family
Lack of boundaries AP family, key to home, enter home unannounced
Unequal relationship, unequal amount of time spent with AP family

Unequal relationship, APs rules, agreed to keep the peace
Unequal relationship, constant time spent with AP mother, negative impact on relationship
Relationship dynamics, P3 all household chores
Decision making, AP making all the decisions
P3 agreeing to keep the peace
Relationship dynamics, AP identified with butch femme, P3 did not
Influence of heterosexuality of relationship dynamic, male & female roles/identities
AP, only interested in femme women
Relationship roles informed by heterosexual gender roles
Abusive Partners (AP) Behaviour

Intimidation
abusive in public
violent when drinking alcohol, mood change
threats to disrupt life if relationship ends

Coercive control
negative comments about weight gain during pregnancy
negative comments about P3’s friends weight
monitoring mobile phone
claiming victimisation
instigating arguments before a college exam

Using isolation
P3 avoided social situations because of APs behaviour
rude, say inappropriate things & outspoken in public
AP discredited her in the LGBT community, isolation, blaming for relationship ending
Discrediting her to friends, blaming for relationship ending

Minimising, denying, blaming
minimising, claiming to not remember & to be drunk
minimising abuse, not taking concerns seriously, making light of the abuse
Blaming, for loss of temper
sought counselling support, counsellor blamed P3
blaming, used absence from birth as an excuse for physical abuse
using lack of medication as an excuse for violence
blaming her for infidelity, infidelity as punishment for text received from a female friend
blaming P3 for her abuse

Controlling behaviours
AP tactics to conceal abuse, story of infidelity to conceal abuse
AP jealous of mother child relationship

AP Previous Abuse History (PAH)
kicked & punched door man (subject to criminal charges against her for abusive behaviour)
attempted to stab family member with a knife
employment terminated twice for bullying in the workplace

Not sure?
Small stature AP
binge drinker
more confident than p3
little friends, older friends
suffered with depression, on medication for the duration of relationship
First long term relationship for AP
AP single since relationship ended
centre of attention, no space for P3 to develop/ grow
egotistical, leaving social event, not addressed appropriately, felt ignored, wasn’t engaged with appropriately
Not sure?
AP, didn’t have a good relationship with her father
AP mother, staying over for a month
AP, parent’s difficult relationship
AP calls parents’ home daily
Not sure?
AP, admitted to DVA & apologised
AP apology prompted by A FB poster advertising SSDVA
AP felt guilty about behaviour

Participant response to abusive behaviours

Context, motive, impact
Motive pushing away, self-defense, get away from AP, feared for her life
never retaliated with verbal or physical abuse, slam a door
push away,
felt like retaliating but didn’t,
coped by walking away, going for a drive, leaving the room, bang an object, close door

Practices of love (POL)

POL AP
suggesting couple counselling in aftermath of severe violent assault, context of marriage ending
apologising, crying when the doctors where not present, ensuring P3 would not report
the cause of injury, confusing P3
period when they are apart, apologising to get P3 to return to shared home
after SPA, buying gifts, taken out for dinner, promising holidays,
Promising to change behaviour, never be violent again, AP seek help
convincing partner to stay in relationship, mediation, couple counselling, change
behaviour, seek help, never be violent again
make her feel sorry for her, make her believe it was her fault

POL Participant
Protecting AP from others negative criticism about their behaviour
protecting AP from negativity, AP mother
protecting AP from negativity about abusive behaviours, friends
Non-reporting, protecting AP, having a criminal record, negative impact on her
employment opportunities
responsibility for AP
Support Guards, POL, didn’t want to get AP into trouble, protecting AP
Support Guards, after assault with bottle, POL, protecting AP from harm

Responsibility for AP & relationship
AP acknowledging P3 strength in not retaliating, compounds sense of responsibility for
AP?
responsibility for managing AP relationship with family
providing support & care for AP after violent episode
responsible for relationship with family, feminine attire to offset criticism of butch attire

Impact
Feels annoyed for protecting AP
Meaning making

Understanding of abusive relationship
role of alcohol & medication drugs
instant mood changes, no argument before assault, context of alcohol
unable to handle alcohol,
depression,
medication for depression
combination of alcohol & medication

Stressed at work
  Tough week in work
  Disagreement/ difference of opinion could lead to physical assault
  Hormonal
  refusing access to birth
  AP unhealthy relationship with parents, especially mother, relationship tension,
time spent with AP mother, interfering with family time
unable to control her temper
self-blame
felt Isolated experience
  AP projecting her negative self-perception onto P3, to demean P3 to her level
confusion, alternating positive & negative comments on appearance
block her succeeding in life

Understanding post relationship
feels she wouldn’t be alive had she remained in relationship,
severely depressed
would not have completed college
achieved current career
relationship as damaging to child
changed understanding of love, equal relationship, adult relationship, respectful
felt disappointed for allowing her & daughter to remain
understood/recognised experience as DV
self-blame

Non-recognition? Stigma DV & victim
Victim blaming, Outsider perspective DV, women as victim, allowing it to happen
negative perception of victim, stereotypical – couldn’t associate
Prior to AR, strong self-perception, good upbringing offset becoming a victim?

