



The invisible minority: a biographical narrative study of gay men's stories of intimate partner violence

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PhD Student: Aisling Callan

BA in Social Care

Supervisors: Dr. Melissa Corbally, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
Prof. Anne Matthews School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health,
Dublin City University and Dr Rosaleen McElvaney, Children's Health Ireland at
Connolly

Dublin City University

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Glossary of Terms /Acronyms

BNIM - Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method is both a methodology and a method for conducting narrative research.

SQUIN - Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative is the first and only question asked in subsession one of the BNIM interview. This consists of an open narrative stimulus framed by an open-ended question.

PIN - Particular Incident Narrative is a narrative that involves participants reliving a specific experience they have lived through by immersing themselves back into the historical context in which it occurred.

GIN - General Incident Narrative is a narrative concerning an abstracted story of what always happened in the participant's story.

TIN - Typical Incident Narrative is a narrative characterised by the participant emphasising the consistent recurrence of events in their stories.

BDA - Biographical Data Analysis represents the culmination of the lived life analysis pattern, serving as a comprehensive analytical procedure. Informed by the transcript, debriefing notes, BDC (Biographical Data Collection), and relevant interpretive panel analysis, this analysis provides a final summary of the individual's lived experiences.

BDC - Biographical Data Chronology involves an analytic procedure that entails organising the life story and events in a chronological order. This approach enables a structured examination of the individual's experiences and the sequence in which they occurred.

TFA - Thematic Field Analysis comprises an understanding of the told story of the individual's life narration through their gestalt, pattern and common structures. This document combined the structural analysis of the text with a thematic analysis of the data.

TSS - Text Structure Sequentialization is an analytic procedure which analyses each unit of text in the order in which they appear in a transcript.

DARNE - Description, Argumentation, Reporting, Narratives, Evaluation is an analytical formula coined by Wengraf as 'TextSort'. These five empirical judgement categories track changes in the tone of the narrator.

IPV - Intimate Partner Violence is used to describe violence that occurs in the context of an intimate relationship such as physical violence, sexual violence, psychological/emotional abuse, and controlling behaviours. The World Health Organisation (2002) emphasises that IPV can affect individuals of any gender or sexual orientation and occurs across diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds.

LGBTQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer is an inclusive term used to represent a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities.

Tusla - The Child and Family Agency is an independent legal entity in Ireland which provides an array of services aimed at addressing domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence.

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Abstract

Aisling Callan

The invisible minority: a biographical narrative study of gay men's stories of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious social problem. There is limited research on gay men's accounts of abuse. Due to IPV being socially constructed as predominantly occurring within heterosexual relationships, abuse in sexual minority relationships remains concealed within society, rendering gay men, as victims, an invisible minority. This thesis utilised Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) to interview six gay men and examined how they account for abuse in their life stories. Three cases (Will, George and Sam) were analysed using all ten stages of the BNIM analytic process. The remaining three cases (Tom, James, and Cole) were incorporated using a streamlined narrative analysis methodology.

This study revealed that gay men accounted for abuse individually, experiencing IPV that closely resembled abuse found in heterosexual relationships. This included sexual, physical, financial abuse, controlling behaviours and technology-related abuse. Sexual minority abuse, distinct from traditional abuse, was also identified. This included outing, encountering heterosexist and hostile attitudes from family members, and restrictions from the LGBTQ community.

This study identified that gay men's perception of their masculinity shaped the framing of IPV victimisation within their life narratives. Drawing from Connell's masculinity theory, it was found that discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity informed how gay men articulated their public and private accounts of abuse. Participants drew upon desirable attributes and values associated with heteronormative masculinity, mobilising narrative techniques such as minimization, generalisation, and avoidance.

Three narrative strategies were identified which characterised how gay men accounted for their IPV experiences. This included the 'Fixer Narrative', 'Invisibility Narrative' and 'Vulnerability Narrative'. These narrative strategies were underpinned by men's desire to affirm masculinity whilst also concealing vulnerability.

The study findings challenge the assumption that IPV is primarily a phenomenon perpetrated by heterosexual males against female victims. This original study makes visible the hidden issue of IPV within gay men's relationships. It is hoped that the findings of this study prompt further investigation into this understudied area.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In 1999, Island and Letellier proposed that if the sexual minority community rallied together, they could eliminate intimate partner violence (IPV) in gay relationships within ten years. This thesis, written almost a quarter of a century later, demonstrates that unfortunately, the problem of IPV in minority communities continues to persist despite calls for collective change. Merrill and Wolfe (2000) observed that it took approximately two decades for the feminist movement to bring the social problem of 'women's abuse' to the forefront of public and academic attention. Gay male abuse or IPV amongst gay men as a phenomenon was almost non-existent in the literature thirty years ago. However, it is now an emerging field of inquiry, albeit considerably smaller than the research examining abuse in heterosexual relationships. The lack of scholarly attention does not mean that gay men do not experience abuse. As Dickerson-Amaya and Coston (2019) emphasise, 'invisibility is not invincibility' (p. 1). This thesis intentionally explores in depth gay men's narratives of abuse to counteract such invisibility.

The theme of invisibility permeates much of this thesis. Those who lead precarious lives or exist anonymously, whose life stories are marginalised within hegemonic epistemologies and visible discourse are potentially invisible (Arrivé, 2020). By these premises, invisibility lies in gay men's subjectivity, wherein they remain excluded from the public gaze and paradoxically assume a role of being a "conspicuous absence presence" (Scott, 2019) or "symbolically absent" (Goffman, 1963). These identities often diverge from traditional cognitive schemas, placing them at risk of "social non-existence" (Arrivé, 2020; Macalister, 2003). The concept of invisibility also relates to this choice of research topic. This thesis represents 'invisible work' by focusing on the narrative construction of gay men who were doubly marginalised as abuse victims and members of the LGBTQ community (Nunes, 2020). My efforts to make this relatively invisible problem more visible began with the publication of a scoping review that

consolidates the existing knowledge surrounding IPV among gay men (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021) (See appendix A). In addition, I published a commentary on how nurses can identify and respond to abuse among gay and bisexual men (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2023) (See Appendix B). This thesis argues that gay men experiencing abuse embody an invisible minority within the discourse surrounding abuse, perpetuating their invisibility within broader social structures.

This thesis also explores gay men's life stories, detailing the abuse they endured. As the conduit for these narratives, it is important to share my own story as a female academic and why I chose to embark on research that primarily concerns the experiences of gay men. In doing so, I adhere to Frame's (2014) notion that reflexivity is inherent to all human social interactions. I also recognize that engaging in continuous reflexivity is a method of situating myself within this study (Pillow, 2010; Wengraf, 2006). Mindfulness of my own "politics of location" (Koch and Harrington, 1998) holds significance given the sensitive nature of this inquiry. Section 3.6 contains more evidence of my reflections regarding this research process.

My connection to this research topic extends beyond an academic interest and forms part of my own identity as a bisexual woman. For as long as I can remember, I have gravitated towards advocating for LGBTQ issues. I adorned the classroom in primary school with inclusive posters detailing vibrant rainbows. In secondary school, I based my leaving certificate project on the biography of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay American elected official. In my final year of pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Social Care, I wrote my dissertation exploring IPV within the LGBTQ community in Ireland. Upon reflection, these were all signs that led me to pursue a doctorate focusing on the abuse of gay men today.

This study was propelled by several of my own observations of the 'invisibility' surrounding this research topic. While pursuing my undergraduate studies in social care, I found an online

article detailing the experiences of a man suffering years of abuse from his wife. As the media began to broaden its scope to heterosexual men's experiences, I wondered why I had never encountered abuse stories about gay men. Eager to explore the dynamics of abuse within the LGBTQ community, I presented my research idea to my professor, who replied with a perplexing remark: *"there is not enough here, and I think you are too close to this"*. At the time, I questioned whether this insinuated that I was an abuse survivor or a member of the LGBTQ community. It puzzled me why either of those categories would hinder the pursuit of research. I became increasingly aware of the pervasive invisibility surrounding this phenomenon, even among spaces populated by the most educated of individuals. While the intent behind this comment remains unclear, it reinforced my resolve to carry out my research as planned. When confronted with invisibility, I approached viewing it from a position of light rather than darkness. I completed an undergraduate research dissertation, which explored the perspectives of practitioners in the field regarding what they observed about violence in the LGBTQ community, which was subsequently published in a journal hosted by my college. After completing a Bachelor of Arts in Social Care in 2018, I qualified in a profession characterised by working in partnership with marginalised individuals. I now challenge the notion that being "too close" to a topic would compromise the rigour of my research. On the contrary, my personal connection and empathy allowed me to approach this subject with sensitivity and deeper understanding.

Throughout the course of this study, I have been 'situated' by those around me in discussing the topic of IPV. My second encounter of 'invisibility' occurred during an informal conversation with a colleague, who expressed frustration regarding the attention given to male victims. My colleague's frustration was not uncommon but appeared caught up in the gender rivalry between male and female victims, whereby the legitimacy of one gender is pitted against the other. One remark made by my colleague emphasises this point: *'why focus on the mouse, when we can talk about the elephant in the room?'*. It was likely their intention was to highlight the

overwhelming prevalence of abuse experienced by women (World Health Organization, 2012). Some argue that the focus should be on addressing the experiences of the most prevalent victims. However, those classified as 'prevalent victims' have been given 'hypervisibility' in this field (Arrivé, 2020), meaning that women predominantly occupy this position within IPV literature.

By exclusively prioritising the 'elephant' (i.e. violence against women) in this metaphorical scenario, we risk perpetuating invisibility of the 'mouse' (i.e. violence against men). Thus, we neglect those who do not achieve visibility, but are still in need of study, support and understanding. Ultimately, by likening gay men to the 'mouse', they have been characterised as 'marginalised' (Migliaccio, 2001), their experiences deemed 'unbelievable' (Corbally, 2011) and 'unmanly' (Morgan and Wells, 2016). In societal terms, they are by comparison to the elephant, perceived as inferior and possibly irrelevant. However, I ask why not tell the story of the elephant and the mouse? It is not my intention to shift the emphasis away from female victims but to expand the emphasis towards gay men.

This study is interwoven with central themes and concepts, providing the foundation for this thesis. The title of this study recognizes that abused gay men are an invisible minority. Therefore, invisibility serves as one of the central threads in this thesis as it has compounded the way they are positioned in society and perceived as gay men, often overshadowing their public and private identities with gendered stereotypes and misconceptions. In addition, acknowledging that abused gay men are doubly marginalised by virtue of being men in this largely heteronormative world is a key position in this thesis. Typically (heterosexual) male victims are stereotyped as perpetrators as opposed to victims. This is further compounded by the fact that abuse in gay male relationships is not well understood. This double marginalisation invariably influences men's dual identity as men and as gay men as they make sense of their lives.

Social constructions of phenomena influence how individuals interpret their experiences. It follows then that gay men are influenced by social constructions relevant to them, including those pertaining to their gender. Plummer's (2003) assertion that men's private lives are influenced by their public world and the prevailing discourse that constitutes it, suggests that discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity invariably play a part. In other words, men are influenced by societal meanings and expectations that dictate what manhood and masculinity should be. These very discourses influence how gay men perceive victimhood, which in turn influence their behaviour and how they live their lives and navigate their relationships.

Biographical stories serve as a means through which both visibility and opacity can be expressed, allowing gay men to account and tell their stories of IPV (Wengraf, Chamberlayne and Bornat, 2002). Evidence suggests that by shifting public focus, we create openings or clearings for invisible figures to emerge (Scot, 2019). By applying a biographical narrative approach, this research endeavours to render the 'invisible minority' visible. It is hoped that the following chapters below will provide meaningful evidence-based dialogue, as a step towards integrating gay men into a more visible landscape surrounding IPV intervention, research, and discourse.

1.2 Setting the Scene of IPV

'Evil is unspectacular and always human and shares our bed and eats at our own table'.

- Auden (1939)

We have a long tradition of violence. From wars and conflicts to interpersonal relationships, violence has found its way into various aspects of our lives. In 1996, the World Health Organization declared violence a major public health problem. The casualties reach a toll of

millions of individuals annually (Krug et al., 2002). A further reminder of this reality is demonstrated in the quote above, as W.H. Auden (1939) talks about the banality of evil, which is not confined to extraordinary acts but subtly manifests itself into the very fabric of contemporary society. To that end, Krug et al., (2002) developed the concept of an "ecology of violence," which highlights the interconnections between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors in the occurrence of violent acts in everyday life. This perspective serves as an important framework for the present study, informing its approach and analysis. Notably, violence has been predominantly examined from a heterosexual perspective, negating the extensive reports of violence directed against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community (Parker, 2016). Within the broad spectrum of violence, ranging from hate crimes to human trafficking, this thesis examines the interpersonal violence that takes place in the intimate spaces of gay men's relationships.

Intimate Partner Violence (hereafter referred to as IPV) was selected as the operative definition for this study. This choice stems from the recognition that this terminology is widely integrated into academic discourses (Krug et al., 2002). IPV is defined as a wide spectrum of behaviours encompassing physical, psychological, sexual violence and controlling behaviours occurring within intimate relationships (World Health Organization, 2012). This definition acknowledges the multifaceted nature of abuse that transpires within gay men's relationships. Over the past decade, scholars have increasingly recognised that gay men encounter IPV in distinctive ways, frequently at rates equivalent to or higher than their heterosexual counterparts (Kay and Jeffries, 2010). However, as a marginalised group, gay men experience high rates of IPV (Finneran and Stephenson, 2014). For instance, a study conducted in the United States revealed that one in four gay men (26.0%) disclosed lifetime experiences of IPV (Breiding et al., 2013).

Paradoxically, while IPV amongst gay men is prevalent, scholarly focus on this subject remains insufficient. Gay men are described as being hidden in the margins of academic inquiry (Ristock,

2002). West (1998) termed this phenomenon the ‘second closet,’ illustrating how these men conceal not just their sexual identities but also their experiences of abuse. It is suggested that the lack of research exploring gay men’s IPV experiences ‘renders their voices invisible’ (Maxwell, 2023, p. 1). It is argued that heteronormativity operates beneath the surface of IPV conceptualization, often evading scrutiny by scholars and practitioners. For example, the abuser or survivor’s sexuality or gender identity is typically not questioned and often assumed as heterosexual and cisgender (Donovan and Barnes, 2019). Consequently, heteronormativity has shaped the public perception of IPV as an issue primarily concerning heterosexual relationships. This dominates the public story (Donovan and Hester, 2015) or what can be termed the ‘canonical narrative’ (Bruner, 2004) of IPV, influencing how abuse is understood in the ‘public consciousness’ (Allen, 2013). This study seeks to address these gaps in the literature by exploring and analysing the life stories of six gay men who have experienced IPV, to give these men a voice and render their experiences visible.

