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Accounting for Intimate Partner Violence: A Biographical Analysis of Narrative Strategies Used by Men Experiencing IPV From Their Female Partners

Melissa Corbally[1] [AQ1] [AQ2]

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Abstract[AQ3]
Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious social issue which affects the medium- and long-term health outcomes of many individuals worldwide. The cost of IPV on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals, in addition to its wider economic costs in responding to abused persons, is significant. Presently, there is a lack of understanding about the nature of female-initiated IPV and how men account for their experiences of it. This study examined male victims' life stories of their IPV experiences from their intimate partners. Using the biographical narrative interpretive method, three cases were analyzed from a social constructionist perspective to examine what narrative strategies men used to account for their experiences of being abused by their female partners. Three dominant narrative strategies were used by respondents: the fatherhood narrative, the good husband narrative, and the abuse narrative. The abuse narrative had a unique narrative form, which reflected respondents' disassociation between their identities as men and also as abused persons. Dominant conflicting discourses of masculinity and intimate partner abuse disadvantaged men in identifying IPV and secondly in responding appropriately. This study found that men prefer to use dominant discursive identities as legitimate means from which to disclose IPV experiences. The findings from this study

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illustrate that broad questioning by professionals regarding fatherhood may be most helpful in promoting disclosures of IPV if this is suspected.

Keywords
intimate partner violence, masculinities, domestic abuse, biographical narrative interpretive method

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and abuse are problems that pervade societies worldwide. These problems are not new. The growing problem of violence and abuse and its impact on health outcomes is acknowledged by the World Health Organization (WHO), which has identified the many serious medium- and long-term health outcomes for individuals, communities, and societies alike (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). In addition, there are significant health and economic costs (Walby, 2009), particularly among those in low- to middle-income countries where income inequality has been shown to be related to violence (Wolf, Gray, & Fazel, 2014). Epidemiological research has suggested that negative mental and physical health consequences for women and men experiencing IPV can be reduced with increased recognition and responses by care providers (Black, 2011). IPV among men and women remains a multifaceted problem in which researchers continue to uncover the causes, nature, and impact of abuse (Butchart, Pinney, Check, & Villaveces, 2004). In relation to social problems, such as IPV, Blumer (1971) points out, "social problems are not the result of an intrinsic malfunctioning of a society but are the result of a process of definition in which a given condition is picked out and identified as a social problem" (pp. 301-302).

In one sense, IPV is a "well defined" problem in society. The difficulty lies with its definition which has essentially been "gendered" to date, as a problem perpetrated by men and experienced by women. The process of social definition of problems *as problems* determines how they are perceived, received, measured, and acted upon. Research has demonstrated that judgments regarding IPV are influenced by social norms regarding perpetrator gender and are less severe if the perpetrator is female (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Evidence of the feminization of intimate partner abuse is also evident through society, media, and politics. This strong feminist perspective evident in the area of IPV has traditionally influenced the shaping of associated discourses (Walby, 1990). There is no doubt that the problem of men's abuse of women (in particular IPV) remains a serious problem worldwide (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002~~Krug et al., 2002~~).

For example, the WHO's (2005) multicountry study of 24,000 women experiencing abuse found that between 10% and 52% reported experiencing IPV at some point in their lives. Similarly, lifetime prevalence rates**[AQ4]** of IPV from an Irish perspective were found to be 15% for women (Watson & Parsons, 2005). There is a growing body of research that has begun to highlight the problem of male victimization (Archer, 2000; Bates, Graham-Kevan, & Archer, 2014; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005). Some studies of IPV have identified prevalence rates for men experiencing IPV. The British Crime Survey data found that 5% of male respondents had experienced abuse from a female partner in a 12-month period (Finney, 2006**[AQ5]**). A national Irish survey found lifetime prevalence rates of IPV for men at 6% (Watson & Parsons, 2005). While the existence of IPV among men is proven (despite the obvious variation in victimization rates depending on survey sources), less is understood about how men account for experiencing IPV and how they disclose abuse to others.