Hierarchies of abuse
Hierarchy DV experience based on male vs female perp, hetero vs SS
Gendered assumptions female aggression as not threatening/damaging, not taken
seriously, incapable of inflicting harm.
Different response based on gender of abuser

Post separation abuse
threatening P3s current partner & physically assaulted her friend
constant abusive texts
scrapped on her arm
Post separation Power & Control
Contesting CP as a form of control, maintaining control after 3 years, blocking P3 moving on
Control, life insurance, decision making in the event of a life-threatening incident
Demanding access to parent/teacher meetings
Threatening to out, school context
Cause embarrassment, outing
concealing abuse, sworn to secrecy
disrupting relationships with friends, coercing them to ally with her, isolating friends from her
via text, undermining her ability as a mother, undeserving of child, threatening to take the child
via FB, disrupting relationships with friends, undermining her ability as a mother, making false accusations, blaming P3 for break up, falsely claiming no visitation to child – gain a sympathetic response, causing embarrassed
unable to physically abuse, abuse via text & social media, constant negative texts, insulting her, undermining her ability as a mother, made to feel guilt over her child,
demanding increased visitation
emotional abuse via texts for over a year
Discrediting her as a mother, false accusations of bad parenting
demanding increased visitation, using child to negotiate terms of a divorce,
contesting divorce, causing additional financial expense
using harassment during visitation

Withholding financial support
AP, full ownership/control of shared mortgage property
P3 no interest in financial gain from shared property
AP makes no financial contribution to child
AP does not provide maintenance
AP wants increased visitation to child without paying any financial contribution to child’s upbringing

Using children
abusive texts undermining her ability as a mother, making false claims about visitation, false accusations about bad parenting
phones P3s parents’ home every day to speak with child
threatening to take child away
making P3 feel guilty about leaving relationship
threating to tell lies to child about relationship ending
Endangering child, physical abuse in front of child
as a bargaining tool during CP process, not signing dissolution unless P3 signs over increased visitation rights to child
threatening to take mother to court over visitation rights
Impact, negatively affected relationship with child
Reason for visitation, bond between daughter & AP, protecting daughter

Seeking support

Friends positive
Friends support positive, advice, APs friend trying to warn P3 to be careful
P3 disregarded friend’s advice as abuse was non-violent at the time
Friends demonstrating awareness of AP negative behaviour
confronted AP about behaviour, witnessed abusive behaviour, validated abuse claims

Friends negative
Friends support negative, socialised with AP post relationship
Friends, shocked at behaviour
Friends, disappointed, felt betrayed by AP lies

Family positive
family aware of AP behaviour with child & tried to warn P3
Support family positive, being there in time of crisis
discussing abuse
financial assistance
providing a place to stay
believing her

Family negative
Parents not taking her claims seriously – female perpetrator
continue to engage AP, source of pain & tension
not respecting P3s wishes
Parents interaction AP source of anger, tension & pain
Parents allowing AP entry into P3s life
Parents reactions, creating bridge between P3 & AP post relationship
not taking abuse seriously based on female gender of abuser
Impact, negatively affected relationship with family
attempts to convince her to remain in relationship
Trying to persuade to return to relationship
Feels parents afraid of AP, not wanting to face/ address problem, not knowing how to respond to female perp?

Counsellor positive
objective response; didn’t treat differently because SS relationship

Counsellor negative
AP access support, Catholic organisation, mediation, refused on basis of same sex relationship
religion as a basis for not offering support
not the right time (too soon after break up) felt uncomfortable, didn’t have the language to discuss experience
Impact, never sought counselling support since
refusing to offer support on religious grounds
non-practical, not providing another option to contact

Health setting positive
Made excuses for injuries
Awareness of DVA despite P3 claims to the contrary, trying to persuade P3 to report incident

Health setting negative
Attended GP in response to physical assault, didn’t disclose
AP present when she attended A&E

**Negative, / Criminal justice**
Guards perception abuse wouldn’t be taken seriously, Guards, felt she would be humiliating herself reporting online abuse Barrister, unsure if her claims were taken seriously, Barrister, recommended to contact another gay barrister, found this unhelpful

**Barriers to reporting to formal authorities**
POL influence here

**Barriers to seeking support**
parent’s response to AP Feels family react differently to male perpetrator, source of pain, anger, tension Distinction male & female perpetrator, impact on support from family Abuse not taken seriously, female perpetrator Danger of cultural/ social construction of femininity as non-violent DV, perception of service for heterosexual women, public face of DV services as heterosexual, perception DV service unavailable to non-hetero women DV services & supports, lack of visibility of SS DV, dominance of heterosexual service options, lack of services & support/support groups SSDV, increase visibility of SS experience Heterosexual public face of DV, impact on decision to seek support Personal lack of awareness of SSDVA

**Barriers to leaving/ Reason for remaining**
influence of heterosexual construction of love, sustain family environment, security low confidence, hope that partner would change hope that abusive episode was the last time questioning if abuse it real not wanting to impact child negatively

**Levels of disclosure**
Non-disclose to friends Full disclose, trusted family member Part disclosure to family Disclosure, didn't tell family as she felt it was her fault, didn't want to disclose the abuse Partial disclosure, balance between past & moving forward Reason for ND, keep abusive relationship secret Reason for ND to health professionals, POL, protecting AP from harm Reason for ND to family & friends, keeping abuse secret, POL, protecting AP from harm Reason for ND, GP, protecting AP from harm

**What’s influencing help-seeking decision?**
Different response if male perp Cultural constructions femininity, female abuser unrecognised, not taken seriously, undermined Parents relationship with AP, negative impact on P3s relationship with them

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Friends & family aware of violence in the relationship
Support, perception, wouldn’t be believed, accused of telling lies
Isolation post relationship
Did not seek support from anyone, dealt with abuse alone
Dealt with abuse alone
Reason for not accessing DV service, didn’t see herself as victim
Impact on help-seeking decisions
Perception & impact, Gendered assumptions female aggression, equates to abuse as not harmful, incapable of causing serious bodily harm

Non-recognition SSDVA
taboo subject (prohibited or restricted social custom)
Hidden nature of SSDV
Reluctance to associate with victim
loss of temper
felt sorry for AP
didn’t identify with category victim
lack of awareness of SSDV
lack of visibility of SSDVA
isolated experience, lack familiarity of another women’s experience

Recommendations for DV services
space to talk, someone to listen, non-judgemental response, environment
Support, increased visibility of SSDV
Post relationship isolation, mechanism to cope, avoid questions on relationship ending
Counselling to address/repair negative self-perception
Unable to relate/ identify experience