Societal constructions impact on how gay men behave. Such behaviour is influenced by expectations and norms associated with gender roles and sexual identity (van Dijk, 1993). These beliefs, values, and practices influence gay men’s performances and their understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine, as well as what is considered appropriate in terms of their sexual orientation (Goffman, 1990). But societal discourse does not solely just impact gay men. Traditionally, women are expected to embody sensitivity and attentiveness (Rudman and Phelan, 2010). In contrast, men are expected to provide, fix things, exude self-assurance, independence, and strength, while avoiding any traits perceived as feminine (Faludi, 2000). Such cultural values are deeply embedded in society, influencing how everyone, including gay men are perceived, the roles they are expected to fulfil, and the societal expectations placed upon them.

At the heart of this study is an examination of not only gay men's IPV narratives but also their understanding (and performances) of masculinity. This is because social constructs of gender and IPV are inextricably linked, whereby understanding one necessitates an understanding of the other. Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) has had a wide influence on international scholarship relating to gender. This theoretical perspective strongly informs the conceptual framework of this study. Connell (1995, 2005) recognised that within social contexts, certain groups of heterosexual men exemplify 'hegemonic masculinity', a form of masculinity privileged by society which dominates the gender order. It is characterised by gendered norms and behaviours imbued in control, emotional suppression, and invulnerability. In contrast, gay men juxtapose 'hegemonic masculinity' with what Connell terms a 'subordinated masculinity' as they occupy a lower, more stigmatised position within society. This includes men who act in any way feminine, display overly emotional behaviour, or embody traits that deviate from the traditional expectations associated with hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, in light of how heterosexuality is framed as an essential feature of maleness (Connell, 2005), gay men are perceived to be more susceptible to feminization and subordination (Messner, 1994), leading them to adopt more masculine presentations to counteract this perception. For gay men, this dynamic introduces, according to Doan (2010) 'a special kind of tyranny' where gay men struggle to conform to heteronormative norms whilst living a homosexual life. A more detailed discussion of this important framework can be found in section 2.2.1.

Crucial to understanding the invisibility of gay men is the recognition that IPV discourse is both 'heteronormative' (Ingraham, 1994) and 'gendered' (Corbally, 2011). To illustrate, Donovan and Hester (2015) suggest that the public story of IPV portrays a rigid representation of gender whereby cisgender heterosexual women (depicted as passive and smaller) are portrayed as victims who endure physical abuse at the hands of their cisgender heterosexual male partners (depicted as more powerful and physically imposing). This gendered perspective impacts how society and victims interpret this phenomenon. This study explores how gay men articulate and

make sense of their abuse, as they simultaneously interpret societal expectations related to their gender, particularly concerning masculinity, femininity, and victimhood.

Discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity form key aspects of the conceptual framework of this study (Connell, 2005; Ingraham, 1994). Evidence of the influence of these discourses amongst sexual minority communities has been identified (Cruz, 2000; Pollitt et al., 2021). Research has documented that those identifying as LGBTQ adhere to heteronormative scripts about intimacy and love, run the risk of IPV in their relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Subsequent studies have indicated that some gay men internalise heteronormative messages about their gender and exhibit hyper masculine presentations in their public and private lives (Brown, 2008; Island and Letellier, 1991; Kay and Jeffies, 2010; Parent, Johnson, and Taylor, 2023). This study examines the connection between gender and heteronormativity in the biographical narratives through which gay men make sense of and narrate their abuse. These aspects are discussed further in section 2.2.1.2.

When studying IPV in gay men's intimate relationships, it is important not to neglect the presence of love. Donovan and Hester (2015) contend that within abusive queer relationships, practices of love are the foundation for 'relationship rules' that govern how the relationship functions. The first relationship rule delineates the abusive partner as the decision-maker, depicted as vulnerable and central to the relationship. This compels the second relationship rule in which the victim oversees the emotional work of their vulnerable but abusive partner. The victim, believing in the reciprocity of love, feels a sense of duty to protect, fix and prioritise their abusive partner's well-being. These practices of love occur paradoxically alongside the victim's victimisation and abuse. Donovan and Hester's (2015) theoretical position serve as part of the conceptual framework examining how gay men navigate their relationships while investigating the role of masculinity. This is discussed further in section 2.2.2.1.

In addition to their behaviour, gender uniquely influences how men interpret and articulate their abuse experiences (Eckstein, 2009; Corbally, 2011; Migliaccio, 2001, 2002). However, little is known about how abused gay men 'talk'. This study explores how six gay men account for and make sense of their IPV victimisation, revealing itself through the deliberate presentation of self, their masculinity, and the artful crafting of narrative identities within their life stories. The following section outlines the key research questions guiding this research.

1.3 Research Questions

The central research questions which guided this study are:

“How do gay men make sense of their experiences of IPV?”

“What is the nature of IPV for such men?”

“In what way does being a member of a sexual minority group impact their experiences of IPV?”

As illustrated in the research questions above, this study examined the subjective experiences of IPV for six gay men. This involves capturing their life stories using a Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM). In light of this, this study is grounded in the interpretivist narrative paradigm. This is informed by the following theoretical perspectives. Social constructionism acknowledges the influence of social relations in generating knowledge (Burr, 2008). Under this framework, participants in this study are viewed as active agents who construct meaning in their lives through the art of storytelling. The talk they produce during story sharing is socially constructed (Burr 2008; Gubirum and Holstein, 1997; Wengraf, 2009). In other words, when telling a narrative, ‘protagonists interpret things’ (Brunner, 1990, p. 51), and the researcher uses their own subjectivity to ‘interpret their interpretations’ (Riessman, 1993, p. 5). The ‘narrative self’ is considered to be ‘locally shared’ meaning a man’s story is determined by his positioning

in their environment (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Therefore, men's life stories will reflect the wider landscape of social and interpersonal contexts. Biographical work, in particular, offers insights into the intricate construction of both public and private identities, shedding light on how individuals strategically conceal undesirable aspects of themselves to accentuate more desirable ones (Corbally, 2001; Goffman, 1990; Plummer, 2001). Consequently, in the context of recounting abuse experiences, gay men adopted specific narrative strategies. The proceeding section clarifies the structure and provides an overview of this BNIM study.

1.4 Thesis Overview

This introduction outlined the rationale and theoretical perspectives that underpinned this study. This included delineating the central threads or main themes within this thesis. For clarity, they are summarised as the following:

- Gay men constitute an invisible minority not only within their intimate abusive relationships but also in the public story of IPV and their personal positioning by others within society (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Plummer, 2001).
- Gay men in IPV relationships are doubly marginalised by virtue of their gender, as society may perceive them as perpetrators rather than victims, and because of their sexual orientation society may struggle to understand or recognize abuse in male same-gender relationships.
- Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) posits that gay men constitute a subordinate masculinity within the larger dominant structure of hegemonic masculinity in society.
- Dominant discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity inform men's positioning in their life stories.

- This study draws on Donovan and Hester's (2015) relationship rules and practices of love to explore the dynamics of gay men's relationships. Notably, this study delves into how gay men articulate their experiences of abuse within the context of their performances of masculinity.

For clarity, the structure of this thesis (from chapter two onwards) is outlined. In **Chapter Two**, a critical discussion is presented on the literature concerning IPV, along with a more thorough examination of the conceptual framework underpinning this study. This chapter critically examines the literature pertaining to what is known about abuse among gay men from an international and Irish standpoint. This begins with an exploration of history and terminology surrounding IPV with a particular focus on how victims are defined in social discourses, followed by a thorough examination of the theoretical frameworks pertaining to IPV and gay men.

Chapter three outlines the BNIM method. This section offers a rationale for selecting this method, outlining how this inductive interview style and analytical procedure was deemed an appropriate means to investigate men's accounts of IPV. The chapter presents the study design, ethical considerations, recruitment stages, data collection, and case selection. Additionally, a detailed overview of the ten stages of the BNIM analytical framework is outlined, including the twin track interpretation procedure (the lived life and told story) and implementation of interpretive panels that facilitated the depth of data analysis. Lastly, a reflective account is presented highlighting the researcher's observations and decision-making processes throughout this research study.

The findings of the study are reported in three subsequent chapters, four, five and six. **Chapter four** presents the three case accounts subjected to the complete BNIM analytic framework. They are presented under the pseudonyms **Will, George and Sam**. Exploring these biographies

indicate that men accounted for their abuse in highly individualistic ways showcasing their own distinct narrative style. They also shared common narrative patterns when articulating experiences of abuse, which are critically discussed.

Chapter five introduces three narrative case accounts presented under the pseudonyms **Tom, James, and Cole**. Notably, these cases did not undergo the BNIM analytic framework but were analysed using Polkinghorne's (1995) three-phase narrative analysis approach. This involved a) identifying data related to the denouement of the participant's story, b) organising data chronologically and exploring connections between life events, and finally c) crafting stories that reflect the plot and underlying gestalt found in the participant's cases. This process generated three 'plotted whole stories' which served as supplementary data to enrich the overall findings of this study.

Chapter six presents the findings from the tenth stage of BNIM analysis, which includes a theoretically informed cross-case comparison of all six case accounts in this study (**Will, George Sam, Tom, James and Cole**). The chapter includes in depth analysis and interpretation of the common patterns interwoven in men's life stories. The study revealed that gender and heteronormative discourses influenced the narratives of IPV shared by gay men. Findings revealed that gay men reported experiencing traditional forms of abuse, consistent with what has been documented in the heterosexual literature (psychological, sexual, and physical, economic, controlling behaviours and technology-related abuse). Gay men also described 'sexual minority abuse' which represents distinctive expressions of IPV that were specific to men's sexual marginalisation and not featured in the literature on heterosexual relationships. This can be considered a subcategory of identity abuse, showcasing how victims' exposure to minority stress led to personalised experiences influenced not only by an abusive partner but also by societal factors such as heteronormativity and homophobia. These experiences encompassed outing, encountering heterosexist and hostile attitudes from family members, and

facing restrictions from accessing the LGBTQ community. Lastly, participants articulated their abuse through three dominant narratives, including the 'fixer narrative' the 'invisibility narrative' and the 'vulnerability narrative'. It is argued that men's understanding, and performances related to masculinity were central to how they narrated their abuse. Consequently, these men favoured narrative techniques which concealed or minimised their abuse and vulnerability.

Chapter seven comprises a critical discussion of the study's results, consolidating the findings from the preceding three chapters. This section underscores the implications of these findings in bridging the divide between research, professional practice, and policy. Practical recommendations are explored, centering on how men's narratives can inform future IPV applications, policies, and interventions. At the core of these recommendations lies the imperative to amplify the visibility of the abuse experienced by gay men through the power of their narratives.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature related to the study. This has been categorised into the following interconnected areas: the conceptualisation of IPV and its underpinning theoretical perspectives, the social constructions of masculinity, and the existing scholarship examining the experiences of abuse among gay men. From an ecological perspective, the context of gay men living in Ireland will be explored. Prior to this literature review, a scoping review was completed to explore the breadth and depth of the available literature examining gay men's experiences of IPV (See Appendix A). The search took place over a 6-month period between May and October 2019. A more extensive and updated search was conducted in May 2023 with additional searches carried out on a monthly basis. New material and secondary data provided a more contemporary perspective on this research phenomenon. The following academic databases were searched: Social Services Abstracts, PubMed, PsycINFO and Academic Search Complete. There were two categories of search terms: those pertaining to IPV and those pertaining to gay men. A more detailed description of these search terms can be found in Appendix C. This chapter offers a critical analysis of the current body of literature on IPV among gay men.

2.1 The Conceptualization of IPV

2.1.1 Defining the Problem of IPV

Violence and abuse in human relationships is difficult to define. Descriptors such as battering, spousal abuse, domestic violence, and IPV all attempt to capture the phenomenon of abuse, yet their varied use leads to inconsistent research outcomes (Krug et al., 2002). Consequently, the violence literature is rife with disputes over definitions, as they are often pre-established prior to empirical investigations and have the paradoxical task of generalising a highly individualised

phenomenon (Corbally, 2011; Stark, 2009). Thus, researchers in this field are challenged with defining the scope of the problem.

In Ireland, the term 'domestic violence' has gained considerable popularity, which resulted in the perception that abuse occurred in domestic settings and relationships, often overlooking instances of violence outside the household involving non-cohabiting ex-partners and current partners (Kurz, 1996; Mahoney, 1991). Physical abuse has historically been prioritised, aligning with the criminalization of physical injuries through assault and harassment offences in Ireland (Sheehy, 2019). However, abuse definitions such as 'domestic violence' are socially constructed and have evolved over time. For instance, Irish scholars, Watson and Parsons (2005), propose a more inclusive definition of domestic violence: 'a pattern of physical, emotional, or sexual behaviour between partners in an intimate relationship that causes, or poses a risk of causing, significant negative consequences for the affected person' (p. 38). A similar framework is integrated within the Domestic Violence Act 2018 in Ireland. Despite the Act not offering a direct definition of domestic violence, it does outline a comprehensive list of eighteen factors. This list encompasses behaviours that are physically, sexually, emotionally, or psychologically abusive, incorporating coercive control (O'Sullivan, 2023).

Bonomi et al. (2006) highlight the significance of language in generating meaning within social contexts. Consequently, language plays a crucial role in how researchers communicate their findings (Mercer, 2002). It has been argued that the term 'domestic violence' carries greater recognition of abuse by incorporating colloquial language that resonates with everyday settings, as opposed to being confined to formal or academic discourse (Corbally, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2010; McWilliams and McKiernan, 1993). Thus, in this study, 'domestic violence' was used alongside 'violence', 'abuse', and 'same-sex' to communicate with gay men recruited to this study. It was hoped such terms carried greater resonance for this marginalised group in Ireland.

A universally accepted definition of abuse has not yet emerged in this research field. Each classification has its own merits and limitations, and researchers must carefully consider which definition aligns best with their specific case and objectives. As elucidated in the preceding chapter, for the scope of this study, the definition of IPV has been adopted as the operative definition. Twenty-four years ago, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention proposed that the term IPV was employed to encapsulate the intricacies of abusive dynamics more accurately (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). This effectively distinguished abuse within couples from violence directed towards children, among siblings, or within other familial contexts. This distinction proved advantageous in pinpointing a specific cohort of gay men who have encountered abuse within the boundaries of an intimate relationship. IPV revolves around abusive behaviours undertaken to wield control or establish power over an intimate partner (Mitchell and Anglin, 2009). As illustrated in Figure 1, the World Health Organization (2012) defines IPV as encompassing a spectrum of abusive behaviours encompassing physical, psychological, sexual violence, and controlling behaviours, all of which possess the potential to inflict significant harm on an individual. This categorization is frequently employed in the domain of violence-focused scholarship (Ali et al., 2016) and is intentionally comprehensive, encapsulating abuse as 'any behaviour' deemed harmful. Moreover, it deliberately encompasses diverse relationship structures, including LGBTQ relationships, as it explicitly affirms that abuse 'occurs in all settings and among all socioeconomic, religious, and cultural groups' (World Health Organization, 2012, p. 1). However, an important enhancement to this definition would be to explicitly state that abuse transcends gender identity and sexual orientation.