There is a growing body of research that has illustrated the problem of male victimization (Archer, 2000; Bates et al., 2014; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005). Presently, there are few narrative research studies undertaken on male victims of IPV (Allen-Collinson, 2008, 2009a, 2009b~~1998, 1999a, 1999b~~**[AQ6]**; Migliaccio, 2001, 2002) in comparison with studies of female victims. The absence of a significant body of research in this area reflects a possible "forbidden" discourse (Allen-Collinson, 2008) surrounding abused men. As a result, there is a potential knowledge gap regarding IPV from a masculine perspective. This article presents the outcome of a biographical narrative interpretive study of how men accounted for their experiences of IPV from their female partner.

The Social Construction of IPV

The social construction of gender and IPV greatly influences how IPV is recognized and responded to. Gender relations can be represented in a multiplicity of ways (Connell, 2002; Featherstone, Rivett, & Scourfield, 2007; Hester, 2004). The nature and conduct of these relationships are strongly influenced by societal norms and expectations, meaning that individuals are socialized to perform their gender in socially acceptable ways (Riemann & Schutze, 2005). While the social construction of masculinity is complex (Courtenay, 2000), men are influenced by public perceptions of what it means to be a man. Hegemonic masculinity is the current and honored socially constructed view of what it means to be a man (Connell, 2005a; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although the excessive focus on structure (vs. agency) is often viewed as a criticism (Wetherell & Edley, 1999), the

concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful in providing theoretical insight into the expression of public masculinities. More useful still is the ordinary sense of hegemonic masculinity identified by Wetherell and Edley (1999), which reflects men's day-to-day masculine associations with the fulfillment of social stereotypes. Although gender identities are not fixed entities, it is plausible that a challenge to one's gender order prompts the questioning of one's gender identity, by both a male victim and those he encounters (Connell, 1987~~95~~~~[AQ7]~~). Personal attributes such as physical size, self-reliance, control, and stoicism seem to play a part in influencing the expression of the abuse experience (Allen-Collinson, 2009a, 2009b; Migliaccio, 2002). Similarly, commitments associated with public masculinity such as marriage, family, and the church are also used by men to justify why men stay in abusive relationships (Migliaccio, 2002). Although it is important to recognize personal agency and men's willingness to subscribe to such norms, it remains that men in general tend toward gender normative behaviors (Hicks, 2008).

Women's abuse of men remains a taboo subject, which receives insufficient recognition in academic discourse and public policy, relative to men's abuse of women. Some writers have argued that feminist perspectives of abuse have been an inhibiting factor in acknowledging the presence of IPV victimization among men (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005; Straus, 2007; Swan & Snow, 2006). While some studies have examined men's accounts of IPV (Allen-Collinson, 2008, 2009a; Cleary, 2004**[AQ8]**; Migliaccio, 2001, 2002), none to date have examined their life stories of IPV. This study examined the nature of IPV as it was experienced by men. A discussion of contemporary definitions surrounding IPV/abuse is expounded upon below.

Method

The purpose of this study was to unearth the social processes that influence how men experiencing IPV account for their experiences. The fact that there was a dearth of narrative studies in this topic area suggested that a different methodological approach may elucidate men's IPV life stories. Biographical narrative interpretive method (BNIM) was used as the analytic tool for this study. BNIM constitutes both a methodology and method for the analysis of life histories and life stories. The methodology implicit is interpretivist (as indicated in its name) and the analytic method within BNIM is constituted of a 10-stage analytic process of life stories. BNIM emerged from a narrative biographical method used to study Holocaust survivors in the 1970s (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 1997). Through case-based analysis, BNIM

facilitates retrospective understanding of the private and public worlds of the individuals and their interactivity with historically evolving contexts. The generation of case accounts using BNIM is characterized by a particular interview style and comprehensive, detailed analytic method where the "lived life" and "told story" are initially analyzed separately and then merged into a case account which can then be compared with other cases (cross-case theorization; Wengraf, 2001). More detailed discussion of the stages of BNIM analysis can be found in Corbally and O'Neill (2014). Because narrative construction (and reconstruction) of self through storytelling is a fluid process, continually influenced by discursive practices and discourses in practice (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), it was felt that a BNIM approach would ideally suit the topic of investigation (Bruner, 2004; Kohler Riessman, 2008).