Impact during relationship
lost confidence & self esteem
felt embarrassed
felt stupid
felt she was exaggerating experience
felt confused
felt she wasted time
felt depressed
Felt like she wanted to die
felt hatred toward herself, ongoing
making excuses for visible sign of abuse
Lost of self-confidence, impact on feeling comfortable with AP sexually
Major impact, post pregnancy, daily negative comments on physical appearance
lost respect for partner
Affected physical attraction to AP

Affected sexual side, intimacy only after consuming alcohol, lose inhibitions, less frequent
negative self-perception

Disrupting relationship with children’s, isolating child from her
Felt stupid allowing AP to take over with child
Impact of providing visitation, lost support of friends
Negatively affected child
negatively affected relationship with child
Impact non-practical support, felt experience wasn’t valued, experience as non-existent following religious group’s response
Impact on seeking support, abuse is not taken seriously, minimising abusive experience, trivialised, undermines your experience
Impact on relationship with family, minimise abuse
Impact during relationship, walking on egg shells
Major impact, confident & regaining confidence negatively affected child & relationship with child
Impact severe physical assault, context of being isolated, resulted in relationship ending

physical health during relationship increased effect of existent medical condition, increased medication, unable to drive for 6-month period

mental health, depression

**Impact post relationship**
Impact, Lost friends over decision to allow visitation
Impact post, feels regret for not leaving relationship prior to CP
Long-term impact, undermining physical appearance
Long-term impact of emotional abuse rather than physical
Impact, Feels anger for non-reporting emotional abuse more damaging than the physical
Long-term impact of name calling
Long-term impact of name calling, still affects her, thinks about it & affects her current relationship
questioning acts of love & kindness, difficulty accepting positive comments about her appearance,
Impact on self-perception
Impact overall college results
Impact on self-perception, self-confidence
Long-term impact, perception of self
Impact, Post relationship, felt angry, not retaliating
Impact, changed participant behaviour, made tougher, not so naïve/ stupid, understand role of AP in her negative self-perception
isolation, stopped socialising
regrets letting AP away with assaults in case AP harms another woman
regrets not reporting to Guards

**Impact on future intimate relationship**
Caution
trust
expectation of abuse in new relationship
guilt past abusive relationship impact current relationship
questioning acts of kindness
questioning partner on physical appearance
parent’s engagement with AP
Long-term impact, confidence & trust
Negative impact on current relationship
Impact emotional abuse, self-perception, impacting on current relationship, accepting/believing acts of kindness & love

**Decision to leave**
Decision to leave, SPA & infidelity on honeymoon
level of violence experienced, feared for her life
context of abuse, isolation from supports, family, friends, medical assistance, language
barrier

**Life after Abuse**

**Agency**

confronted AP about her behaviour
sense of achievement leaving AP,
survived difficult time in her life
confident to represent herself in court
proud of non-violent response, maintain identity in relationship

**Recovery**

Role of current partner in healing from abuse, confidence & trust building
regaining confidence, talking about experience, completing degree, achieving career,
living for herself & not for another, equal relationship, adult relationship
independence, independent life, living for herself
more confidence, not being held back, no longer living on egg shells,
established bond with child
experiencing a healthy relationship, new home
ambivalent
not about rebuilding identity

**Miscellaneous**

Felt nervous during interview
Reliving abuse via interview
Milestone in life, birth, tainted with violence & abuse
Allowed AP bonding time with child after assault
P3 mother’s carer (6 years) at 17 years, resentment
Constructions of femininity, expectation to care for mother
Silenced in judicial system around abuse experience – not relevant

**Civil Partnered**

Bought house after 2 years (2011)
AP keen on buying a house
CP in 2013
Felt pressured to go through with the CP, financial reasons, relatives travelling from abroad, honeymoon paid for, guests taken time off work
CP lasted 2 months
Regrets marrying AP
Context CP, unsound mind & pressure from family, finances & honeymoon expenses
## Table of emergent themes (meaning-making)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Page/ line</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on AP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- AP multiple identities</td>
<td>19/688</td>
<td>total Jackal and Hyde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- grieving loss of parent</td>
<td>02/40</td>
<td>to have a parent hang themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- family rejection</td>
<td>03/92</td>
<td>shunned by the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fear of coming out</td>
<td>05/152</td>
<td>worried how people were going to react</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- homophobia from family</td>
<td>04/114</td>
<td>completely disgusted by the whole thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- poor mental health</td>
<td>16/595</td>
<td>her mental health wasn’t good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no prior knowledge of AP</td>
<td>03/93</td>
<td>I didn’t know her previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- partner as abusive</td>
<td>30/1113</td>
<td>My partner was being abusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on the self</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- questioning her behaviour</td>
<td>02/55</td>
<td>would I have done the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- self-blame</td>
<td>22/816</td>
<td>something wrong with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- felt at fault</td>
<td>04/139</td>
<td>maybe I should have backed off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-recognition of DV</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- DV as heterosexual</td>
<td>30/1108</td>
<td>dv is, is a married couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Public story of DV</td>
<td>30/1114</td>
<td>always thought to think that DV between a man and a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- context lesbian as taboo</td>
<td>30/1110</td>
<td>at the time, anyway I definitely thought that way</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Loss</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- loss of power</td>
<td>41/1496</td>
<td>not to give away my power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- loss of control</td>
<td>41/1496</td>
<td>not to give someone control over me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- loss of self-identity, autonomy</td>
<td>16/557</td>
<td>I didn’t know who I was anymore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploitation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| -Exploitation of caring nature                   | 34/1264 | that can be taken advantage of |
| -Exploitation of love                           | 34/ 1265 | they can see that in my love |
| -Exploitation of intimate disclosure of PAH     | 20/740   | dominate me you know with this |
| **Post Relationship Understanding**             |         | I thought I was attracting abuse |
| -attracting abuse                               | 21/767   | I realised the extent of it all |
| -full weight of experience                      | 24/875   | How can I have let all this happen? |
| - self-blame                                    | 39/1420  | Abused as a kid and then for this to happen |
| **Influence of Previous Abuse History**         |         |                                 |
| -self-blame                                     | 22/815   |                                 |
Appendix 16 Developing superordinate themes (meaning making)