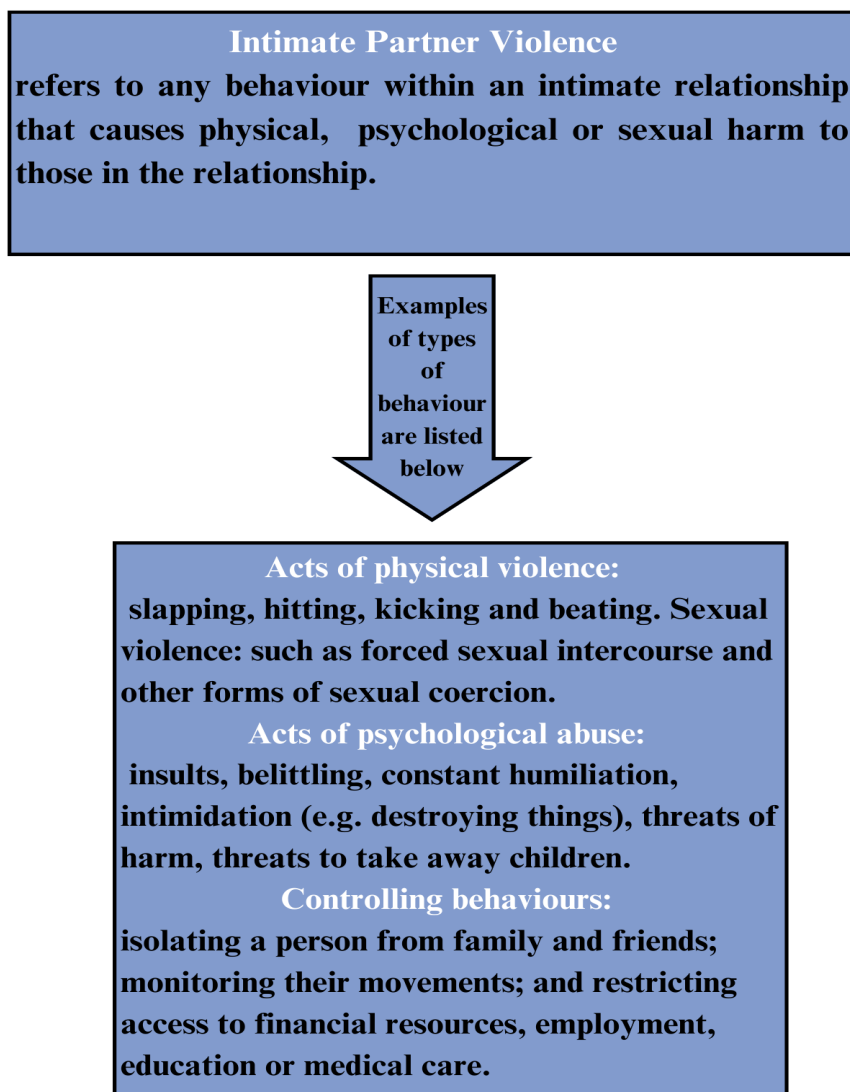


Figure 1: Definition of IPV as defined by the World Health Organisation (2012)

In summary, perhaps no universal definition of abuse exists because they are social constructs, shaped by those who define them (Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999). On the other hand, those who criticise existing definitions may inadvertently fall into the tautological trap of inserting new labels into an already diluted lexicon. In future, a more unitary definition may be needed to talk about abuse to facilitate greater collaboration among survivors, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. As Ellis et al. (2012) point out, a solution can only begin with defining the problem.

2.1.2 The Impact of Second Wave Feminism: The Public Story of IPV

In the late 1960s, the women's movement contributed to the conceptualisation of IPV (originally called wife-beating) as a male-female phenomenon rooted in political and social patriarchy. In particular, this perspective narrowed the context of abuse to women's inequality and male gender socialisation (Ristock, 2002). This is evident in the titles of early feminist work such as *The Wife Assaulter* (Schultz, 1960) or *Battered Wives* (Martin, 1976). During this time, men were afforded the legal protection, cultural and religious acceptance to abuse their wives privately (Bedard, 1990; Dobash and Dobash, 1978). It was through the grassroots of second-wave feminism that cultural taboos surrounding abuse were finally addressed and that female victims were listened to, and their abusers held accountable (Donovan and Hester, 2010). However, the metamorphosis of this issue, as defined through feminist activism, led to female victims occupying the central position of IPV and the primary target of structural-level interventions. The gendered response to female abuse resembled an 'echo chamber' in which members favoured similar gendered beliefs and joined groups formed around combating violence against women. This was done without considering any diverse perspectives on the issue (Cinelli et al. 2021). This gendered and heteronormative response to abuse was embraced in Ireland (Corbally, 2011; Cahill, 2019; Kestell 2019) and internationally (Baker et al. 2013; Cannon and Buttell, 2016).

While feminist theoretical perspectives proved useful to initially recognising IPV, they have certain theoretical blind spots in relation to the abuse transpiring outside the realm of male privilege (Baker et al., 2013). In particular, they exclude heterosexual or gay men, as well as other diverse sexual minority and non-binary victims, whose stories have not yet been incorporated throughout the breadth of violence-based scholarship. Jamieson (1998)'s work on

public narratives highlights how social issues are presented and negotiated in the context of people's public and private lives:

'Pervasive stories are a stock of narratives that anyone can draw on or distance themselves from when telling their own story...Stories also feed into both public and private lives when they coalesce into official views shaping public policies, laws and the distribution of resources' (Jamieson, 1998, p. 11)

Considering IPV as a pervasive story, Donovan and Hester (2015) assert that the popular imagination regarding this phenomenon has been influenced by feminist scholarship and activism, portraying a restricted representation of gender and sexuality. It stems from the backdrop that heterosexual women are the largest victim group observed in the majority of large-scale surveys (Smith et al., 2010). This weaves a compelling story in which cisgender women (depicted as passive and smaller) endure physical abuse at the hands of their cisgender male partners (depicted as more powerful and physically imposing).

'The outcomes have been both a story of success and a story of exclusion. The public story about domestic violence locates the phenomenon inside heterosexual relationships, within a gendered victim/perpetrator dynamic (the stronger/bigger man controlling the weaker/smaller woman), and forefronts the physical nature of the violence' (Donovan and Hester, 2010 p. 281).

The pervasive framing underscores three elements in the way society discusses abuse: a heterosexual assumption, an emphasis on physical violence and a gendered victim perpetrator dichotomy. As a result, the public story of IPV clouds what abuse is and who it impacts, especially for LGBTQ victims, who may struggle to recognise their own experiences, disclose, and receive appropriate support. As a consequence, gay men who have endured abuse might encounter difficulties in identifying their experiences, particularly when their abuse is non-physical in nature and distinct from what transpires in heterosexual relationships.

Scholars such as Davies (1998), Lamb (1999), Mitchell and Anglin (2009), Ristock, 2002 and Island and Letellier (1991) have also criticised the public portrayal of female abuse victims and the implications for individuals who experience abuse but do not conform to these traditional depictions. Nevertheless, Donovan and Hester (2015) situate the public story of IPV within the

realm of how it impacts on sexual minority victims. In the face of the growing recognition of IPV as a societal issue, this visibility is selective in nature, and often at the expense of rendering abuse in sexual minority relationships invisible. As this thesis unfolds, this public story, and how gay men tell stories of abuse, will be explored.

2.1.3 Defining a ‘Victim’ of IPV

Central to theorising IPV is identifying who is involved and who is impacted by this phenomenon. These decisions are closely affiliated with the response, meanings and seriousness attached to abuse (Kestell, 2019). They play important roles in how people label and make sense of their experiences (Muehlenhard et al., 1992). One definition constructs a victim as an individual who, individually or collectively, suffers harm. ‘Casualty’, ‘sufferer’, ‘injured person’ and ‘fatality’ are to name but a few synonyms. However, colloquial discourse refers to victims as someone who is duped, tricked, and deemed helpless (Fohring, 2018). This would suggest that the label of victim is both a source of power (access to tailored support, interventions, and social awareness) and stigma (exposure to discrimination and social prejudice). It is difficult to define abuse universally, but agreeing on who constitutes its victims is just as challenging. Despite a wealth of interdisciplinary literature concerned with constructing ‘victimhood’, no consistent theoretical perspective or definition has been reached (Jacoby, 2015). This is because the victim identity is a social construct subject to fluctuation, which some suggest is mediated by the political field or those most influential in society (Christie, 1988; Jacoby, 2015; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999). Often it is the case that those who are considered ‘real’ victims are those who are most frequently represented (Christie, 1988).

Since IPV has been a product of feminist scholarship, abused heterosexual women typify this victim category (Donovan and Hester, 2010). It is important to note that initially, battered

women were held responsible for their victimisation (Pleck, 1982). However, over time they became categorised as “innocent victims” (Bedard, 1990). Moreover, wives have been regarded as ‘appropriate victims’ due to their heightened vulnerability to being abused as ‘male property’ (Dobash and Dobash, 1978). Thus, women are the dominant figures in abuse discourse and provide a ‘regime of truth’ to who is impacted and how legal and social assistance is best delivered (Foucault, 1998, p. 107). If women are socially constructed as victims, the construction of men as perpetrators is the flip side of this. This is because violence is viewed as a masculine phenomenon (Beynon, 2002). As a result, the legitimacy of the term ‘victim’ is likely a source of contention for male victims, given that society has preemptively deemed them as perpetrators.

Christie (1986) suggests that the ‘ideal victim’ is discursively constructed as one who is easily provided with legitimate status, both known and respected by society. They inhabit an appropriation of socially constructed gendered features: a ‘weak’ older female acting out a respectable project in an appropriate location. Their offender is of significant stature, morally corrupt and unfamiliar. Likewise, Island and Letellier (1991) described the victim as someone who has been manipulated into a situation. They are ‘innocent’, ‘naive’ and seemingly void of character flaws. On the contrary, the opposite of an ideal victim (who is contrived as conventionally feminine) is a strong male conducting no such respectable projects, who is as big as the offender and thus capable of protecting himself (Christie, 1986, 2018). It is helpful to consider how the ideal victim is discursively moulded by the public story of IPV, featuring the imagery of a powerful man perpetrating physical violence towards a smaller innocent woman (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This highlights the gendered victim binary as laden with issues, particularly in two aspects: it divides women and men, depicting women as helpless in contrast to men being typecast as culpable perpetrators (Donovan and Barnes, 2018).

However, victim discourse has evolved alongside societal attitudes and interactions, particularly influenced by the momentum of feminist activism. There has been a heightened responsiveness to the struggles faced by abused women, for example (Allen, 2013). As recently purported by Christie (2018): *'Wives are not 'ideal victims.' Not yet. But they are approaching that status. They are more ideal today than yesterday'* (p.14). Notably, this statement omits any reference to gay men who experience abuse, whose status as 'ideal victims' remains a source of contention, largely due to their invisibility as abuse victims in social discourses. This is apparent given that Christie's typification concentrates on gender and age, as opposed to interconnected factors of social class, race, disability, and sexuality, recognising the distinct context of marginalised social groups (Donovan and Barnes, 2018). Consequently, the 'ideal victim' is constructed as female and heterosexual, denying legitimacy to LGBTQ individuals in how they account for their victimisation. This will likely influence how gay men make sense of their abuse and victimisation and the social performance embedded in their life stories.

Donovan and Barnes (2018) propose that, as hate crime legislation broadens its scope to protect LGBTQ individuals under the grounds of race, gender identity, and sexuality, these individuals may gradually approach the status of an 'ideal victim'. This shift also implies the need for a more comprehensive level of support and understanding for this marginalised group. However, despite witnessing a significant increase in hate crimes (as high as 29% in 2022, in contrast to the preceding year), Ireland is poised to become one of the last European countries to enact hate crime laws (Government of Ireland, 2023). This underscores the heightened contention surrounding the legitimacy of victimhood for gay men living in Ireland.

It is problematic that IPV is contrived on the notion of victimhood when gay men are noted in the literature not to see themselves as victims (Letellier, 1994; Merrill and Wolfe, 2000; KwongLai Poon, 2011). When emphasising the significance of 'innocence' in defining a victim

(Loseke, 2003), it is crucial to acknowledge the historical portrayal of gay men as deviant, morally questionable, and social outsiders (Donovan and Barnes, 2018) (see section 2.7 for further discussion on gay men's history in Ireland). Furthermore, when men are portrayed in society as strong and independent, this characterisation may prevent them from being viewed (and from viewing themselves) as victims who are simultaneously characterised as weak and helpless. Thus, gay men may intentionally distance themselves from the victim category, which is portrayed as highly undesirable and feminine (Dunn, 2012; Fohring, 2018). This would suggest that not all gay men who undergo IPV recognise their abuse at the time.

However, the struggle to embrace a victim identity is not exclusive to men; women, too, have distanced themselves from social constructions of victimhood. This distancing is often associated with perceptions of passivity, fragility, and a perceived lack of personal agency (Jagervi, 2014). Similarly, semi-structured interviews with forty heterosexual women indicate they reject victimhood due to negative associations with terms such as 'weak,' 'powerless,' 'whiny,' 'cowering,' 'hopeless,' and 'helpless' (Leisenring, 2006, p. 318). Similar themes are found in cohorts of lesbian victims (Ovesen, 2021). Victims, regardless of gender and sexual orientation, exhibit similar behaviours, including a reluctance to seek professional assistance for their abuse (Donovan and Barnes, 2020a; Donne et al., 2018). These findings suggest that managing social constructions of victimhood, which emphasise a particular mode of femininity (passivity and weakness), poses a challenge for victims regardless of their gender. Thus, abuse victims, beyond their gender or sexuality, may demonstrate resilience and break away from the conventional portrayal of passivity and other traditional female gender norms aligned with the "ideal victim" archetype (Cabin, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2018). This prompts us to question the utility of victim discourse, as its exclusionary nature likely surpasses the inclusiveness of those it portrays. This accentuates the need to revisit and redefine gendered notions of victimhood.

The literature also suggests key differences in how men and women navigate their portrayals as victims, emphasising the gendered nature of these narratives. Insights from qualitative research involving men and women in abusive heterosexual relationships indicate that women often overstate incidents of violence, while men tend to downplay or minimise the abuse they have experienced (Hearn, 1996). Adler (1981) initially theorised that men appeared either accepting or unrestrained by their experiences of abuse from their partners. However, George (1994) re-examined this notion, suggesting that men's tendencies to deny, use humour, or minimise their abuse might be more closely linked to their desire to avoid displaying vulnerability. Moreover, additional scholars have observed that male victims are more inclined to underestimate or downplay their experiences of abuse (Allen-Collinson, 2008; Corbally, 2011; Migliaccio, 2001; Zverina et al., 2011).