Sample Recruitment Strategy/Selection Process

Following formal ethical approval, respondents to the study were recruited by seeking volunteers who attended the abused men's support group in Ireland between September 2007 and January 2008. The interviews were undertaken in the same venue during or following the support group meeting to maximize participant and researcher safety. Written and verbal informed consent were obtained. The author interviewed all participants and maintained responsibility for all aspects of data handling and analysis. In total, 14 men participated in the study. This article presents findings relating to three case studies that were subjected to BNIM analysis. Each of the three cases met four key criteria for life narratives as outlined by Plummer (2003): a sense of ordering of events, a sense of the person behind the text, that person's voice and perspective coming through the text, and elements of causality. The number of particular incident narratives per case was also used as a key criterion in selecting the three cases.

Biographical Interviewing

Data were collected using an open narrative structured interview specific to BNIM (Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Apitzch, 2004; Jones, 2003; Wengraf, 2001). This study used a two-sub-session interview technique. Sub-session 1 involved the asking of one key question with minimal involvement from the interviewer, otherwise known as a Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN; Wengraf, 2001). This questioning technique proved very useful in eliciting data, enabling participants to control the framing, sequencing, content, and duration of the interview. Sub-session 2 allowed

deeper questioning about particular narratives (only if they were raised by respondents) during Sub-session 1 (Wengraf, 2001). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Access to the original transcripts was restricted through computer encryption. Associated handwritten notes made during the interview were stored securely.

Data Analysis

Following the selection process outlined above, three cases were analyzed using the BNIM analytic technique. Nine analytic stages are undertaken on each individual case. The 10th stage is an analysis undertaken across all three cases. In the individual case analysis, the "lived life" data were separated from the "told story" data and analyzed separately. Interpretive panel analysis (a group analytic process involving between three and eight heterogeneous individuals) is a defining characteristic of the BNIM method (Jones, 2003) and was used extensively in this study. Three interpretive panel analyses per case were undertaken. The inclusion of interpretive panels enhanced analytic rigor by appreciating multiple interpretations of meaning rather than a singular meaning generated solely by the researcher (Hollway & Jefferson, 2009). Stage 9 of the process reunites the lived life and told story creating an interpretive case reconstruction. The 10th stage consisted of a cross-case analysis comparing all three cases collectively to unearth similarities among cases (Jones, 2006; Wengraf, 2001).

IPV: Men's Life Stories

The following section provides a brief contextual overview of the case studies. Note that the terms "first wave abuse" and "second wave abuse" used in these case studies arose from the analysis of men's descriptions of the forms of IPV they experienced (Corbally, 2011). First wave abuse was perpetrated by the intimate partner and broadly reflected traditional constructions regarding the nature of abuse in contemporary literature. Second wave abuse was found by Corbally (2011) to be constructed as a collective endeavor, initiated by the intimate partner but not exercised by her. Alan, Conor, and Mike are pseudonyms used to protect the real identity of the participants.

Alan: Lived Life and Told Story

Alan married his wife in the early 1980s. They had four children. He worked for the public service. Alan experienced severe intimate partner abuse physically and emotionally from his wife throughout their relationship. His

older children also abused him. After 18 years of marriage, Alan left the house following a crisis point, which was roughly 4 years ago. Alan has not seen his children despite court orders granting access. His psychological abuse continues despite being separated. He is in a new relationship now.

The severity of the abuse Alan experienced was notable. Alan's accounts of IPV were the most severe of all accounts. He told stories of IPV perpetrated by his wife and also by his children (upon invitation by his wife). Alan's narrative descriptions compare with the typology of "intimate terrorism," a pattern most associated with female victimization (Johnson, 2011). His account of his children's involvement in his abuse is also unique in this study. When recounting his IPV story, the dichotomy between Alan's public and private identity to survive was striking. His particular role in the workplace represented the epitome of hegemonic masculinity where attributes of strength, valor, and impartiality represented the norm (Connell, 2005a). Privately, his masculinity mutated into subordination when he was subjected to repeated victimization at home. Alan's narrative style was from the position of "the wounded" and is an expression of a chaos narrative, where the severity of the suffering could not be made sense of (Frank, 1995~~[AQ9]~~; Hyden, 2005~~[AQ10]~~).