### Table of superordinate themes & sub themes from Interview #05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Page/ line</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(3 Layers of Focus)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Abusive Partner</td>
<td>14/575</td>
<td>she was an alcoholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- AP as alcoholic</td>
<td>07/249</td>
<td>perceiving me as being weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- AP perceived her as weak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the self</td>
<td>26/1042</td>
<td>that I wasn’t stronger in myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- weak</td>
<td>08/285</td>
<td>something about me that triggered her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- self-blame</td>
<td>04/131</td>
<td>what I was doing was giving permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- providing permission for abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the relationship</td>
<td>16/652</td>
<td>nothing was solid, nothing was stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- precarious</td>
<td>25/1004</td>
<td>it’s about two people interacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- couple interaction</td>
<td>25/1008</td>
<td>our emotional linkage it went askew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- emotional breakdown</td>
<td>15/605</td>
<td>yeah, I did yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- recognition of DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Contexts of relationship violence)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of alcohol</td>
<td>06/227</td>
<td>it was mainly alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- increased aggression</td>
<td>06/237</td>
<td>Drink was one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- trigger for abuse</td>
<td>14/571</td>
<td>Very often related with drink (fear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- contributed to fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post relationship understanding</td>
<td>07/281</td>
<td>She was a fucking mess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- AP messed up</td>
<td>25/1022</td>
<td>There was something about me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- self-blame/ attracting abuse</td>
<td>06/242</td>
<td>it was a once off for her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- role of alcohol

Reason for remaining/ leaving
- hoped for change
- wanted the relationship to work
- no longer committed to relationship
- realised change would not happen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contexts of relationship violence</th>
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</table>

Vulnerability
- isolation/ leaving support networks
- abuse at a vulnerable period of life
- weak in response to abuse

No previous abuse history
- lack of comprehension
- confusion

Lack of experience of intimate relationships
- lack of knowledge on healthy relationship
- lack of experience of intimate relationship
- late coming out

<p>| | |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/618</td>
<td>she would get help and get it sorted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/615</td>
<td>I still wanted the relationship to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/798</td>
<td>I’m no longer committed here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/685</td>
<td>my hopes for the relationship had finished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25/1027</td>
<td>You’re kind of vulnerable when you move house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/1036</td>
<td>those two deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/1040</td>
<td>it was probably more in my response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/644</td>
<td>everybody’s reasonably together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/592</td>
<td>makes no fucking sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/1048</td>
<td>I didn’t know any fucking better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/1013</td>
<td>rabbit in the head lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/646</td>
<td>I was a very immature 40-year-old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 17 Schematic representation of superordinate themes

(a) **Superordinate theme 1: The lived experience of intimate partner abuse (IPA)**

- Emotional psychological
- Physical violence
- Financial
- Sexual
- Identity
- Practices of love
(b) Superordinate theme 2: Power, context, retaliation and impacts
(c) Superordinate theme 3: Making sense of an abusive relationship
(d) Superordinate theme 4: The experience of help-seeking

- The experience of help seeking
  - Key sources of informal support
    - Positive & negative responses from family & friends
  - Key sources of formal support
    - Positive & negative responses from formal supports from health services; police; LGBT community; DV services
    - Perception of support
  - Barriers to help-seeking
    - Societal; institutional; individual barriers
Identifying recurrent themes

**Title: Making sense of an abusive relationship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>A focus on the self</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>A focus on the partner</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>A focus on the relationship</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various contexts shaping relationship violence</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Context of heterosexism &amp; homophobia</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

**Sample?**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A focus on the self</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on the partner</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on the relationship</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various contexts shaping relationship violence</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of heterosexism &amp; homophobia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

475
10th December, 2015

RE: Ms Lynne Cahill, REAC Reference No 554
‘Female Same Sex Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Qualitative Exploration of Participants Lived Experience’

To whom it may concern:

I confirm that ethical approval has been granted to Ms Lynne Cahill for her study ‘Female Same Sex Domestic Violence and Abuse: A Qualitative Exploration of Participants Lived Experience’ by the School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethical Approval Committee (REAC).

Sincerely

Philip Curry
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

STUDY TITLE:

Female Same Sex Domestic Violence & Abuse: An exploration of the lived experience of women in Ireland

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURES:

This study aims to explore the experience of domestic violence and abuse for women living in the Republic of Ireland who have had experience of an abusive intimate relationship with another woman. I am doing this by conducting interviews with people who are no longer involved in an abusive relationship. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your experience of domestic violence abuse. You will be asked to talk about your experience of abuse and if this had an impact on you. You will be asked to talk about how you sought help in response to the abusive relationship. I am also interested in finding out your ideas and views about domestic violence services and how they might be improved to help women in Ireland who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse from a female partner.

Participation will involve meeting the researcher for an interview. The interview will last approximately 1 hour, depending upon how much you have to say. You will be asked to meet the researcher on one occasion only. With your permission, it will also be audio-taped.

DECLARATION:

• I have read the study information sheet & consent form
• I have had the opportunity to ask questions
• All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
• I understand that all information collected in this study will be treated as confidential.
• I understand that my identity will remain confidential except where there is an immediate
• I understand that my identity will remain confidential except where there is an immediate risk of harm to you or another person.
• I understand that the anonymised data from this study may be used in future studies, to include public presentations, training workshops/seminars, and lectures without the need for additional consent.
• I understand that the interview will be audio taped and transcribed.
• I understand that a transcript of my interview will be provided to me upon my request.
• I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, though without prejudice to my legal and ethical rights.
• I have received a copy of this agreement
• I understand that the results of this research may be published.
• I understand my participation is voluntary
• I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant’s Name (BLOCK CAPITAL LETTERS):

_____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature:

________________________________________

Date: _____________________  Contact Number: ____________________

Lynne Cahill  
Mac Léinn PhD  
Scoil na hOibre Sóisialta agus an Pholasai Sláinte  
Coláiste na Tríonóide Baile Átha Cliath,  
Oláis Altha Clath,  
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire.