Central to how society defines 'victims' is holding them accountable for their abuse and responsible for ending the abusive relationship (KwongLai Poon, 2011). Victim blaming is mediated by sexism, which refers to how women and men are assigned sexual roles (Schoellkopf, 2012). This would explain why men who defy their assigned roles as the perpetrator are more prone to victim-blaming as victims (Corbally, 2011; Hogan et al., 2022; Migliaccio, 2001). This runs parallel to Christie (1986, 2018) who posits that victims who do not conform to the image of an ideal victim may struggle to find sympathy and acknowledgement. When considering the stigma associated with the term 'victim' certain scholars recommend 'survivor' as an alternative rubric to talk about abuse and those who are impacted (Donovan and Hester, 2010; Fohring, 2018). Alternatively, experts propose ditching such terminology altogether, as Ristock (2002) suggests that when sexual minorities are fitted into heterosexual social structures including 'victim' and 'perpetrator,' it contributes to heteronormativity and does not provide an accurate scope of the problem, while KwongLai Poon (2011) agrees that gay men have difficulties identifying the victim-perpetrator dichotomy and their abuse (such as mutual abuse) may not fit neatly into this category. The literature suggests that the line between victim and abuser may be more ambiguous than scholars theorise. Experts

report that both intimate partners may claim to be victims, making this binary ineffective (Jacoby, 2015; Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999), as it falsely assumes that abusers and victims are homogeneous groups when a ‘grey area’ exists, where contradictions are embedded in the presentation of oneself and the story of abuse (Goffman, 1959). Yet, on the other hand, the term ‘victim’ connects IPV to criminal justice discourse (Donovan and Hester, 2010). It also remains one of the few uniform terms collectively threaded in IPV literature (although its social construction is far from universal). Without such threads, a shared understanding and grasp of the problem is lost. The question remains how scholars collectively define and disseminate the issue in a way that empowers the person. Instead of immediately dismissing this definitional dilemma, we need to redefine what it means to be a victim. While this question is rhetorical and aimed at future scholars in this field, the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are used within this thesis. Some participants may feel more connected to the concept of victimhood, while others may resonate with the notion of survival. The usage of these terms is consistent with their widespread adoption in IPV literature and acknowledges the different perspectives of those who have experienced IPV victimisation.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in social constructionism, which acknowledges the creation of societal knowledge, concepts, and realities through social interactions and language (Burr, 2008). As suggested by Harré (2002), social constructionism delves into what it means to be human, exploring how individuals perceive themselves, others, their interactions, historical narratives, and aspirations for the future. This thesis builds on this insight to examine how abused gay men make sense of themselves, their relationships, and their world. Thus, when each participant tells a story, their ‘narrative self’ is understood as being ‘locally shared’ and shaped by his circumstances within his environment (Holstein and

Gubrium, 2000). The concept of 'positioning' is a valuable framework in this study for understanding how men adopt certain stances within their narratives, influenced by discursive practices and situational categories (Davies and Harré, 1990; Wetherell and Edley, 1999).

This section introduces the theoretical concepts in this thesis, presented in order of logical sequence, from the general to the particular. It begins with Plummer's (2003) concept of 'intimate citizenship' and Goffman's (1990) theory of self-presentation. Following this, Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) which underpins this study is introduced in section 2.2.1 and 2.2.1.1. This includes a critical discussion of the discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity as they relate to this theory (see section 2.2.1.2 below) (Connell, 2005; Ingraham, 1994). Following this, an exploration of gay men's relationships (section 2.2.2) and the theoretical perspectives underpinning these are outlined, namely Donovan and Hester's (2015) relationship rules and practices of love (section 2.2.2.1). In addition, Meyer's (2003) concept of minority stress is discussed in relation to gay men's marginalised relationships (section 2.2.2.2).

Because this thesis is concerned with IPV, the conceptual framework discusses traditional IPV paradigms to assess their relevance in understanding the nature of abuse in gay men's relationships. These perspectives include Walker's cycle of violence (1979, 2000), Johnson's IPV typology (1995, 2006), and Stark's coercive control theory (2007) which are all discussed in section 2.2.3.

Plummer's (2003), concept of 'intimate citizenship' focuses on the intersections between an individual's intimate and public sphere. Tracing these intersections acknowledges the entwining of gay men's public and private spaces. Citizenship, according to Plummer (2003) encompasses a diverse array of groups, recognized identities, rights, and societal responsibilities socially constructed through dialogue, storytelling, and an awareness of societal inequalities. However,

the experience of citizenship is not universally accessible. Richardson (1998) highlighted the exclusion experienced by gay men who fall outside the confines of traditional constructs of citizenship. In Western contexts, the notions of citizenship are often rooted in heterosexuality, shaping various aspects of an individual's life such as education, employment, legal, and political rights (Richardson, 1998). For gay men, citizenship takes on complex dimensions, frequently entailing a battle for recognition, visibility, and inclusion. This struggle is accentuated by their prior criminalization, where sexual acts between men, and less commonly between women, have been deemed a criminal offense (Mayock et al., 2009). Consequently, this study recognizes that gay men's 'intimate citizenship' underscores their invisibility and the challenges they face in aligning their public and private lives within a heteronormative society. By delving into their life stories, this study explores how the participants navigate 'gay intimate citizenship' and how this influences the understanding and articulation of their abusive experiences. The following section discusses the performativity of masculinity in society and how it relates to gay male victims of IPV.

The study of gay men requires an examination of their gender, placing this as a key focus of the conceptual framework of this thesis. As detailed below, this involves understanding masculinity, including its social constructions and performances. Inextricably linked to being assigned male at birth is the inevitable experiencing of culturally constructed notions of what a man should be, what attributes they should espouse and what society expects of them through their lifespan. These pervasive and socially constructed perspectives strongly influence social discourse and in turn affect men's decisions of how they interpret and effectively 'do' their gender role. As Beynon (2002) explains, 'men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic makeup; rather it is something in which they are acculturated, and which is composed of social codes of behaviour which they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways' (p. 2). By that definition, expressions of masculinity are influenced by cultural, geographical, and social

locations, as well as the social discourses that constitute them (Berger et al., 1995; Beynon, 2002), which also affects how men interpret and account for IPV.

The 'doing' of masculinities can be likened to a 'dramaturgical performance' (Coleman, 1990) and a 'situational accomplishment' (Kersten, 1996). Goffman's (1990) theory about how individuals' presentation of self underlines how men portray masculinity in everyday life, cognizant of the dominant societal norms and expectations. The portrayal of self takes a dramaturgical perspective, whereby men are contrived as 'actors' and their interactions are described as 'performance' that is acted out with a particular environment and audience in mind. This study extends this insight to account for how gay men 'story' IPV, which involves strategically managing the impressions they make in their interviews due to broader societal influences. This likely results in a complex interplay of social performances and narrative identities woven within the IPV stories of gay men.

Criticism has been directed at theorists who overly emphasise the conscious agency in how masculinity is performed, wherein men strategically and knowingly perform their masculinity (Connell, 1999). However, it is important to consider the influence of norms operating within the realm of gender and identity. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler introduced the concept of gender performativity in her 1990 work titled 'Gender Trouble.' In this perspective, gender is not shaped by a singular action, but rather through recurrent rituals. This stance challenges the notion of rigid gender norms that universally prescribe how individuals ought to express their gender identity. Rather, Butler (1999) proposes that norms are contextually and culturally dependent and have the potential to be questioned and reshaped. This suggests that men are not solely recipients of masculine discourses; in their actions, they may reiterate or alter these discourses in distinct ways. This holds particular relevance when considering how gay men construct narratives of being abused. Such narratives have the potential to both challenge and

validate the prevailing discourses and gender norms that surround them and potentially influence their actions and decisions.

This section has so far focused on the social performances and discourses of masculinity. However, theorising masculinity can sometimes be paper based. The following section introduces Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) as it relates to the study.

2.2.1 Theorising Masculinity

Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) stands as one of the most influential in the field of men and masculinities, which argues that to understand the social construction of masculinity in society, the examination of the interplay of power relations is essential. The choice to employ this theoretical perspective was due to its utility to understand the self-portrayal of abused gay men and their positioning in society. The term 'masculinity' is often viewed as a 'single plural' representing distinct masculinities, each associated with different positions of power (Beynon, 2002). However, Connell (2005) challenges the potential rigidity of a singular term. Her theoretical perspective highlights four distinct hierarchical facets of (or configurations of practice relating to) masculinity; hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, complicit masculinity and marginalised masculinity. Power is a key feature of this gender order and according to this theory, power is held by men who occupy stronger positions. These are discussed further in turn below.

Connell borrows the term 'hegemony' from Marxist theory to depict those who secure power and have the capacity to shape appropriate social behaviour. **Hegemonic masculinity** is the most dominant form of masculinity and largely represents a heteronormative perspective. It often involves the subordination of women and other marginalised genders, as well as the suppression of expressions of vulnerability, emotion, and behaviours considered "feminine"

(Connell, 1987, 2000, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define this as the “currently most honoured way of being a man” (p. 832). If hegemonic masculinity is positioned at the pinnacle of the gender hierarchy, some men will live up to these ideals, but most will fall short. This perspective also implies that men occupying this position wield more power over others. It is argued that men regardless of their gender are aware of their positionality and its potential precarity in societies depending on their choices.

Within Western society, hegemonic masculinity has historically been embodied by affluent white heterosexual men who emphasise physical prowess and emotional restraint (Connell, 1995; Scott-Samuel et al., 2009). Like its European neighbours, traditional hegemonic constructions of manliness hold particular value in Ireland (Madden, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity was rooted in idealised notions of family life, physical strength and agricultural work (Laoire, 2002). Prior to the end of British rule in Ireland, the Irish revolutionary years were marked by civil unrest and militarism, thus aggression and physical prowess emerged as exemplary models of hegemonic masculinity (Redmond, 2021). Hearn (1996) highlights how control, power and violence are frequently associated with masculine domination within relationships. As recently as a decade ago, men were defined by a strong Catholic faith, breadwinning and heterosexual marriage (Corbally, 2011). This ‘patriarchal dividend’ arising from perpetuating the hegemony of men (Connell 2005) foregrounds a potentially precarious status for gay men who do not subscribe to the traditional ‘family’ norms and structure by virtue of their attraction to other men. In not comprising part of the hegemony gay men are rendered deviant and portrayed as unmanly (Madden, 2010). The precarity of being gay, coupled with victimisation creates a uniquely challenging level of powerlessness for men navigating abusive relationships.

Subordinate masculinity represents less desirable and subsequently less powerful aspects of manliness as determined by society. Given that heteronormativity is the organising feature of the gender hierarchy, gay men are ‘subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices’ meaning being a gay man is associated with having less societal power. Additionally, ‘gayness is easily assimilated to femininity’ (Connell, 1995, p.78) which is also in opposition to the hegemonic position outlined above and problematic for gay male victims. In other words, the subordinate position of a gay man is defined by their homosexuality and this position is further solidified by the challenge of conforming to societal expectations that involve suppressing women and other marginalised genders. Messner (1994) echoes this sentiment by asserting that the construction of heterosexual masculinity is upheld by systematically devaluing both femininity and homosexuality, categorising them as deviations from the established norm of masculinity (p. 47). Given their subordinated masculinities, gay men are more vulnerable to societal violence; from heterosexual men including emasculating and homophobic attacks (GLEN, 1995; Mayock et al. 2009; McHugh et al., 2013; Pizmony-Levy, 2019), as well as from societal structures which invalidate any deviation from the desired gender order (Doan, 2010). While the notion that gay men may embody subordinate masculinity holds validity, it is crucial to acknowledge that they also encompass a wide range of diverse masculine expressions.

Gay victims may adopt a masculinised response to dominant norms, known as ‘**complicit masculinity**’ (Connell, 2005). These individuals need only to support, and do not necessarily enact hegemonic masculine behaviours to accrue the benefits themselves, even within the context of their victimisation. For example, evidence suggests that victims avoid acknowledging their abuse and expressions of submission in their narratives. Instead, these individuals re-assert hegemonic norms to avoid stigmatisation (Eckstein 2010).

Lastly, **marginalised masculinity** emerges from oppressive intersections between gender relations, class, and ethnicity. Some might argue that gay men, who exist on the peripheries of societal power structures, may also embody marginalised masculinity by virtue of their sexuality (OliFFE et al., 2014). In the context of IPV, gay men may exercise power and force as they lack the ability to attain patriarchal status (Hearn et al., 2012). This could perhaps provide a partial explanation for gay men's perpetration of violence within relationships. Following Connell's conceptual framework of marginalised masculinities, it is possible that gay men will continue to dominate other gay men in private and public spaces (Connell, 1995). As gay male victims in these situations, marginalised men may feel pressured to demonstrate power or force as an attempt to conform to societal expectations of masculinity (Connell, 1995; 2005). This is a key consideration for men in same sex relationships as they navigate relationships with dual masculine identities.

Whilst it can be argued that Connell has reduced the complexity of masculinity and the individualistic meaning embedded in manhood by distilling these concepts into generalised traits and characteristics within her designated categories, the potentially limiting nature of these has also been acknowledged by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) who draw attention to the view of masculinities as context-bounded, by which values of a given culture shape their meaning. This offers conceptual space for nuances in men's gender performances and for new masculinities to take centre stage. For instance, Miller (2011) introduced "caring masculinity" which recognised that men may relinquish values of dominance and act out caring roles previously endorsed by women. The rise of caring masculinities endorsed by men in Ireland has been accompanied by changing gender relations and contemporary neoliberalism recognising that masculinities are not static concepts (Hanlon, 2018). It can be argued that the social construction of what it means to be a 'man' is intricately interwoven with the construction of what it means to be a 'woman' (Connell, 1995). This is owing to the fact that masculinity and

femininity have consistently been examined in terms of their differences (Beynon, 2002). Central to Connell's masculinity theory (2005) is the view of gender as a relational concept, wherein femininities and masculinities are not isolated entities but relational sets of practices and identities. Consequently, it is important to comprehend masculinity and femininity (and masculinities/femininities) in relation to each other, while also considering the power differentials such as relational, interactional, and hierarchical dynamics (Connell, 2005). In summary, Connell's theory of masculinity influenced the development of this study, providing a crucial element of the conceptual framework for exploring how gay men perceive and navigate masculinity and femininity in the context of IPV. The next section includes a critical analysis of how gay men perform masculinity, elucidating on the behaviours, norms, and societal expectations within the gay male community.