Conor: Lived Life and Told Story

Conor is a young man estimated to be in his late 20s. Conor met his partner while he was studying for a master's degree in the mid-1990s. He married his partner who was pregnant at the time. They had two children. Conor's wife misused alcohol and left the house for long periods of up to a week at a time without warning. Conor became the primary carer for his children and changed his working hours to part-time. He experienced physical and psychological abuse during this time. Conor's wife achieved a "parentectomy" [1] by spontaneously removing the children from their home and making a false accusation of sexual abuse against him. He was isolated from his children for 3 months. In addition to the physical and psychological abuse, Conor experienced mostly second wave abuse through social services and the legal system. Conor kept a diary that helped him realize the extent of the abuse he was experiencing. At the time of interview, Conor lost custody of his children and was appealing this decision.

The nature of Conor's storytelling is articulate, vivid, humorous in parts, and detailed. His use of metaphor in illustrating the gestalt of his story was not observed in the other cases. There were many shifts and turns in Conor's story, which suggest that his narrative constraint to go into detail was stronger than his constraints to condense and close the form of his extempore

narration (Riemann & Schutze, 2005). Conor contextualized his wife in his story as the key event carrier in his IPV. His dedication of a large amount of narrative to frame the character of his wife suggests that understanding her was key in understanding his story.

Mike: Lived Life and Told Story

Mike married his wife in the early 1980s. They had two children. He was a successful businessman. The couple had a relatively happy relationship until she suddenly asked for a separation. He later discovered that his wife was having an affair with a friend. After this crisis point, Mike began experiencing physical and psychological abuse from his wife. His wife achieved a "parentectomy," removing the children from the country for 3 months, isolating Mike. He stated that he experienced "second wave abuse" by the police, solicitors, and a psychologist. He thought about suicide but his desire to have access to his children helped him get through his low point. He was granted access to his children. When the children were old enough, they came to live with him. Until his divorce hearing, which was prior to the interview, he had not seen his wife in 13 years but was still being psychologically abused by her.

Mike's told story was similar to a highly rendered recovery story (Plummer, 1995). This high amount of biographical rendering was perhaps due to the passage of time since separation in contrast with other cases (Riemann & Schutze, 2005). Mike's active involvement of biographical caretakers early in his narrative is unique. In contrast with Alan and Conor, Mike sought support from friends, his doctor, and the police. This may be due to his lack of trajectory potential and the normativity of his relationship prior to trajectory.

Accounting for IPV: Narrative Strategies Used by Men

A narrative strategy was defined as a positioning technique used in the expression of a life story. The findings presented below reflect the outcome of the full 10 stages of BNIM analysis. The final stage of analysis resulted from a cross-case theorization of all three case studies. The criterion for defining a narrative as dominant was its presence in all three cases and pervasiveness throughout the life story, which is consistent with the tenets of BNIM. The findings and interpretive discussion are intermingled within the text below.

The Fatherhood Narrative

The fatherhood narrative was by far the most dominant narrative structure used by men in accounting for their IPV experiences. In structuring the fatherhood narrative, men utilized contrasting narrative positioning (of capable fatherhood vs. stolen fatherhood) to amplify their constructions of IPV through the removal of fathering opportunities. The men portrayed their practical involvement in child care. For example, Alan asserted that in caring for his new-born daughter, "I'd mind the little one. Actually I was the first one to change her nappy. I used to walk up and down the corridor every night when she wouldn't sleep." Conor gave in-depth accounts of his effectiveness as a father, augmenting his capability with language synonymous with the health and social care field to supplement his narrative of capability. For example, "I've done most of the upbringing and have been, the term apparently is the primary carer, responsible parent." He described practical strategies used in protecting his daughters from his wife's angry outbursts:

> I used to say "right come on girls we'll go out, we'll play football or we'll play Frisbee or cycle or something" that's what I'd do. We'd just go out for an hour or something and let her cool off.