Lynne Cahill  
PhD Candidate  
School of Social Work & Social Policy,  
Trinity College Dublin,  
the University of Dublin,  
Dublin 2, Ireland.

T: +353 1 896 2001  
M: +353 86 125 5500  
cahillly@tcd.ie  
www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie
STATEMENT OF RESEARCHERS RESPONSIBILITY

I have explained the nature and purpose of this study to the persons named above, the procedures to be undertaken and any risks that may be involved. I have offered to answer any questions and have fully answered such questions. I believe that the person named above understood my explanation and have freely given informed consent.

Researchers Signature: __________________________ Date: ______________

RESEARCHER CONTACT DETAILS:
Name: Lynne Cahill
Telephone: 086 1255500
E-mail: cahillly@tcd.ie

SUPERVISOR CONTACT DETAILS:
Name: Dr Stephanie Holt
Telephone: 01 8963908
E-mail: sholt@tcd.ie

For Researchers Use Only – Participant Code: _______________
Appendix 21 Consent form to archive data

**Consent Form**

Project Title: Female Same Sex Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA): A Qualitative Exploration of Participants Lived Experience

Principal Investigator: Lynne Cahill

Material gathered during this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored in a locked cabinet at Trinity College Dublin. You have the right to access any of your interview materials (tapes, transcripts and notes) at any time.

Please answer each statement below concerning the collection of the research data.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I have read and understood the information sheet.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I have had my questions answered satisfactorily.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I agree to the interview being audiotaped and to its contents being used for research purposes.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below, are sets of statements that give you, the interviewee, a series of options about how you wish your interview to be used. Please answer each statement.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I do not agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use. Where used my name must be removed and my comments made attributable.</td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  I do not agree to being identified in this interview and in any</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subsequent publications or use. Where used my name must be removed and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my comments made unattributable. At my request, other information that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>may identify me must be removed. I understand that I must make this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>request within one month of receiving a copy of my transcript.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  I agree to the transcripts (in line with the conditions outlined</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I agree to my audiotapes (in line with the conditions outlined above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being archived and used by other bona fide researchers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 I would like to receive a copy of my transcript.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 I would like my name acknowledged in the report and on the project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>web site (without linking it to content or quotation).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name (printed) ____________________________________________________________

Signature _______________________________ Date __________________________

About 25 women from all over Ireland are taking part in this research. Your contribution is immensely valuable. Feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

Lynne Cahill
Mobile: 086 1255500
Email: cahillly@tcd.ie

Dr Stephanie Holt
Phone: (01) 8963908
Email: sholt@tcd.ie
Appendix 22 Research safety protocol

Female Same Sex IPA: Interview safety protocol

Before Interview
- Explain a bit about yourself and the study to the participant.
- Explain about the informed consent form and their privacy. Remind the participant that they can stop the interview at any time and choose not to answer anything they do not wish to.
- Choose a ‘safe word’ in case you need to end the interview unexpectedly.
- Get person to sign consent form.

During the interview
- If a participant gets upset, ask them if they would like you to turn off the tape record. Offer to stop the interview.

End of interview
- Provide the participant with the support services list.
- Fill in the participant demographic form.
- Check with the participant that you have a number to call to follow-up after the interview and if they are OK with you ringing to follow up in the next day or two.
- Ensure that the participant is okay and ask if they have any questions.
- Check if the participant would like to review the transcript and, if so, where would they like it sent to and mode of delivery (post/email). Keep in mind confidentiality, so check that they are ok with it being sent.
- Discuss what you will do if you meet the participant in a place outside of the interview context. E.g. will you acknowledge the person? Will you leave it to them to decide? What will you say when you meet?

If the participant reveals feeling of anxiety or distress
- Provide them with the support services list and encourage them to seek support. Call them to follow-up on how they are doing later in the day.
Post Interview

Contact supervisor
- Take some time to de-brief and discuss the interview.
- Discuss any specific issues that may have arisen, particularly related to experiences of DVA.
- Write field notes on the interview with your observations.

Contact interview participant
- Thank the participant for doing the interview.
- If they were facing any distress during the interview, ask how they are doing now. Ask them if they need any more specific support services.

Assign an interview code
- Assign an interview code to your participant using the interview number it was assigned + age, gender, sexual orientation.

Transcription
- Upload the audio recording to your own computer and save a copy, using your code number.
- Ensure your computer is password protected.
- Delete the recording from the audio recorder.
- Transcribe and anonymise the transcript.

Once transcription is completed…

- Anonymise the transcript. Example of items to anonymise: name of county, city, village or town; name of parent, sibling or other family member; number of children; name of primary school/secondary school/college/university; name of a service, GP, psychologist, therapist.
Appendix 23 Study information sheet

Lynne Cahill
School of Social Work and Social Policy,
Trinity College, Dublin.
04th May 2016.

Female Same Sex Domestic Violence & Abuse: INFORMATION SHEET

What is the Study About?
This study called, Female same sex domestic violence and abuse: An exploration of the lived experience of women in Ireland is trying to learn about the experiences of non-heterosexual women, over 18, who have encountered abusive behaviours in their previous relationships with other women. By abusive behaviours, I mean behaviours in which a partner may have been violent toward you, where you feel you may have been emotionally, physically, financially, and or sexually abused by your partner.

It is my hope that, by learning about your experience of domestic violence and abuse, this will provide an insight into what type of supports are needed in response to that abuse. It may also highlight the avenues available to women seeking support from an abusive relationship – what works and what is problematic. By talking about your experience, insights could be captured about what an unhealthy female same sex relationship looks like, and the warning signs to an abusive partnership.

Who am I?
I am a student from Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and I am carrying out this research for my PhD degree.