2.2.1.1 'Doing' Gay Masculinities

Across studies, gay men are documented to display multiple masculinities and multiple ways of 'doing' gender. However, the 'tyranny' of gender, ensures that the 'doing' of masculinity for gay men is often shaped and even hindered by heteronormative ideals of gender (Doan, 2010). Research indicates that gay men value being perceived as masculine (Cruz, 2000; Dunn, 2012; Island and Letellier, 1991; Sánchez et al., 2009). Conversely, gay men might feel at ease expressing feminine traits (Hale and Ojeda, 2018). However, it is commonly observed that both gay and heterosexual men may respond negatively to effeminate behaviour in gay men (Messner, 1994; Sanchez and Vilain, 2012). The display of more stereotypically masculine traits in gay men has been termed 'straight-acting gays' (Sanchez and Vilain, 2012, p. 111). Connell (1992) referred to this as the 'very straight gay,' and Seidman (2005) termed it the 'normal gay.' This implies that despite the diversity in how gay men express their gender, their perception of masculinity remains crucial in how they present themselves and navigate their world.

The research evidence exploring masculinities within the context of gay male abusive relationships is an emerging but growing field of inquiry. Several authors suggest that gay men engage in abuse in their relationships to conform to hegemonic masculine gender norms (Brown, 2008; Cruz, 2000; Kay and Jeffies, 2010; Parent et al., 2023). Island and Letellier (1991) were the first to study the connection between masculinity and abuse in gay relationships. They suggest that the gay male abuser is 'obviously confused about the concept of masculinity' (p. 49). The authors hypothesised that gay men experience similar cultural expectations concerning male aggression and dominance as their heterosexual counterparts. Focus groups conducted by Goldenberg and their team (2016), which engaged 64 gay and bisexual men, found that similar to their heterosexual counterparts, the participants in this study framed masculinity as synonymous with 'dominant' and 'violent' (p. 5). In a sample of 117 gay and bisexual men, adherence to traditionally masculine norms, including aggression, suppression of emotions, and invulnerability, was a significant predictor of IPV perpetration (Oringher and Samuelson, 2011). Furthermore, interviews with Cuban gay couples (n=34) demonstrated that they were motivated to abuse their same-sex partners to achieve traditional masculine status. This was linked to gender role socialisation in which they were taught to uphold dominance and stoicism as children (Télez Santaya and Walters, 2011). Interviews with professionals suggest that gay men enact abuse to counteract their subordinate masculinities and experiences of feminisation (Connell, 1995; 2005; Cruz, 2000; Kay and Jeffies, 2010).

It is plausible that gay men's adherence to conventional masculine norms likely impedes their capacity to disclose IPV, especially when they perceive that being victimised threatens their core sense of masculine identity. For instance, displays of masculine norms in gay men (n=117) were associated with a reluctance to seek psychological help. The researchers emphasise that these patterns closely parallel documented behaviours in general male populations who were presumably heterosexual (Simonsen et al., 2000). Likewise, gay men who subscribe to a

masculine ideology are likely not to recognise IPV, given that it presents itself as a feminine experience (Goldenberg et al., 2016). This observation aligns with findings identified in heterosexual male victims (Bates, 2019). Considering that gay men portray a plurality of masculinities shaped by the ideals of the prevailing culture, it is plausible that masculinity equally hinders gay men in disclosing abusive relationships and accounting for their IPV experiences (Goffman, 1990).

It is evident that gender discourses which dictate the social meanings of masculinity and homosexuality hold considerable sway in the lives of gay men. It is also useful to consider Connell's work on masculinity (1995, 2005) to examine how these men present themselves and interpret their lived experiences (Butler, 1999; Connell, 1999; Goffman, 1990). For example, gay men's experiences of feminization and the subordination of their masculinity are likely to foreshadow the importance they place on their masculinity. Those who experience IPV must find ways to accommodate their victimisation and the impact of these experiences on their sense of a masculine self. As detailed below, this study explores the interplay among social discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity within the biographical narratives of gay men as they articulate and make sense of their experiences of IPV.

2.2.1.2 Discourses of Masculinity, Femininity and Heteronormativity

The examination of social discourses is a key component of this thesis, providing a lens to account for the intricate interplay of social settings, norms, beliefs, and the lived experiences that unfold in gay men's biographical narratives. Social discourses refer to the ways in which language, communication, and expressions shape and reflect societal understandings, beliefs, and norms (Gee and Green, 1998; van Dijk, 1993). These discourses extend beyond mere verbal content, involving how ideas are constructed and conveyed within a particular social context. Therefore, discourses are viewed as a form of social practice, contributing both to the

reproduction of societal structures, norms, and patterns and to the potential for social change (Fairclough, 1992). This study focuses on how social discourse shapes gay men's self-perception, their presentation to others, and their interpretation of the abuse they have experienced.

In particular, social discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity are helpful conceptual tools to examine how gay men interpret their IPV narratives (Connell, 2005). It is useful to consider Wetherell and Edley's (1999) concept of 'imaginary positions', referring to the ways in which individuals adopt certain subjectivities or positions embedded in gender discourses. This explains how men position themselves in relation to the multiple meanings of masculinity. In essence, different interpretations of masculinity may be emphasised or downplayed depending on the specific circumstances or interactions men experience. To that end, the theoretical premise of this study considers the socially dominant representations of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity, which influence how gay men perceive their worlds, their gender identities, as well as their IPV victimisation.

When examining discourses of masculinity, there are a multitude of practices and socially desirable attributes associated with what it means to be a man in society. Men are socially defined by their ability to endure pain, win and make decisions (Mutunda, 2009). The plethora of norms surrounding masculinity seldomly portray men as vulnerable with men expected to be self-reliant and become 'masters of their own universe' (Faludi, 2000). The construction of male gender is intertwined with themes of warfare, violence, aggression, and dominance (Carner, 1997). Other descriptions of the cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour include dominance, power, risk-taking, emotional restraint, toughness, and anti-feminine attitudes (Mahalik et al., 2003; Wetherell and Edley 1999). To be a man, it seems, is to be invulnerable. As Sexton (1970) argues:

‘male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body’ (p. 7)

Men discursively position themselves within social discourses of femininity, often highlighting their distinctions from these cultural narratives (Connell, 2005; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). In particular, social discourses of femininity encompass concepts such as heterosexuality, domesticity, passivity, and modesty (Rudman and Phelan, 2010). Femininity is characterised by more vulnerable modes of interaction, such as being emotional, open communication, gentle, caring for others, agreeableness, showing empathy and being selfless (Williams, 1985). Since masculinity is portrayed as the opposite of femininity, and if men avoid all things quintessentially feminine, the list above provides a baseline for what is, arguably, forbidden or at the very least suppressed. This is not to say that men ought not express empathy nor women toughness – they remain idealised societal desirable attributes. In Western society, the ideal man is portrayed as heterosexual, often displaying homophobia and animosity toward gay men which presents further challenges (Cruz, 2000). It is worth noting, that given the fluidity and socially constructed nature of gender (Butler, 1999), masculine attributes and masculinities are not just endorsed by male bodies but can be endorsed by any person such as transgender, nonbinary, lesbians and bisexual women (Cahill, 2019; Donovan and Hester, 2015).

The concept of heteronormativity is frequently examined in studies related to gender and sexuality. In this study, it serves as a conceptual framework to investigate how gay men express their experiences of IPV within heteronormative social contexts. In particular, social discourses of heteronormativity encompass societal and cultural narratives, beliefs, and norms that reinforce the notion that heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation (Rich, 1980; Van der Toorn, Plisken, and Morgenroth, 2020). In other words, discourses of heteronormativity operate on the presumption that sexual and romantic desire are exclusive dynamics of relationships

between women and men, and that individuals inherently embody roles aligned with their presumed genders. Rich (1980) coined the term ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ to describe this phenomenon. Warner (1993) captures this as the juncture where ‘humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous’ (p. xxii). Extending this perspective to the realm of social discourses, Dalley and Campbell (2006) present a similar argument:

‘Heteronormative discourses’, then, are linguistic and/or cultural practices which construct and circulate heterosexual representations, practices, and identities as the natural or normal expression of humanity. (p.13).

Social discourses of heteronormativity are regarded as amalgamations of ideas, images, and practices which circulate through human interaction (Foucault, 1998; van Dijk, 1993). Similarly, these discourses often materialise through the everyday ‘performativity’ of straightness, maleness, and femaleness (Dalley and Campbell, 2006). Yet, inherent in heteronormative discourses is the tendency to marginalise non-heterosexual individuals (Rich, 1980). This aligns with Doan’s (2010) notion of the ‘tyranny of gender,’ as gay men, based on their sexuality, face the challenge of conforming their gender identity to heteronormative appropriate behaviours and ideals. This becomes particularly pertinent for gay men with IPV experiences, who are likely to feel added tension between heteronormative societal expectations and their IPV victimisation, potentially resulting in hyper-masculine and heteronormative gender performances.

Discourses of femininity and heteronormativity play a role in shaping men’s positioning as victims, but arguably, their portrayal of themselves as masculine is crucial to their narrative presentation. Therefore, a more in-depth discussion of the theories and discourses surrounding masculinity, as detailed below, forms an integral part of the conceptual framework of this study. MacIness (1998) suggests that masculinity serves as a fantasy about what men should be in order to help them and those around them make sense of the world. In an attempt to meet often unattainable, fantasy-like gender norms, men are likely to experience strain. Joseph Pleck (1981)

introduced the concept of the 'gender role strain' to highlight how tensions arise when men's expressions of their gender roles deviate from the prevailing hegemonic masculine ideology. It also coincides with research linking conformity to hyper masculine norms with mental health disparities in men such as depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem (Gerdes and Levant, 2018). Theorists commonly interpret this as a 'crisis of masculinity'. This occurs when historical and social changes destabilise gender roles and change the experiences and expectations placed on men (Frosh et al., 2002). For example, the masculine virtues of heroism and stoicism have been interpreted as destructive and emotionally inarticulate (MacIness, 1998). Connell (1995, 2005) disapproves of the term 'crisis of masculinity', given that 'crisis' relates to disrupting a system and masculinity is not a system but a configuration of practice. Instead, she discusses the crisis of a gender order and its tendencies towards crisis. However, the term 'crisis' has evolved to reflect times of uncertainty, difficulty, and suspense, particularly in a political context, all of which relate to gay male victimhood in the context of IPV (Morgan, 2006). Since male gender norms typically depict men as devoid of vulnerability, a 'crisis' in their masculinity seems plausible. Perhaps 'vulnerability crisis' would be a more fitting term but what is clear is that gay men, by virtue of their vulnerability as victims invariably experience challenges in seeking help and support through their double bind of being men and victims (Watson and Parsons 2005).

In a similar vein, Clare (2000) suggests that the crisis of masculinity arises from the inability of men to reconcile their public and private identities, each presenting contrasting notions of masculinity. This can be attributed to the fact that public and private representations of masculinity cater to different audiences or societal contexts (Goffman, 1959). Consequently, men find themselves caught in a struggle between their feelings of vulnerability within their personal lives and the societal expectations of invincibility imposed upon them (Plummer, 2003). Such is the bind of masculinities for gay victims of IPV who have no available discourse from which to make sense of their IPV experiences. This internal conflict gives rise to a 'struggle between the world of personal love, intimacy, empathy, magnanimity and self-sacrifice, and the terrible pressures of conspicuous consumption to achieve, possess, display' (Clare, 2000, p.128).

Given that the primary focal point of this study is gay men, the following section explores how masculinity impacts gay men navigating an abusive relationship.

2.2.2 Gay Men's Relationships

Over the last 50 years, relationships among gay men have transitioned from being concealed in society, characterised by a 'love that dares not speak its name', to now occupying a more prominent position in social discourses (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2007, p. 406). The study of gay men's relationships is a key focus in this thesis, crucial for understanding how abuse manifests within this population. However, when it comes to studying IPV in relationships, most research prioritises the male to female relationships, focusing on the recruitment of married and cohabiting heterosexual women. Baker et al. (2013) term this the 'heterosexual marriage model.' Consequently, gay male victims have been largely excluded from pivotal discussions about their relationships and IPV experiences. This has prompted scholars to develop specialised frameworks concerning this population. Donovan and Hester (2015) suggest that heteronormative practices of love and relationship rules are crucial to understanding how power and control manifest in sexual minority relationships. This implies that, in the absence of established social and gender norms for gay relationships, they may adopt conventional heterosexual scripts for their romantic partnerships. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the current study due to its attention to the distinct context of abuse in LGBTQ relationships. It constitutes a key feature of the conceptual framework and is elaborated in greater detail below.

2.2.2.1 Practices of Love and Relationship Rules

Donovan and Hester (2015)'s theoretical perspective originated from the findings of the 'COHSAR'¹ study, which combined a community survey (N=746) and qualitative interviews

¹ COHSAR is an abbreviation for 'Comparing Heterosexual and Same sex Abuse in Relationships'

(N=68) of self-identified lesbian, transgender, gay and heterosexual men and women. This facilitates a comparison of IPV experiences between heterosexual and same gender relationships. This study utilised a feminist epistemological approach, exploring how gender and power operated in same-gender and heterosexual relationships and found that abuse manifested according to ‘relationship rules’. By nature, these rules are socially produced or based on “everyday expectations of adult relationships assumed and constituted through dominant socially and culturally produced scripts about adult intimacy’ (P.132). The usage of ‘rules’ highlights that they are imposed on the victim at the behest of the perpetrator, and if they are broken, a punishment would likely follow. **The first rule describes how the relationship revolves around the abusive partner who serves as the decision-maker, positioned as in control of the relationship.** Despite how decision-making is often associated with social constructions of masculinity performed by heterosexual men, the abusive partner, irrespective of their gender and sexual orientation sets the terms of the relationship, one of which may stipulate that they are abnegated from responsibilities such as contributing to the relationship financially, childcare or household maintenance (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Matched by the perpetrators' expressions of need, vulnerability and control is the victim's displays of care and concern for the perpetrator.

The second rule ensures that the victim acts as the caretaker, overseeing the emotional work of their abusive partner, who is portrayed as simultaneously vulnerable and volatile.

Although usually associated with descriptions of femininity, the abusive partner's displays of fragility and neediness are tactically employed to assert control and deflect responsibility. By enacting relationship rule two, victims may struggle to acknowledge their abuse, given their displays of agency, unwavering loyalty, and concern for their abusive partners. This directly challenges the imagery of how abuse victims are commonly presented in the ‘public story’ of IPV as passive, helpless, weak, and subjugated. It is suggested that such victims may not see themselves as victims in this depiction, but as emotionally resilient, strong, and proactive (Donovan and Hester, 2015). While the role of caregiver is usually assumed by heterosexual

women (Williams, 1985), Donovan and Hester (2015) found that taking responsibility for, or attempting to fix, the abusive partner (under rule two) were particularly prevalent among women in their cohort. They did, however, acknowledge that individuals of any gender or sexuality can embody relationship rule two, offering assistance, loyalty, feeling responsible and even attempting to fix or rescue their abusive partner.