Mike constructed his fatherhood as the defining feature of his life: "I mean in honesty, in all honesty, when it came to doing stuff with the children, it was me who had done it from day one." Although some argue that subject positioning such as this is done strategically to convey a desired identity (Davies & Harre, 1990), it also illustrates men's accounts of how their masculinity was "done" in this context (Fenstermaker & West, 2002). It is suggested that the overarching social constructions of masculinity and intimate partner abuse severely limited the men's choices to present themselves by alternate means.

The men's accounts of stolen fatherhood were characterized by men's articulations of removal of the children from their lives. Being "perpetrated" by both first wave (directly by the female partner) and second wave sources (initiated by the female partner but enacted by others), stolen fatherhood was constructed by the men as a form of IPV. Alan articulated stolen fatherhood in different ways, via his wife's physical and psychological abuse of him "in front of the kids" and threats of him, "You'll never see those kids if you walk out that door" and via lamenting lost parenting opportunities—"Missing the kids is the biggest thing in my life that I miss the most." Knowing the weaknesses and sensitivities of the other party is considered valuable in cases where couples fight (Hyden, 1994). Mike reflected that in relation to the children, "she knew that the one thing I really wanted out of this was you know to have interaction and be part of their lives." For men, the removal of

fathering experiences was the most powerful and long-lasting form of IPV they experienced. This was viewed as an assault on both their public and private identities.

Conor's stolen fatherhood involved accounts of how he was unfairly separated from his children because his wife made a (false) allegation of sexual abuse against him removing the children from their home for a period of 11 weeks. Conor took an active role as a father trying to restore normality for his children. He expresses extreme disappointment and bias from social services:

> Constant, constant phone calls to social services . . . I'd eventually get to talk to somebody. One of them actually said to me that I should seek a section 20 order which is, you know, to see if the kids would go into care . . . Why put the kids into care? You know, they come home . . . they can come home and live with me . . . I'll have whoever she likes will supervise. I don't care who it is. Kids back at home, going to their normal school . . . Putting the children through a sexual abuse investigation, completely unnecessarily, is abuse in itself or tantamount to abuse . . . I have done nothing . . . and they [social services] didn't seem to give a fuck . . . you know, even talking about it, it makes my blood boil.

Conor uses metaphor to express the bias requiring two witnesses present when he was eventually granted restricted interim access to the children he previously had sole care for because he was "the accused" and she had no one supervising her because she was "the victim." Conor expresses frustration with social services alleging their gender bias against him in light of his assertion that the children have been wrongly removed from their home and are unsafe with their mother as she was unreliable and volatile: "I mean you leave the kids with a potential abuser because it's alright, it will come out in the investigation? Because it's a woman? If that was a bloke, there's no way that would happen."

Bias against vulnerable men has been recognized within social systems before (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004). Although Conor was not "vulnerable" in Ferguson and Hogan's sense, he was rendered vulnerable by the way he was managed. Mike's account of lost fatherhood was expressed via his experience of "parentectomy" (Summers & Summers, 2006) when his wife took their children out of the country without his consent. Mike instigated an application to the English courts through the Hague Convention to return the children home. This whole process took 3 months, which translated into 3 months of "stolen fatherhood." The lack of urgency in which Mike felt support workers ascribed to the men's plights as separated fathers could be

constituted as the practice of “ideological denial” of the men’s rights as fathers, favoring the practice of femininity (Cohen, 2010). He highlighted how he was *annihilated* by a psychologist who submitted a report to court based on one observation.