Your experience
I am looking for women to take part in an interview. During the interview, I will ask questions around your experience of an abusive relationship with another woman, how you managed that experience, and what impact it may have had on you. I would also like to hear about your experience of looking for help in response to the abuse – to see what worked for you and what was problematic.

Lynne Cahill
Mac Leínn PhD
Scoll na hOibre Sóisialta agus an Phholasaí Shóisialta,
Coláiste na Tríonóide Baile Átha Cliath, Ollscoil Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire.

Lynne Cahill
PhD Candidate
School of Social Work & Social Policy,
Trinity College Dublin,
the University of Dublin,
Dublin 2, Ireland.

T: +353 1 896 2001
M: +353 86 125 5500
cahillly@tcd.ie
www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie
What am I asking you to do if you take part?
Taking part is YOUR CHOICE. If you decide that you would like to take part, I will arrange the interview in a safe place and at a time that is convenient for you. The length of interview will depend on how much you wish to say.

Privacy and Confidentiality
With your permission, I will record the interview with a dictaphone. This is because what you say is important and I want to make sure that I remember in full what we talk about. I will turn off the recorder at any time if you are not comfortable with it. What is said during the interview is completely confidential, which means that whatever is discussed or spoken about in the interview will not be told to other people except where there is an immediate risk of harm to you or another person. If this happens, I will discuss this with you first.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?
A risk of participating in this research is that you are being asked to reflect on a difficult time when you were in an abusive relationship with someone you cared for. Reflecting on this experience might bring up difficult thoughts and feelings. You might feel uncomfortable telling me things about your experience of abuse from a previous girlfriend. If there is a question you do not want to answer for any reason, you do not have to. If at any time during the interview you feel upset while answering any of the questions, you do not have to finish the interview. We can stop the interview at any time you want. The benefit of the study is that you will have the chance to talk about your experience of being in an abusive relationship. By you sharing your experience, I hope that this will promote an understanding and greater awareness of this issue for other women, and to highlight where services could be improved to better respond to women who are abused by their female partners.

What happens if I decide I don’t want to take part?
It is solely your choice to participate in the study. Taking part in this study means volunteering your time to meet for an interview. I understand that this is a difficult subject to talk about and that you may change your mind about participation. If you decide you do want to talk about your experience, it is very important that you know that you are free to refuse to answer any questions and stop taking part in the study at any time you wish, without any reason. Please take your time in deciding whether you want to take part in this research or not.

Lynne Cahill
Mac Leinn PhD
Scoil na hOibre Sóisialta agus an Pholasai Shóisialta,
Coláiste na Tríonóide Baile Átha Cliath,
Ollscoil Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire.

Lynne Cahill
PhD Candidate
School of Social Work & Social Policy,
Trinity College Dublin,
the University of Dublin,
Dublin 2, Ireland.

T: +353 1 896 2001
M: +353 86 125 5500
cahillly@tcd.ie
www.socialwork-socialpolicy.tcd.ie
Contacting the Researcher
If you want to ask any questions about the study, please feel free to contact my research supervisor or me by telephone or by email. Our contact details are:

Lynne Cahill (researcher) 086 1255500 cahilly@tcd.ie
Stephanie Holt (supervisor) 01 8963908 sholt@tcd.ie
Appendix 24 Participant demographic profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aoife</th>
<th>Caoimhe</th>
<th>Saoirse</th>
<th>Ciara</th>
<th>Niamh</th>
<th>Roisin</th>
<th>Clodagh</th>
<th>Aoibhinn</th>
<th>Eabha</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Irish</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Irish</td>
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<td>Irish</td>
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<td>lesbian</td>
<td>lesbian</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of Ed.</td>
<td>Completed third level</td>
<td>Complete d some third level (failed degree)</td>
<td>Complete d third level</td>
<td>Complete d upper secondary level</td>
<td>Complete d PhD level</td>
<td>Complete d third level</td>
<td>Complete d upper secondary level</td>
<td>Complete d Masters level</td>
<td>Completed third level</td>
</tr>
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<td>employed</td>
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<td>employed</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently living</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>city</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>suburb of a city</td>
<td>suburb of a city</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out status (participant)</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to all (since relationship ended)</td>
<td>Out to some</td>
<td>Out to all (until entered relationship )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out status (partner)</td>
<td>Out to some</td>
<td>Out to some (P1) Out to all (P2)</td>
<td>Out to all (P1) Out to some (P2)</td>
<td>Out to all (P1) Out to all (P2)</td>
<td>Out to all (P1) Out to all (P2)</td>
<td>Out to none (P1) Out to all (P2)</td>
<td>Out to all</td>
<td>Out to none</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (time of interview)</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (coming out)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (first SS relationship )</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Abusive partner)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20 &amp; 29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45 (P1)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28 &amp; 32</td>
<td>22 &amp; 45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 25 Participant relationship profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Aoife</th>
<th>Caoimhe</th>
<th>Saoirse</th>
<th>Ciara</th>
<th>Niamh</th>
<th>Roisin</th>
<th>Clodagh</th>
<th>Aoibhinn</th>
<th>Eabha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abuse in first SS relationship</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of abusive relationship experiences</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 SS</td>
<td>2 SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 SS &amp; 1 heterosexual</td>
<td>1 hetero female</td>
<td>2 SS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current relationship status</strong></td>
<td>single &amp; not dating</td>
<td>single &amp; dating</td>
<td>monogamous relationship</td>
<td>monogamous relationship</td>
<td>single &amp; not dating</td>
<td>single &amp; dating</td>
<td>single &amp; not dating</td>
<td>single &amp; not dating</td>
<td>single &amp; not dating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Met abusive partner</strong></td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>college &amp; through friends</td>
<td>LGBT group</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>LGBT scene</td>
<td>social event &amp; LGBT group</td>
<td>work &amp; sporting event</td>
<td>LGBT group</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