Few studies have investigated the ways in which gay men assume responsibility for or endeavour to care for and fix their abusive partners. Toerien and Durrheim (2005) asserted that social constructs of masculinity shape how men articulate themselves, present to others, and construct their gendered identities. Therefore, it is important to explore the influence of masculinity on how gay men navigate and interpret the rules and love embedded in their relationships. Exploring the dynamics of relationship rules in the context of gay men's experiences of IPV illuminates the nuances of how these rules get enacted in male to male abusive relationships. It also sheds new light on how gay men not only navigate relationship rules but also negotiate their own self presentation, the interpretation of their abuse and the intricate dynamics of their masculinity and victimhood.

Donovan and Hester (2015) contend that practices of love are key components in understanding the abusive dynamics and relationship rules in sexual minority relationships. In adult interpersonal relationships, discourses on love often encompass notions such as privacy, loyalty, fidelity, and care. These ideals shape the expectations and values that define a romantic relationship. Despite being gendered and often aligned with heteronormative ideals, discourses of love can be adopted by any individual irrespective of their gender or sexuality. However, in an abusive relationship, these messages are often manipulated by the abusive partner to induce guilt and self-blame in the victim. Therefore, practices of love become part of a 'perpetrator's toolkit,' serving as a context and means for perpetrating IPV (Donovan and Hester, 2015, p.

128). In particular, the abusive partner uses the pretext of their own need and vulnerability to rationalise their abusive behaviour, evading responsibility for their actions and obligations in the relationship (rule one). This compels the victim to carry out practices of love, whereby they remain in and strive to improve their relationship, ultimately providing emotional support for the abusive partner they deeply care for and love (rule two). Therefore, practices of love contribute to the victim's confusion about the dynamics of an abusive relationship, impacting their ability to recognize and make sense of their experiences of IPV.

Based on a UK context, Donovan and Hester (2015) offer a nuanced perspective to IPV related to gender and sexuality. This study demonstrates that those in sexual minority relationships are influenced by dominant ideas about heterosexual relationships, including gendered scripts and narratives. However, individuals perform these scripts regardless of their own gender or sexuality. In other words, gender is not binary, and expressions of 'masculinity' are not confined to gay men, nor 'femininity' fixed to lesbian women. Instead, they are unique to the portrayal of self (Goffman, 1990). Donovan and Hester's work notably deviates from IPV theorisation, contingent on the fixed binary of gender and unitary conceptualisation masculinity and femininity. Overall, research has supported Donovan and Hester's theorisation, highlighting how practices of love and relationship rules serve as a primary lens to explain abuse in sexual minority relationships (Butterworth, 2018; Cahill, 2019; Hoefl, 2016; Knight and Wilson, 2016; Ovesen, 2021).

2.2.2.2 Minority Stress

While Donovan and Hester's relationship rules and practices of love are primarily used in this thesis, it is almost impossible not to discuss the concept of minority stress when examining gay men who come from a sexually marginalised position in society. It has been nearly three decades since Meyer (1995) first discussed the concept of 'minority stress' to explain the lived realities of gay men in society who reported elevated degrees of stigma and disparities in their health

(Meyer, 2003). However, predating this, Brooks (1981) laid the groundwork for the concept of ‘minority stress’ to explain how lesbian women contended with “negative life events” arising from their existence within marginalised communities, transcending boundaries of sex, race, and sociosexual preferences (p. 71). Similarly, Goffman (2009) delved into the heightened anxiety experienced by stigmatised individuals during their social interactions.

The Minority Stress theory put forward by Meyer (2003) refers to the excess or additive stress uniquely experienced by sexually marginalised groups. This stress presents along a continuum from distal to proximal. Distal stressors describe daily events and experiences outside the individual. Proximal stressors involve internalised stress transmuted through socialisation and cognitive processes. Thus, gay men are known to experience both proximal stressors (such as internalised homophobia and concealment of sexual identity) and distal stressors (violence, discrimination, and harassment) (Rollè et al., 2019). This minority stress model has since expanded as a sociological and psychological framework to investigate the health disparities experienced by sexual minority groups (Mayock et al., 2009). Similarly, Lewis and colleagues defined minority stress as the following:

‘Sexual minority stress is a multifaceted construct that includes experiences specifically related to one's sexual minority status such as: identity concealment and confusion; experienced and anticipated rejection, victimisation and discrimination and internalised homophobia/sexual self-stigma’ (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 251).

The concept of minority stress has stimulated a large body of empirical research. Notably, its applicability to examine IPV among gay and bisexual men has been widely documented. In particular, this model recognises the impact of heteronormative structures and unique dynamics of abuse evident within gay men’s relationships (Berke et al., 2023; Brown, 2008; Edwards and Sylaska, 2013; Finneran et al., 2012; Longobardi and Badenes-Ribera, 2017; Rollè et al., 2019; Stephenson and Finneran, 2017). Nevertheless, there exists a debate surrounding this theory. Donovan and Hester (2015) argue that research on the connection between minority stress and violence in relationships yields inconclusive findings. For instance, there are uncertainties around whether minority stress is a consequence or a driving force behind IPV in LGBTQ

relationships. Until these questions are definitively addressed, the precise role of minority stress in abusive LGBTQ relationships remains unclear.

The complexity surrounding this concept is compounded by the variations in how researchers define and measure 'minority stress', which frequently rely on quantitative methods. For instance, Stephenson and Finneran (2017) assessed internalised homophobia, sexuality-based discrimination, and racism as indicators of minority stress in sexual minority men in their online survey, highlighting a significant correlation to this cohort reporting IPV. In contrast, Lewis et al. (2012) concentrated on substance use as a signifier of minority stress, while Balik and Bilgin (2019) focused on internalised homophobia, discrimination, and outness as dimensions of minority stress. Perhaps these variations are indicative of the complex nature of minority stress. Comparable debates pervade the violence-based field, highlighting similar disagreements about the methodologies and classifications utilised to define and measure abuse or violence in LGBTQ relationships. This speaks to the broader issue of reconciling diverse perspectives and methodological approaches in this area of study.

Donovan and Hester (2015) express reservations about the utility of minority stress due to its leanings towards a psychological and individualistic approach instead of embracing a framework rooted in social positionality and intersectionality. This viewpoint surfaces within the context of a growing trend in this field, where researchers employ individualistic psychological frameworks, while paradoxically acknowledging the socially constructed nature of IPV (Donovan and Barnes, 2018). However, in narrative biographical studies, the potential neglect of social processes is mitigated, as they delve into the intricate interplay between societal and individual assumptions and processes, which play a pivotal role in how life stories are formed (Wengraf, 2011).

In summary, it is difficult to study abuse in this sexually marginalised community without acknowledging the potential for 'minority stress'. Thus, the concept of 'minority stress' is useful in this thesis to examine social landscapes of gay men's relationships and to examine if and how participants' descriptions of IPV are influenced by their affiliation with a marginalised sexual community, and how this has potentially influenced the construction of men's life stories. The following section examines paradigms and perspectives relating to IPV.

2.2.3 Traditional IPV Perspectives

Skinner (1981) suggests that the strength of any theory lies in the amalgamation of theory and empirical investigations. However, as mentioned earlier, existing research on IPV primarily focuses on the experiences of heterosexual female cohorts rather than LGBTQ populations. While this study has looked at theoretical perspectives based on sexual minority participants, it is important to also consider traditional IPV paradigms to see if they apply to abuse in gay relationships. These perspectives include Walker's cycle of violence, Johnson's typology, and Stark's coercive control theory, which are further detailed in this section.

In 1979, Walker developed a theoretical framework to comprehend the cyclical dynamics of abuse, consisting of three phases: the tension-building phase, the acute battering episode, and the honeymoon phase (Curnow, 1997). However, this framework originated from a small non-randomized cohort of women, which Walker acknowledged as not being suitable for generalisation (Dutton and Golant, 2008). The cycle was initially focused on the enactment of male violence arising from the patriarchy, which she labelled "the battering cycle". Consequently, further research is needed to examine its applicability to understanding violence in the relationships of gay men (Walker, 1979, 2000).

The abuse cycle begins at **the tension-building phase**. This is marked by a slow and gradual escalation of violence, wherein the male abuser uses discreet hostile tactics to unsettle the female victim. In response, women may draw on anger reduction techniques as a means of placating their male partners (Walker, 1979, 2000; Curnow, 1997). According to Walker, female victims may learn to predict the next stage, known as **the acute battering episode**. This stage encapsulates the abuser's uncontrollable charge of violence and tension. In response, the female victim focuses her efforts on survival (Goodmark, 2009). Arguably, the representation of the abuse cycle as ending typically in physical abuse runs the risk of overlooking other abusive behaviours such as psychological or sexual violence. This is concurrent with the predominant focus of the abuse field on examining physical violence (Stark, 2007). Shortly after the abuse episode, the couple enter **the honeymoon phase**. The male partner is characterised as remorseful for their violent behaviour. There follows an absence of tension and violence, replaced by gestures of remorse, promises to change, prompting the victim to reinforce their commitment to the relationship (Curnow, 1997; Walker, 1979, 2000). It is inevitable that a cycle of chronic violence will repeat itself unless some sort of intervention is taken (Goodmark, 2009). Walker was one of the first to provide access to empirical-based descriptions, generating a popular rubric to understand abuse (Barnett, 1993). However, the three phase typology likely over simplifies the multifaceted nature of IPV. For example, the cycle was amended with fourteen additional stages by Johnson (2006). Goodman (2009) remarked on the coherence of a simple construct that bestows a clear narrative of a villain and victim. However, I argue that this narrative is of men as the villains. In addition, the theoretical foundation is based on heterosexual relationships which rendered gay men invisible. Despite this, researchers have highlighted the conceptual similarities between the cyclical nature of abuse within gay couples and Walker's typology (Cruz, 2000; Cruz and Firestone, 1998; Dutton, 1994). This would suggest that the aetiology of violence found in gay relationships is similar to that of heterosexual relationships.

In the early 1990s, Micheal Johnson (1995, 2006) introduced one of the most influential typologies of IPV to date (Anderson, 2009). Despite drawing on a representative sample of women who attended IPV refugee centres in America, the theorist exerted broader generalisations to which he described IPV as having four distinct patterns including intimate terrorism, violent resistance, situational couple violence and mutual violent control. One defining characteristic of **intimate terrorism** is the unilateral perpetration of abuse by one intimate partner (also known as an intimate terrorist), most typically that of a man who wields violence towards a non-violent female (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). This aligns to the original theoretical representation of 'domestic violence' and may include acts of physical abuse, coercion, intimidation, and male privilege etc. (Johnson, 2008). Like Walker's theory, the theoretical underpinnings of intimate terrorism are gendered, in which men are assigned the role of the abuser. The typology itself was initially designated as 'patriarchal terrorism' to convey its explicit focus on systematic male violence (Johnson, 1995). In the absence of patriarchal relationship structures, Johnson (2006) ascertained that gay men could not be the subject of 'patriarchal terrorism'. However, it is difficult to support Johnson's objectivity due to the inevitable gender bias, as he had no access to this cohort when making this deduction nor does he account for how gender socialisation amongst gay men can be similar to§ that of heterosexuals (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Furthermore, research has since challenged this notion, reporting that men have been the subject of abuse and control that can be framed as intimate terrorism (Corbally, 2011; Migliaccio, 2002).

On the other hand, **violent resistance** is constructed around women's resistance to intimate terrorism. This entails a non-controlling female whose male partner is both violent and controlling (or an intimate terrorist). The physical violence in response to intimate terrorism by a female victim is construed by Johnson (1995, 2008) as an extension of self-defence and their innate strength and resourcefulness. Unlike intimate terrorism, **situational couple violence** departs from a one-directional view of abuse, one in which both genders may enact violence. It

is rooted in the mutual conflict by both women and men who desire to control a specific situation as opposed to one another (Johnson, 1995). However, the theoretical distinction between control over a 'situation' as opposed to a 'partner' is clouded by ambiguity. In situations in which conflict is evoked, controlling a situation is very much entwined with one's attempt to control their partner (Anderson, 2009).

Lastly, Johnson (1995, 2008) briefly discusses the fourth pattern which he calls **mutual violent control**. This is characterised by both partners exercising symmetrical levels of control and violence. In other words, a violent and controlling female is paired with a violent and controlling male (or two intimate terrorists). In the presumed absence of patriarchal relationships, Johnson (1995, 2008) initially assumed that abuse between two gay men fell into this mutual violent control category. This coincides with how abuse among gay men is often falsely perceived as mutual combat or a 'fair fight' (KwongLai Poon 2011). This misperception has been perpetuated by what is known as the "Boxing Ring" myth (Island and Letellier, 1991, p. 16). Overall, Johnson's typology frames abuse from a multidimensional perspective and presents an effective means of classificatory analysis. The utility of Johnson's typology was observed in 184 gay men and lesbian women (Frankland and Brown, 2014). This would suggest a greater level of similarity between the control and violence observed in gay relationships and heterosexual relationships.

From the careful perusal of abuse literature (including Walker and Johnson) and empirical research, Stark (2007, 2018, 2019) suggests that abuse does not always consist of severe violence or physical harm but takes on discrete forms (Entilli and Cipolletta, 2016). As a result, his twelve-year-long conceptualisation of coercive control gained prominence in theoretical literature. The premise of Stark's **coercive control theory** lies in the analogy of abuse resembling that of a hostage situation, as the perpetrator imposes regimental controlling behaviour that seeks to isolate their victim, scrutinise their behaviour and deny their agency.

This resonates with Johnson's typology of intimate terrorism but distinguishes itself by paying closer attention to the covert non-physical abusive acts, not always visible but embedded in the micro dynamics of the victim's public and private life (Stark, 2007).

Stark (2007), like Walker and Johnson, constructs IPV from a heteronormative and gendered standpoint. Originally coined the 'male dilemma', he suggests that coercive control was devised by men to preserve their traditional male privileges. However, this critically neglects the presence of abuse within gay relationships and the experiences disclosed by heterosexual male victims. Stark later recognized that coercive control can manifest in the relationships of gay men (Stark and Hester, 2019). Scholars have also identified instances of coercive control among cohorts of abused gay men (Raghavan et al., 2019).

Overall, Stark's coercive control theory reshaped the academic landscape by encouraging abuse experts to examine the individualised nature of abuse, in which the perpetrator uses their own intimate knowledge of the victim to subvert their liberty (Sheehy, 2019). Stark's typology captures a wider net of abuse when compared to Walker and Johnson's, which overly emphasises physical violence. As a marker of his success, Stark's work has been credited with designing laws on coercive control that address the lacuna of statutory guidance for acts of non-physical IPV. In Ireland, the Domestic Violence Act 2018 recognises that coercive control is knowingly and persistently engaging in behaviour that is controlling or coercive and has a serious effect on a relevant person (Sheehy, 2019). At an international level, coercive control has been introduced into criminal law in England, Wales, Scotland, and Australia (Stark and Hester, 2019).