It is not surprising that the fatherhood narrative took up the most space in the men’s biographies, given the accounts of systematic removal of children from their lives. Taking into account the assertion of self-relations as constituted by that which is valued to them (Philbin, 2009), the fatherhood narrative (and its associated identity) is clearly the most valued by the men presented in this study. It is suggested that fatherhood for these men was one of the few available valued identities in which to narrate one’s biographies, representing a “local culture” of acceptable discourse (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Fatherhood is an attribute that is associated with hegemonic masculinity—both in the ordinary sense and biologically (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). The utilization of socially acceptable identities in which to portray oneself has been identified in studies of motherhood (Neuhouser, 1998). The portrayal of fatherhood through narrative representation illustrates a similar “doing” of a gendered role through the medium of language.

Fatherhood narratives elucidated where the men were most vulnerable, not in a physical sense but within the broader context of the society in which they situated themselves. The medium by which they were abused was via access to their children. The use of children as a means to hurt the other partner is not unusual in the practice of domestic abuse of both women and men and has been illustrated in other studies (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, & Watts, 2006; Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007). The exclusion of fathers from their children’s lives has been long recognized as a social problem in Ireland and one of the areas in which “gendered” practice continues (Featherstone et al., 2007). In Ireland, this is more pointed by the exclusion of fathers from the text of the Constitution of Ireland, in contrast with mothers who are clearly specified (McKeown, 2001).

The Good Husband Narrative

Two elements formed the “good husband” narrative: accounts of being a good provider and accounts of being a loyal and loving husband. In a similar fashion to the fatherhood narrative, the presentation of self as “good provider” contrasted strongly with their presentation of selves as penalized providers. For example, Mike “was a very very successful . . . international sales guy.” Expressions of such success implicitly positioned him as a good provider. The contrast of penalized provider status is evident in his biographical trajectory, which highlighted that “at that point in time, to have

a house and feed myself and have somewhere to have the children . . . I had about £8 a week for survival, (laugh), and that was my, my life you know." Alan positioned himself similarly in his capacity to provide well for his family. His repeated expressions of the fact that he was making "good money" enabling them to upgrade their home a total of three times in a period of economic recession in Ireland made clear that the self as good husband was something worth expressing and usefully contrasted with the self as abused man. Alan used the term "nice life" a lot in describing his material wealth and financial success. Alan's efforts to demonstrate his success in this role is notable considering he experienced the most physical abuse. He was providing in spite of experiencing IPV:

> I'd come home from work and things would be fine. The money would be coming in; things would be grand I wouldn't be allowed to sit at the table . . . I was the breadwinner, I earned all the money, I did everything I could . . . I gave her the money.

Amplifying one's role as a provider could also be viewed as a positioning mechanism for illustrating the unjust nature of the abuse that was experienced (Goffman, 1976). "Giving her the money" meant that he was holding up his side of the bargain in relation to negotiated gender roles. Conor's accounts of being a good provider became evident through his narrations of making "sure all the bills were paid." His narrative contrast after his parentectomy illustrates a penalized man, portraying his current poverty situation as an outcome of his IPV experiences:

> She's left me paying her loans and all types of her debt that she created . . . And maintenance . . . I, I have nothing to live on, nothing. I mean I have €90 a month to live on at the minute.

In Ireland, the social order of masculinity remains heavily influenced by Catholicism and organized around marriage, family, and heterosexuality (Ferguson, 2001). One performative element of this constructed public identity was that of a hardworking man who is a "good provider" for the family (Ferguson, 2001). Narration of this "investment role" (McKeown, 2001, p. 10) elucidated the men's commitment to conforming to the dominant masculine hegemony of the provider role of men in Irish society (Connell, 2005b; Ferguson, 2001, 2002).

Accounts of being a loyal and loving husband also formed part of the good husband narrative. Love, it appears, justified the men's decisions to marry, stay together, and acquiesce to the abuse they experienced. The use of love in

the men's narrative expression was constructed as commitment to fulfilling one's promise as a husband to his wife in marriage. This portrayal of commitment illustrates the participants' values in keeping promises, as a masculine expression of honor. Alan expressed,

> From the time I fell in love with her, I was in love with her. And I couldn't see that she didn't love me. And I thought that one day she would. And I thought if I did what she wanted, and made her happy, that she would be happy.