488
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Living with partner</strong></th>
<th>yes (abuse started prior to moving in)</th>
<th>yes (abuse started prior to moving in)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>yes (abuse started prior to moving in)</th>
<th>not living with partner in both abusive relationships</th>
<th>lived with partner in both abusive relationships</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abuse started</strong></td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>7 months (during pregnancy)</td>
<td>no memory</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>3 years (R1)</td>
<td>3 years (R1)</td>
<td>no memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of abuse experienced first</strong></td>
<td>emotional/psychological</td>
<td>physical</td>
<td>emotional/psychological</td>
<td>emotional/psychological</td>
<td>emotional/psychological</td>
<td>physical (R1)</td>
<td>emotional/psychological (R1)</td>
<td>emotional/psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of abuse</strong></td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>daily</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>daily</td>
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<td>Daily</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of relationship</strong></td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>3 years (R1)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Less than 1 year in both</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3.5 years (R1)</td>
<td>26 years (R1)</td>
<td>8 years</td>
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<td>Reason for leaving</td>
<td>Threat of HIV infection</td>
<td>Partner committed to psychiatric hospital</td>
<td>Severe physical assault</td>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>No longer felt committed to relationship</td>
<td>Physical assault in both relationships</td>
<td>Wanting to 'come out' (R1) Partner unfaithful (R2)</td>
<td>Stop financial exploitation</td>
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</table>
Appendix 26 Definitions of abusive behaviours

**Emotional abuse**
Putting her down; making her feel bad about herself; calling her names; making her think she’s crazy; playing mind games; humiliating her; making her feel guilty; undermining her sense of self so that she believes that she is incompetent, stupid, wrong, to blame, claiming that nobody will take her seriously if she speaks to anybody about the abuse; making her believe she is lucky they are in a relationship with her.

**Using isolation**
Controlling what she does, whom they see and/or talk to, what she reads or watching on TV, looks at on the computer, where she goes; limiting their contacts with the outside world; using jealousy to justify your own actions.

**Minimising, denying, blaming**
Making light of the abuse and not taking their concerns about it seriously; saying the abuse did not happen, shifting the responsibility for the abuse onto her, other external factors, or on your own problems (your substance use, abusive childhoods etc.)

**Using children**
Making her feel guilty about their children; undermining her parenting; using the children to relay messages; using visitation to harass her; threatening to take children away, telling lies to the children about her.

**Economic abuse**
Preventing her for getting or keeping a job; making her ask for money; giving her an allowance; taking their money; not letting her know about/ have access to the household income; running up debts without their knowledge, (E.g. by not paying bills, taking out loans); making all big decision about how money will be spent; refusing to get paid work and/or expecting her to support her.
Physical abuse
Slapping/pushing/shoving; physically threatening them; kicking/punching; restraining/holding them down/tying them up; stalking/following them; beating up; choking/strangling/suffocating; locking them out of the house/room; hitting them with an object weapon; biting; abducting them and keeping them somewhere against their will.

Sexual abuse
Persuading them to have sex for sake of peace; touched them in ways that causes fear/alarm/distress; forcing into sexual activity, including rape, forcing them to watch or enact pornography; hurting during sex; disrespecting ‘safe’ words/boundaries; sexually assaulting/abusing; refusing requests for safer sex.

Identity abuse
Threatening to out or actually outing their sexuality, gender (or birth gender) identity or HIV status to their employer/colleagues, faith community, family of origin, children’s services; undermining their sense of self as a woman, bisexual, or lesbian; controlling what she looks like, what clothes she wears, what hair style she has, her look and behaviours; threatening to or withdrawing medication, hormones, physical care supports; refusing her money for the cost of her gender transition.

Adapted from Donovan and Hester (2014, p. 208-09)

Forced sex or rape
When women describe being sexually violated, and forced against their will; the perpetrator might use an object, weapon, hand, finger to penetrate a woman’s vagina, anus, or mouth, and/or may restrain women with their physical strength while assaulting their body

Sexual coercion
Involves engaging in sex as a result of pressure when you do not want to.
Emotional sexual abuse

Involves partner acting in sexually controlling ways that are not consensual, for example, not letting their partner touch them sexually, rejecting partners sexually in ways meant to hurt of humiliate, or making demeaning comments about their sexual behaviour or body parts

Adapted from Ristock (2002, p.53)

Appendix 27 Comprehensive list of emotional/psychological abusive behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional abuse experienced by participants</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>being put down/humiliated</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>shouting &amp; screaming</td>
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<td>threats to jeopardise participants business</td>
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### Appendix 28 Comprehensive list of post-separation abusive behaviours

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<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>isolating participant from friends and LGBT community</td>
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<td>perstering phone calls/ texts</td>
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<td>entering participants home without permission</td>
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### Appendix 29 Comprehensive list of physically abusive behaviours

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<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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Appendix 30 Comprehensive list of identified inequalities in relationships

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<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
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<td>participant more financial resources</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>partner more financial resources</td>
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<td>equal contribution to household bills</td>
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<td>unequal conflict resolution</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>unequal contribution to household bills</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>equal contribution to household chores</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 31 A note on abusive partners
This section draws attention to areas of commonality identified by participants when they spoke of their abusive partners’ behaviours. A cautionary note must accompany these findings because identifying abusive partner’s perspectives and their experiences in the relationship was not an objective of the current study. Further, the researcher made no attempts to interview partners of the participants. The following data pertaining to abusive partner’s behaviours was gathered from the narratives of the participants. Having said that, given the paucity of research concerned with female perpetrators in Ireland, a note on their behaviours, as identified by their partners, warrants some attention.