2.2.4 Conclusion

In summary, this thesis is grounded in social constructivism, recognising how societal constructions influence the behaviour, perspectives, and life narratives of gay men. Plummer's

(2003) conceptualization of 'intimate citizenship' usefully explores the intersections between gay men's intimate and public spheres. Masculinity holds a pivotal position within the conceptual framework of this study, which encompasses an examination of social performances and theoretical perspectives surrounding how masculinity is negotiated by gay men. In particular, Connell's theory of masculinity serves as an important theoretical framework for understanding gay men's positioning in society within the gender order (Connell, 2005). Social discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity are integral components of the conceptual framework, shedding light on the role of gender in shaping gay men's narrative performances, including their presentation of self and interpretation of their abusive experiences (Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005; Goffman, 1990).

Another key feature of the conceptual framework involves examining how love and rules function within gay men's relationships. Donovan and Hester (2015)'s practices of love and relationship rules serve as key conceptual tools in this study to examine how gay men construct their IPV narratives and explore the dynamics of abuse in their relationships. Notably, this study explores how gay men uniquely account for the rules and love in their abusive relationships through an examination of their narrative portrayals, performances, and understanding of masculinity. The concept of 'minority stress' is employed in this study to account for men's affiliation with the sexual minority community, examining how this influences the social landscapes of their relationships (Meyer, 2003). Different IPV paradigms, including those introduced by Walker (1979, 2000), Johnson (1995, 2006), and Stark (2007), have been proposed that will resonate differently with each victim and their individualised abuse story. However, a common thread among traditional IPV paradigms is the assumption that abuse is a heterosexual female experience. To address such limitations, the conceptual framework of this thesis also explores theories tailored more towards examining the distinct context of gay men's relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2015). After delving deeper into the conceptual framework, the following section reviews existing research pertaining to gay men's experiences of IPV.

2.3 Research on IPV and Gay Men

Little is known about the subjective partner abuse experience for gay men both in Ireland and globally. This gap in the literature contrasts with the wide range of heterosexual violence-based scholarship (Callan et al., 2021; Dickerson-Amaya and Coston, 2019; Finneran and Stephenson, 2012; Raghavan et al., 2019). For instance, empirical investigations into abuse in same-gendered couples comprised 3% of the violence-based literature nine years ago (Edwards et al., 2015). The majority of literature on this area has been quantitative in nature and was initially focused on lesbian women (Donovan and Barnes, 2019). Methodological challenges in considering the aetiology of abuse in gay men encompass various aspects, including inconsistencies in key conceptual issues such as terminologies, defining sexual identities, assumptions of monogamous relationships, limitations of IPV measurement systems primarily designed for heterosexual relationships, inconsistent recall periods, and a reliance on small samples and non-probabilistic sampling methods (Finneran and Stephenson, 2012).

Despite variations from pooled prevalence, the literature suggests that gay men are disproportionately impacted by IPV and it is measured as high as or higher than abuse found in women in opposite-sex relationships (Kay and Jeffries, 2010; Merrill and Wolfe, 2000). For example, it has been reported that the lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence and stalking from an intimate partner is 26% for gay men (Black et al., 2011). In the UK, a community-based survey and interviews with lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women (n = 746) were conducted by Donovan and Hester (2015). A total of 38 percent were men in this sample, predominantly identified as gay. Of these, 35.2% of male participants reported an experience of IPV. In a systematic review, the prevalence of IPV among gay men ranged from 29.7% to 78.0% (Finneran and Stephenson, 2012). It has been recorded elsewhere as 26.0% (Rollè et al. 2019), 33% (Liu et al. 2021) and between 1.8% and 93.7% (Nowinski and Bowen 2012). These inconsistent findings can be attributed to the methodological challenges discussed earlier.

Variations in defining LGBTQ individuals as a research group and discrepancies in the definitions of violence have been recognised as significant factors contributing to variations in the prevalence rates of IPV (Donovan and Barnes, 2019; Messinger, 2017). This research field is considered in its infancy. Thus, it is often difficult to obtain reliable data on the extent of violence within the gay male community, leading to potential underreporting, misclassification and an overall inaccurate representation of this phenomenon. Addressing these methodological issues is essential to gain a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of violence in the lives of gay men.

Nevertheless, surveys utilising random population samples play an important role in mitigating methodological challenges within this field (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Messinger, 2020; Greenwood et al., 2002). Messinger (2020) examined the prevalence estimates from large randomly selected studies and found that sexual minority victims (or those in same gendered relationships) were at a higher risk of experiencing IPV when compared to heterosexual victims (or those in opposite gender relationships). For example, one randomised telephone survey involving 16,507 individuals in the US revealed that half of sexual minority men reported experiencing psychological IPV during their lifetime (Breiding et al., 2013). In a probability-based sample consisting of 2,881 sexual minority men who participated in telephone interviews between 1996 and 1998, 34% reported experiencing psychological abuse, 22% reported physical battering, and 5% reported instances of sexual abuse. (Greenwood et al., 2002). General population sampling through the Crime Survey for England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2020), which encompassed data up to the end of March 2020, highlights that gay men were roughly twice as likely to experience IPV compared to heterosexual men. More precisely, 6% of gay men aged 16 to 74 reported experiencing IPV in the previous year, in contrast to 3.5% of heterosexual men.

It is important to consider that randomised sampling is not without limitations. In numerous regions, the absence of a suitable sampling frame has posed challenges in identifying random samples of LGBTQ individuals from the general population. Additionally, all voluntary surveys inherently involve an element of self-selection, underscoring the importance of considering how the obtained sample may differ from those who chose not to respond (Donovan and Barnes, 2020b). Nonetheless, evidence indicates that IPV is a significant issue within LGBTQ communities, particularly among gay men.

2.4 Traditional Representations of IPV

A review of the literature on IPV suggests similarities and distinctions between IPV in gay men's relationships to what has been traditionally observed in heterosexual mixed-sex couples (Cruz and Firestone, 1998; Freedberg 2006; Kay and Jeffries, 2010; Roll'e et al., 2018). Those common aspects described in the literature refer to the nature of the abuse including psychological, physical, financial and sexual, while those experiences identified as distinctive include outing, the use of societal homophobia in perpetrating abuse and internalised homophobia. In both heterosexual and gay relationships, similar patterns exist in which abuse escalates in frequency and severity (Potoczniak et al., 2003). Given these remarkable similarities, it is not surprising that gay men have used similar descriptions to heterosexual victims when portraying their abuse (Cruz and Firestone, 1998). Consistent with heterosexual abuse narratives, gay men describe staying with their partners due to love for the partner, lack of awareness about abuse, financial and emotional dependence, hope for change, and fear of retaliation (Cruz 2003; Island and Letellier, 1991; Merrill and Wolfe, 2000).

2.4.1 Psychological Violence

According to the literature, in line with other studies on violence and abuse, psychological abuse is the most prevalent form of abuse for gay men (Callan et al., 2021). Merrill and Wolfe (2000) found that all 52 gay men had experienced some form of psychological violence. Similarly, focus groups with gay and bisexual men (n=64) conclude that psychological abuse is the most

subtle and difficult to detect within the abusive relationship. Follingstad (2007) describes psychological abuse as an array of verbal and mental methods aimed to emotionally wound, coerce, control, intimidate, and psychologically harm. Descriptions of psychological abuse (such as name calling, verbal threats, controlling behaviours, passive aggression) correlate to those described by heterosexual women (Woodyatt and Stephenson, 2016). In a recent qualitative study involving 26 gay and bisexual men, valuable insights were gained regarding the subtypes of psychological violence and the impact. Among the cohort, 20 men reported experiences of manipulation, while 13 men reported the impact of the abuse as a loss of self-esteem and personal autonomy, 12 men reported being cheated on, and 11 men reported instances of stonewalling and gaslighting. Additionally, nine men shared their experiences of intentional deception by their partners (Stults et al., 2022). These findings shed light on the unique nature of abuse for different individuals and the challenges faced by victims to recognise the psychological aspects of these experiences.

2.4.2 Physical Violence

According to the literature, physical violence is the most measured form of IPV among gay and bisexual men (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017). One useful definition is to describe physical abuse as both attempts to cause, and actual infliction of, bodily harm toward another individual such as hitting, striking, kicking, choking, pushing, and biting (Murray et al. 2007). Bourne and colleagues (2023) recently explained physical abuse to their LGBTQ respondents as hitting, throwing objects or threats and physical intimidation regardless of injury. These experiences were overwhelmingly reported by 89 percent of their cohort (gay men = 1,112). Across countries, gay men (n= 2,368) experienced physical IPV ranging from 5.75% in the U.S. to 11.75% in South Africa. In Australia, sexual violence was reported less frequently and ranged from 2.54% to 4.52%. (Finneran et al., 2012). A total of 42.2% of gay men (N=63) reported being punched, hit, struck with hands or fists among other experiences (McClennen et al. 2002). A total of 87% of gay men (N=52) reported severe and recurrent physical abuse. Out of these

men, 62% reported more than five incidents of physical abuse, while 37% reporting between 11 and 100 physical abuse incidents (Merrill and Wolfe. 2000). More than half of gay and bisexual men (n=26) recruited through a purposeful sampling disclosed pushing, hitting, slapping and punching. Based on these men's descriptions, physical abuse was further grouped into kicking, biting, vehicle, or object used as a weapon and choking (Stults et al. 2022). This runs parallel to Donovan and Hester (2015) who noted that gay men and heterosexual women reported more physical violence than lesbian and heterosexual men.

2.4.3 Financial Violence

In their study, Donovan and Hester (2015) found that gay men were more likely to suffer financial abuse than lesbian or heterosexual abuse survivors. Postmus and colleagues (2020) describe financial abuse as the invisible and lesser known domain of IPV, which victims and even scholars may not recognise. Financial violence may include preventing the victim from accessing monetary resources, forcing economic dependence, or destroying property or restricting the person from school, working, or accessing independent income (Merrill and Wolfe, 2000; Walker, 1979). Merrill (1998) found that 85% of gay men (N = 52) had described financial loss. A total of 18.6% of 25 men self-identified gay and bisexual cited not leaving the relationship due to financial dependence (Cruz, 2003). Within a non representative sample, Merrill and Wolfe (2000) found that 90% of self-identified gay victims (N=52) disclosed financial abuse. These men described being financially controlled, losing employment, income, or property, and their partner refusing to contribute to expenses. In the same year, a total of 37% of 227 of gay men in same-sex relationships disclosed accounts of financial abuse (Turell, 2000).

2.4.4 Sexual Violence

Raghavan and colleagues (2019) theorised that gay men may be especially vulnerable to sexual violence because their sexual orientation defines them socially. Despite the variability in classification and measurements, sexual violence is recorded as prevalent among gay men

(Callan, et al., 2021; Donovan and Hester, 2015). Donovan et al. (2006) concluded that gay men reporting IPV were more likely than women to be victimised sexually. Researchers are also beginning to connect gay men's exposure to chemsex (the use of recreational drugs combined with sexual practices) and other risky sexual behaviour to the heightened risk to experience sexual violence (Callan et al., 2021; Finnerty et al. 2019). In a large-scale survey, one in four gay men (26.0%) disclosed an experience of sexual assault by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Breiding et al., 2013). By reviewing secondary literature between 1989 to 2015, Brown and Herman (2015) determined that the lifetime prevalence rates of sexual violence victimization among marginalized groups ranged from 3.1% to 15.7%. While Raghavan et al. (2019) found sexual violence prevalence rates as low as 4% in 188 gay and bisexual men, Merrill and Wolfe (2000) found that 73% of gay men in their study had experienced sexual violence, although the latter was likely due to the small sample size by which men in this study were selectively recruited through tailored gay IPV programmes and HIV programmes. Similarly, heterosexual abused women who attended IPV programmes reported the most elevated levels of IPV (Johnson, 2006). More recently, sexual violence was categorised by 26 gay men as rough or aggressive sex (n=9), implicit pressure (n=8), explicit pressure (n=6), non-consensual sex (n=6), forced penetration (n=4), and attempted sexual assault (n=2) (Stults et al., 2022). Overall, these findings suggest that gay male victims are at an increased risk of sexual violence.

2.5 Distinctive Experiences of IPV

There is a growing number of studies suggesting that there is a unique context to gay men's abuse. This entails abusive experiences that are specific to sexual minority groups that are not featured in abusive heterosexual relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2017; Finneran et al., 2012; Meyer, 1995; Rollè et al., 2018; Woodyatt and Stephenson, 2016). Alexander (2002) emphasises the stress of identifying as a gay man. Similarly, the abuse experienced by gay men requires studying the broader socio-structural and cultural context of their lives (Donovan and Barnes, 2020a). As one illustration of this, Kaschak describes the 'double closet' that envelops

IPV in same-sex relationships, where stigma and shame arise for victims identifying as gay and as abused. The distinctive experiences outlined in this literature review, including outing, societal homophobia, and internalised homophobia are elaborated upon below.

2.5.1 Outing

One theme throughout the literature is that perpetrators use the sexual minority victim's social position to inflict IPV. Although not describing marginalised populations, this aligns with Stark's (2007) theory that the abuser utilises their intimate knowledge of the victim to exert control and abuse. In the broader context of homophobia and heterosexism in society, gay men may conceal outward expressions of their sexual orientation, whereby their abuser will then threaten to 'out' or proceed to reveal their sexuality to society, such as telling family, friends or employers or work colleagues. This can deter gay men from reporting the abuse or seeking help (Brown, 2008; Callan et al., 2021; Calton et al., 2016; Kay and Jeffries, 2010; Johnson and Ferraro 2000; KwongLai Poon, 2010).

Outing has previously been categorised as a distinct expression of psychological abuse (Callan et al., 2021) or a method of control (Renzetti, 1997) and blackmail tactic (Duke and Davidson, 2009). On the other hand, Donovan and Hester (2015) categorise outing as a form of 'identity abuse' to control, undermine and isolate the victim. This may include threatening or revealing a person's sexuality, gender identity, or HIV status. Identity abuse for a gay man may include undermining his sense of self, such as controlling his appearance, including how he dresses, wears makeup, and styles his hair. It is likely that for gay men, identity abuse may relate to their experiences of feminization whereby abusive partners may control how their victims express femininity (Kay and Jeffries, 2010; Letellier, 1994). Nevertheless, the literature indicates a lack of consensus on the conceptualization of identity abuse, given documented variations across different genders and sexual orientations (Woulfe and Goodman, 2021). As an illustration, Woulfe and Goodman (2020) expanded the scope of identity abuse to include various violent

tactics that exploit systemic oppression, such as heterosexism and cissexism, to inflict harm on individuals.