Mike expressed, "I really deeply loved her when I was married to her and I've no feelings, I mean as in I haven't a feeling for her, I don't hate her." Conor's argumentation of his being a bit of a traditionalist implies his commitment to marriage (the couple married as soon as they discovered his partner was pregnant). Drawing on romantic discourses of love as a strategy to support the choice to stay in an abusive relationship has been found in similar studies of women (Baly, 2010; Hyden, 1994; Jackson, 2007). According to Farley, love offers a way of "faithful seeing," in which bad points of the other are overlooked (Farley, 1990[AQ11]). Love narratives also reflect the situated sense of hopefulness about the relationship, which is often cited as a reason for staying in an abusive relationship (Hyden, 1994). It is suggested that assertions of love in this sense held the men hostage to their original promises at marriage. The expression of self through commitment to love represented a strategic use of narrative where the narrator was portrayed as honorable, sustaining a masculine identity.

The fatherhood and good husband narrative represented what Plummer (2003) terms Public Identity Narratives. These narratives, influenced via contemporary media, influence the portrayal of self in the public eye and as such define acceptable discourses of practice from which individuals interpret meaning and choose to perform (or not) (Plummer, 2003). The metanarrative of "excluded fathers" is a pertinent issue in contemporary social discourse (Featherstone et al., 2007; Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; McKeown, 2001). The presence of the fatherhood and good husband narrative threads above all others illustrated the biographical commitment the men had to these legitimate identities and represented "standpoints" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 105) or "canonical stances" (Bruner, 2004, p. 694) from which the storying of masculinity in the ordinary sense could be best portrayed (Edley & Wetherell, 1999).

The Abuse Narrative

The abuse narrative delivered powerful information about the IPV life story. Unlike the fatherhood and good husband narratives, the abuse narrative strategy the men used was distinctly different, characterized by a different pattern of telling, uncharacteristic from the language patterns and narrative style used in the other sections of their storytelling. Not once in any of the interviews did the men express themselves as "victims" nor did they use this term in any of the interviews. The three cases provided exemplars congruent with typical abuse definitions (e.g., Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002~~Krug et al., 2002~~). The practice of "intimate terrorism"—the exercise of violence and control by one over another mostly attributed to be something done by men to women (Johnson, 2006, 2011) was also identified in Alan's case. The following sections illustrate some examples of IPV abuse narratives.

> I'd lock myself into the bedroom . . . she would kick the door, and thump it until she got in . . . she would come in and attack me. . . . The key was gone off the toilet door and she could just walk in . . . As I said I'd, I'd be locked out of the house. I often slept in the backyard with the dog. I'd go to work in the morning, I'd shave in work. (Alan)

> I'd be on my knees, I'd beg her, I'd hold on to her, she used to hit me, kick me in the groin. She'd scratch me, thump me, I'd go sick at work [participant crying]. I wouldn't go in, my face would be torn. I often had black eyes, though she was small, 5 foot four, and I was, I'm 6 foot . . . Sometimes, she'd wait until I went to bed, and she'd hit me when I'd be asleep. (Alan)

> A Samurai sword . . . Now it was sheathed . . . the end of it, the handle with the metal bit on it, the grip. I'm getting this whacked over me and I was fast asleep and she's belting me with this . . . I just covered my face and she cut me with it on my arms and that and I was really shaken and I just screamed at her to stop . . . that was the worst, that was the worst she'd ever hit me. (Conor)

> She started, really laid into me . . . I mean really started to kick me and thump me . . . she was screaming and the kids came into the room and all I could think of doing was just rolling up in a ball. As I did that she actually jumped . . . jumped on top of me and kept jumping and jumping on top of me and my son, em, came running over and said "look leave daddy alone and all this kind of stuff" . . . I was just saying to her just stop, stop, stop, stop. She wouldn't, she just would not stop . . . kicking me and everything else and then my daughter arrived and she got involved and it was just horrendous . . . she seemed to be in

> like, like this red mist and she was just going completely berserk and she was scary looking. (Mike)

Abuse narratives are characterized by a lack of the authoritarian voice often associated with masculine storytelling (Plummer, 1995). It is suggested that the chaotic nature of the language (in contrast with the other two narratives) resulted from a lack of available discourse in practice in communicating this particular part of the masculine self. The terms used in this narrative represented a clear positioning of oneself as powerless and weak. For example, accounts of “I wouldn’t be allowed,” “I slept outside with the dog,” “She was scary looking,” “She’d make me clean,” and “I was screaming” are not usual language in men’s vernacular (and was uncharacteristic compared with the men’s overall life story accounts). This could be akin to “narrative slippage” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 109) from the dominant public narratives, in which the men make sense of themselves within their life stories (Bruner, 2004).