Common behaviours across the sample
Table 24 below provides an overview of the abusive behaviours and tactics enacted by female abusive partners. Some behaviours identified by the participants have been previously addressed in Chapter 4, such as coercion and threats, using isolation, controlling daily activities, tailoring abuse to vulnerabilities, and exploiting knowledge of a previous abuse history.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abusive partners behaviour</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Coercion &amp; threats</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using isolation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimising, denying &amp; blaming</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling daily activities</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to property</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intimidation</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tailoring abuse to vulnerabilities</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat of infidelity/infidelity to punish</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploiting knowledge of participant’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>previous abuse history</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealing sexual identity</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other abusive behaviours identified by interviewees included their partners minimising the abuse by not taking their concerns seriously, and mocking them for interpreting the behaviour as abusive. Partners denied the abuse by suggesting, alcohol, medication, or a
combination of both, and stress related issues in work as the reasons for their abusive behaviour. More commonly across the sample, partners blamed the participants for their abusive behaviours, suggesting that something they said or did, or did not do, was the reason/ justification for their abusive outbursts. Women provided accounts whereby the abusive partner would never apologise or admit to being in the wrong, and no matter what the disagreement, participants were always in the wrong and blamed by their partners. The following quote by Roisin explains,

\[ I \text{ was always wrong, I was always wrong, no matter what I did I was always wrong, always my fault, everything was my fault, I was the one that had to the apology, apologise and all the rest. I was always the one who was made to feel bad that it was always my fault. } \]

Women also spoke of damage to their homes, pets, and property by their partners. One woman recalled her partner damaging a client’s home in an attempt to jeopardise her business. The participant’s partners used the threat of infidelity and actual infidelity to punish. For example, toward the end of her six-year relationship, Aoife’s partner told friends and neighbours that Aoife was violent toward her and that she was sleeping with other women. Because of this, Aoife was excluded from social events organised by the small rural community in which they lived. She only knew the cause of her exclusion when the relationship ended. Aoife recalled her partner attending one of the neighbours parties, a party that she was not invited to, and her partner saying, “I don’t know if I’ll be home tonight” (Aoife). This comment was understood by Aoife as her partner ‘playing mind games’ by insinuating she may she might be unfaithful on a night out.

Another example of this type of abusive behaviour was evident in Saoirse’s interview. Saoirse and her partner had Civil Partnered. While on honeymoon, Saoirse’s partner was unfaithful. The reason for the infidelity was to punish Saoirse over a text message she received from a friend on their honeymoon, the quote below explains,

\[ I \text{ could go out on the balcony and see them, and she was holding hands with this fella…So, the next day, I said, “You were with him” she had all love bites there [on her chest area] } \]
Evidence of intergenerational violence?

Interestingly, more than half of the women reported their abusive partners had come from a family origin where there was violence, and they had knowledge of their partners having an abusive history with both male and female previous partners. For participants, this previous abusive history, informed, in part, their understanding of their partners behaviour during the relationships. For example, Clodagh understood her partner’s behaviour as learned behaviour from her mother. During her interview, Clodagh gave evidence of experiencing the same type of abusive behaviours as outlined in the quote below, hence the word ‘learned’,

See her mother used to that to them when they were kids. The mother had long nails and used to scrap them and pull their hair and kill them [LC: Did she tell you that?] Yeah, it was a big joke in the family that the mother used to do it to them all and that’s probably where she learned you know (Clodagh)

This finding is in accord with previous research indicating a lesbian abused by a member of her family or who had witnessed family violence as a child was significantly more likely to be a victim or a batterer in an intimate adult relationship (Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991). However, the significance of intergenerational violence as a predictor of becoming a victim or a batterer in adult life is debated within the literature (Coleman, 1990 cited in Renzetti, 1992; Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987). Further, Renzetti (1992, pp.72) asserts, the intergenerational transmission hypothesis is “flawed by various weaknesses, not least of which is that it exonerates batterers”. Instead, Renzetti (1992) points to additional factors associated with the experience of childhood abuse and the influence on behavioural outcomes in adult life. For example, factors such as the age at which the individual was abused, the duration and severity of abuse, the nature of the emotional relationship between
the victim and the abuser, and whether or not victims had a positive experience when accessing support.
Appendix 32 Comprehensive list of impacts during relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact during relationship</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>lying to family &amp; friends to hide abuse</td>
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<td>negatively affected relationship with children</td>
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<tr>
<td>inability to resolve conflict</td>
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<td>felt undermined</td>
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<td>loss of control</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>adopted negative habits of partner</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>felt controlled by partners family</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>forced to conceal sexual identity/partners</td>
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</tr>
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## Appendix 33 Comprehensive list of post-relationship impacts

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Appendix 34 Comprehensive list of longer-term impacts

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Appendix 35 Comprehensive list of items: 'focus on the self'

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Appendix 36 Comprehensive list of items: 'focus on the partner'

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Appendix 37 Comprehensive list of items: meaning-making

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### Appendix 38 Comprehensive list of items: 'contexts of relationship violence'

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### Appendix 39 Comprehensive list of helpful responses from informal supports

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Appendix 40 Comprehensive list of unhelpful responses from informal supports

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Appendix 41 Comprehensive list of positive experiences with formal supports

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Appendix 42 Comprehensive list of negative experiences with formal supports

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Appendix 43 Barriers to counselling support

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Appendix 44 Barriers to LGBT community support

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### Appendix 46 Barriers to healthcare supports

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Appendix 47 Barriers: non-disclosure to informal support

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510
Appendix 49 Comprehensive list of barriers to seeking police support

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Appendix 50 Factors occurring at the individual level
Appendix 51 Factors occurring at the Informal Groups level

- Heterosexist understandings of relationship violence
- Gendered assumptions about violence
- Lack of validation
- Minimising experience
- Not taking concerns seriously
- Partner re-enacting a previous abuse history
- Partner claiming victimisation
- Homophobia: Limited support

Informal Group Environment
Appendix 52 Factors occurring at the Formal Groups level
Appendix 53 Factors occurring at the Societal Structures level

- Services based on heterosexist ideology
- Lack of awareness of SSIPA & SS relationships
- Actual/perceived homophobia
- Notions of femininity
- Female perpetrated sexual violence
- Heterosexist rape laws
- Identity abuse

Societal Structures