In the context of this study, it is suggested that the abuse narrative constituted the “forbidden” narrative, which was unbelievable in terms of its content and narrative style but also by the inextricable link between femininity and victimhood (Allen-Collinson, 2009a, 2009b). As highlighted earlier, the abuse narrative was notably difficult to articulate (Plummer, 1995) and directly challenged the men’s gendered assumptions of themselves, given that discourses of victimhood and vulnerability are not “known” within a masculinist discourse (Burr, 2008). Although some would also argue that discourses of vulnerability are counterproductive within feminist discourses (Hyden, 1994), the availability of the discourse is useful for women who seek help in relation to IPV (Loseke, 2001). The abuse narrative was articulated as a largely private experience in this study. Exposing private narratives renders individuals publicly vulnerable, so keeping this aspect of their lives private seemed reasonable (for as long as was feasible). The embodiment of masculinity via physical size and strength was a challenge, particularly when men were articulating accounts of victimization (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; Migliaccio, 2001). Narratives of being abused illustrated the dilemma of men’s bodies belonging to the kinship group of men, yet their stories “belonged” to women (Butler, 2004; Courtenay, 2000).

There are several limitations to this study. As acknowledged in previous research (Watson & Parsons, 2005), men who seek help represent a small minority of victimized persons. This purposive sample of three abused men, although small, serves to create insights about how this phenomenon is talked about among this particular population. The interviewer in this study was

female and although this was voiced by the participants as preferable to a male interviewer, it is a potential limitation, given the overarching influence of gender discourses in society (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). However, this potential limitation was counteracted somewhat by the conduct of interpretive panel analysis, which obtained both male and female perspectives about the narrative strategies during data analysis.

Conclusion

The problem of IPV continues to be problematic within societies worldwide. The dominant discourses surrounding IPV and masculinity have the potential to influence how men who are abused by their female partners seek help from health and social care providers. Narrative models (Bruner, 2004) or plausibility structures (Berger & Luckman, 1966[AQ12]) are means by which the particular cultures can be characterized. This study identified that the narrative structures of fatherhood and being a good husband appear to be acceptable and plausible channels of discourse for men experiencing IPV. This study has highlighted that the abuse narrative remains for men a difficult means from which to articulate stories of experiencing IPV~~the abuse life story~~. This may have implications for service providers who may directly question abused men without effect. Subscription to masculine norms seems to be a paralyzing factor, articulated as prolonging men's relationships and preventing help-seeking (Allen-Collinson, 2008; Cleary, 2004; Migliaccio, 2001). Agencies who work directly with vulnerable men may benefit from understanding the appropriate narrative structure from which to discuss family issues.

The marked difference of the structure and form of the abuse narrative reiterates the fact that IPV remains an "unbelievable" or "forbidden" discourse for male victims (Allen-Collinson, 2009a, 2009b; Migliaccio, 2002). The findings of this study suggest that a broad questioning technique (e.g., "How are the children? How are things at home?") would be potentially more useful than direct questioning of IPV from support workers if the promotion of an IPV disclosure from a man is desired. This practice is already advocated in some settings (e.g., Kenny & Ni Rian, 2008), and has yet to be evaluated for its effectiveness. IPV is a serious problem —regardless of gender. It is hoped that the findings of this study prove useful in generating meaningful solutions to assist victimized men and will prompt further investigation into this under-researched area.

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Note

1. A "parentectomy" refers to the severing of a parent–child relationship (parental alienation) by one parent against another through making false accusations (Summers & Summers, 2006, p. 243).

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