Scholars exemplify 'outing' to distinguish between abuse in heterosexual relationships to abuse exclusive to sexual minority groups. This has the means to emphasise more careful consideration of sexual minority groups in both research and service provision. One study in China found that 12.4% of young gay men aged 16–24 reported threats from their previous or current partner to reveal them to their wider community (Yu et al., 2013). Those more prone to outing may include HIV-positive gay men and gay male immigrants and those living in hostile locations which criminalise gay men (Allen and Leventhal, 1999). Those with intimate knowledge to hide are likely subjected to outing. However, further empirical evidence is needed to confirm such hypotheses. Focus groups with 64 gay and bisexual men suggest that contrasts of 'outness' of men's sexuality create tension, unequal power dynamics which result in IPV. For example, the 'out' abusive partner may control the closeted victim. Alternatively, the closeted abuser may force the 'out' victim to keep their secret, serving to control his decision-making (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Overall, the consequences of outing as abuse can include loss of employment, custody of children, and family support (Allen and Leventhal, 1999; Renzetti, 1992).

2.5.2 Societal Homophobia

Several studies suggest that societal homophobia contributes to abuse in gay men's relationships. Popularised by Weinberg, homophobia characterises any negative feelings towards sexual minority communities (Brown, 2008). This stigma towards non-heterosexual sexual orientations incorporates labelling, stereotyping, ostracisation, status loss and discrimination. Homophobia may manifest as negative attitudes and behaviour, such as verbal harassment, slurs, threats, physical abuse, and refusing to acknowledge the existence of sexual minority identities (Allen,

2019; Lamontagne et al., 2018). Alternatively, Herek (2015) prefers the term 'sexual stigma' to describe the cultural phenomenon of prejudice towards non-heterosexual behaviour, identities, relationships, and communities. According to a recent comparative review of homophobia across 158 countries, homophobia was determined as a prevalent issue in social spheres and is linked to lower life expectancy for men (Lamontagne et al., 2018). In a large-scale survey of 1,575 sexual minority men, all participants reported experiencing homophobic discrimination (Finneran and Stephenson, 2014). A separate survey of 2,368 sexual minority men across six countries (Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Brazil) revealed that homophobia consistently decreased the likelihood that they would report IPV regardless of their geographical location (Finneran et al., 2012). Even though these findings are a decade old, it would appear that homophobia for gay men is an issue even in the most progressive countries.

An examination of the empirical literature reveals there are several links between homophobia and IPV in gay relationships. However, there is no consensus as to the exact role homophobia plays in the manifestation of abuse. Findings from an internet-based survey of 2,368 sexual minority men across six geographical locations shows that men with homophobic experiences are more likely to report sexual and physical violence victimisation (Finneran et al., 2012). However, according to a separate internet-based study of 1,575 sexual minority men, those with homophobic experiences were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence (Finneran and Stephenson, 2014). Focus groups with gay and bisexual men (n=64) suggest that IPV is linked to homophobia and hate crime attacks (Woodyatt and Stephenson, 2016). Likewise, focus groups with a different group of gay and bisexual men (n=64) suggested that external experiences of homophobia and anti-gay cultural messages would generate abuse within gay men's relationships (Goldenberg et al., 2016). It can be concluded that homophobia and IPV risk are present for both victims and perpetrators. Interviews with practitioners delivering support services for gay male victims suggested that abusive partners exploit the backdrop of

societal homophobia to claim that no one will help or understand the gay victim due to their sexuality (Kay and Jeffries, 2010). Similar findings were reported by Cruz (2000). Comparatively less qualitative attention has been paid to gay men with lived experiences of homophobia and abuse, which may provide a nuanced insight into the exact link societal homophobia plays. The results of a large-scale survey of gay and bisexual men (n = 989) indicated that previous homophobic experiences correlated to their reluctance to seek help for abuse which included anticipation of rejection and stigma from law enforcement (Finneran and Stephenson, 2013). By the same token, homophobia from family members hampers how gay male victims seek support (Frierson, 2014).

2.5.3 Internalised Homophobia

The literature highlights that homophobia can occur at a structural and interpersonal level. According to Kay and Jeffries (2010), 'for some men, societal homophobia sometimes is internalised into a fear or hatred of their own homosexual desires' (n = 413). Malyon (1982) coined the concept of 'internalised homophobia' to depict the anti-homosexual attitudes that gay men hold. In a sample of 100 gay men, internalised homophobia due to living in a hostile environment was associated with shame and poor self-esteem (Allen and Oleson, 1999). Gay men with internalised homophobia are more susceptible to depression, self-esteem issues, guilt and psychological distress (Finneran and Stephenson, 2014; Meyer, 1995). Internalised homophobia was described as gay and bisexual men hating who they are, and this has been considered a precursor to abuse in gay male relationships (Woodyatt and Stephenson, 2016). Like societal homophobia, scholars have linked internalised homophobia with IPV perpetration and victimisation in gay and bisexual men (Balsam and Szymanski, 2005; Edwards and Sylaska, 2013; Finneran et al., 2012; Peeper and Sand, 2015).

Exposure to internalised homophobia has been linked to both enacting IPV (Edwards and Sylaska, 2013) and experiencing IPV (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2019). Two large-scale surveys of sexual minority men (n = 989) and (n = 1,575) indicate that those who disclosed internalised homophobia were more likely to experience IPV (Finneran et al., 2013) than those who did not, these attitudes also increased the odds of perpetrating sexual violence (Finneran and Stephenson, 2014). This corresponds to a meta-analysis of 10 empirical studies highlighting a statistically significant association between internalised homophobia and IPV perpetration and victimisation (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2019). These findings were previously reported in a study of 2,368 gay men (Finneran et al., 2012) and in separate cohorts of 272 and 220 sexual minority women (Balsam and Szymanski, 2005; Lewis et al., 2014). More recently, the enactment of psychological abuse was associated with internalised homophobia in a sample of 144 same-sex couples (Li et al., 2021).

In summary, this section has highlighted that gay men report distinctive experiences of IPV shaped by their marginalisation and negotiation of public and private spaces where homophobia and heteronormativity persist (Plummer, 2001). As previously explored in section 2.2.2.2 above, Meyer's Minority Stress theory provides an explanatory framework to understand the unique social and cultural factors experienced by gay male victims by examining their exposure to excess or additive stress uniquely derived from their sexually marginalised position in society. Thus, gay men's experiences of outing, societal homophobia, and internalised homophobia, as part of their IPV experiences, can typically be understood as factors related to their exposure to minority stress (Callan, Corbally, McElvaney, 2021). This reinforces the need for independent study of gay male victims, which may shed light on the high prevalence of IPV in this population.

2.6 The Irish Context of Gay Men's Abuse

According to Wengraf (2008), the concept of "situated subjectivity" emphasises the interconnection between the narrative self and specific temporal and spatial contexts, including geographical, cultural, and social factors. In the next section, particular attention is given to the Irish context of this research topic, encompassing the historical backdrop of gay men in Ireland, existing Irish research, and available service provisions.

2.7 The History of Gay Men in Ireland

The history of gay men living in Ireland illustrates their marginalisation and their path towards equality and acceptance. From 1952 until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental disorder (Drescher, 2014). Unsurprisingly, pathologizing homosexuality resulted in the stigmatisation of gay men, both in Ireland and at an international level. The practice of homosexuality was viewed as deviant and a departure from "natural" sexual behaviour (Baker et al., 2013). In Western societies, the meaning of homosexuality was primarily defined by religions, many of which deemed same-sex behaviour 'immoral' (Bullough, 1979). Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion in Ireland, and the Irish Constitution (Article 44) gave the Catholic Church the power to influence the political governing of the country (Higgins et al., 2016). Homosexuality was outlawed in Ireland by two laws, the 1861 Offences against the Person Act and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act (Cahill, 2019). This exposed gay men in Ireland to prosecution, facing between 10 years or life in prison if they engaged in consensual sexual activity (Tiernan, 2020). In an era of criminalisation, gay men lived in fear, and many were victimised by policing and hate crimes (Mayock et al., 2009).

The gay rights movement gained traction in Ireland during the 1970s (Tiernan, 2020). However, such progress was hampered by the AIDS crisis from 1981-1989, which entailed a global

epidemic in which approximately 330,000 gay and bisexual men died from AIDS-related illnesses in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Watney (1994) suggests that AIDS was socially constructed as an illness that affects those deemed 'sick', 'sexually deviant' and 'outcasts'. As disproportionately affected, gay men were defined by the AIDS narrative. The Irish government offered little support to gay men during this health crisis and due to their hidden sexualities gay men were reluctant to seek help, which magnified their social exclusion (Smyth, 1998). During the 1980s, the Blood Transfusion Service in Ireland banned gay men (men who have sex with men) from donating blood (Carolan, 2016). Arguably, the impetus for the national gay rights movement was sparked by the murder of Declan Flynn, an Irish gay man who was murdered in Fairview Park in Dublin in 1982. His death was connected to a sequence of assaults targeting gay individuals. The five men responsible for his death pleaded guilty to manslaughter but were given suspended sentences ranging from one to five years (Cahill, 2019). These sentences, many felt, were insufficient considering the severity of the crime which served to highlight the discrimination and violence faced by gay men at the time.

Over the last two decades, Ireland has undergone a substantial change in its treatment of gay men. In 1988, the chairman of the Irish gay rights movement, David Norris, argued to the European Court of Human Rights that the laws criminalising homosexuality infringed on his human rights (Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to respect for private and family life). During this time, Norris was the very first openly gay senator elected to public office. This was emblematic of the growing support for gay men during that period. On 26th October 1988, Norris won his case at the European Court of Human Rights. Ultimately, this led to the enactment of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993, decriminalising consensual sexual acts between adult men (Tiernan, 2020). This marked a turning point for the gay rights movement in Ireland and perhaps the beginning of a social revolution. In light of this

context, sexual minority women in Ireland sought to overcome negative views of homosexuality by hiding abuse in their intimate relationships (Cahill, 2019). The IPV manifested within the LGBTQ community was perceived by many as fuelling negative stereotypes about gay relationships and as hampering the progress of the gay rights movement (Ristock, 2002). It was not until the Domestic Violence Act 1996 that gay men in Ireland were afforded legal protections, granting them access to safety measures, barring orders and protection orders.

In 2006, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was one of the first politicians to attend a gay and lesbian event officially. He stated that ‘sexual orientation cannot, and must not, be the basis of a second-class citizenship. Our laws have changed, and will continue to change, to reflect this principle’ (Chicago Tribune, 2006). His words reflect a movement towards policy and legislative reform for the sexual minority community in Ireland. This included the Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015), which outlawed discrimination (inclusive of sexual orientation) in the workplace, and the Unfair Dismissals Acts (1977 to 2016), which prohibited employers from discharging workers unfairly, such as on grounds of sexual orientation (Irish Statute Book, 2020). The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 outlawed discrimination against gay men in the areas of accommodation and education (Gibbons et al., 2007). The 2010 Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act became the first to legitimise gay relationships, as men could enter civil partnerships together (Property Registration Authority, 2018). However, men in civil partnerships were not afforded the same rights as heterosexual couples in civil marriages. A total of 169 legal distinctions were cited (Parker, 2017).

The 2011 Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act amended the Domestic Violence Act 1996 and 2002 to protect LGBTQ victims undergoing IPV who did not register for civil partnerships (COSC, 2019). In May 2015, Ireland held the first marriage referendum to address marriage equality for gay couples. The Catholic Church strongly opposed altering the definition of

marriage, while the public and media coverage was overwhelmingly supportive of gay relationships. After an intense legal campaign, Irish citizens voted in favour of marriage equality by a landslide of 62 percent. This marked the increasing secularisation in Irish society. The vote for yes led to the 34th amendment to the Irish Constitution defining marriage as ‘contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex’ (Government of Ireland, 2020). After decades of oppressing gay men, Ireland is now viewed as an international forerunner in working towards full equality for the sexual minority community (Higgins et al., 2016; Haynes and Schweppe, 2019; Tiernan, 2020). This study is situated eight years after the 2015 marriage referendum and several decades after Ireland witnessed significant social change to increase the visibility, inclusion, and rights of sexual minorities. As a result, gay men in this study likely describe a climate of transformative social change in their biographies, but also relate to their life histories in which they faced prosecution and prejudice.

2.7.1 Irish Research on Gay Men

In western societies, 0.5% of the population is estimated to be gay and bisexual men (Bailey et al., 2016). However, in Ireland, the exact figure of the gay male population is unknown. This is because sexual minorities are a hidden population in national statistical analysis, as the Census does not measure categories of sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBT Ireland, 2023). The newspaper Irish Times ran a ‘family values poll’ to ask Irish people to describe their sexuality. It was reported that 4 percent (one in 25) of the respondents identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Although this survey lacks scholarly rigour, it provides some flavour of how many gay people live in Ireland (O'Brien, 2015). In addition, there have been no nationwide surveys to document the prevalence and experiences of IPV among gay men living in Ireland. It is crucial to address this gap in order to contextualise this issue within the Irish context and ensure that the experiences of sexual minority men are adequately represented in Irish and international research.

Currently, without national statistics it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the true extent of the problem in Ireland. However, the available literature demonstrates that gay men living in Ireland are subject to societal violence. In 1995, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) circulated a report on LGBTQ discrimination in Ireland. This included a questionnaire of 150 gay men and lesbian women. A quarter of respondents disclosed physical assault and 11 percent disclosed repeated physical attacks due to their sexuality. In the sample, 41 percent had been threatened with violence, 35 percent had been chased and 9 percent had been wounded with a weapon. There were 79 percent of respondents who reported verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation (GLEN, 1995). Cahill (2019) remarked that despite the questionnaire examining violence, the respondents were not asked about their accounts of IPV.

Mayock and colleagues (2009) conducted an online survey and interviews exploring the mental health of LGBTQ populations. This included over 1,100 respondents, 902 of whom identified as gay or lesbian who were asked about their experiences of harassment and victimisation in 'any setting'. Eighty percent of those surveyed experienced verbal abuse; a quarter of all respondents disclosed physical violence due to their LGBTQ identification. Two-fifths of participants had been threatened with physical violence, while one-quarter described being punched, kicked or beaten. Almost 8% reported being attacked with a weapon. Nine percent stated they had been attacked sexually due to their perceived sexuality. The following presents a disconcerting picture, indicating that the occurrence of violence reported by LGBTQ individuals remains alarmingly high, even after a fourteen-year gap since the previous study (GLEN, 1995). A more recent study of Irish schools (N=788) found that 73% of sexual minority students reported feeling unsafe in school and experiencing homophobic remarks (Pizmony-Levy, 2019). In Ireland, 59% of sexual minorities described how they avoid holding hands with their same-sex partners, according to the largest LGBTQ survey across 30 countries

(n=140,000). 17% of Irish citizens reported hate crimes, including physical and sexual attacks (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020).

The first nationwide survey was conducted in 1995 focusing exclusively on the prevalence of IPV in Irish women. Unsurprisingly, this was commissioned by Women's Aid, a female-oriented non-governmental abuse agency (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1995). Surveys were administered through the postal service, and interviews were conducted with service providers and women attending medical centres. While 1,483 adult women were randomly selected for the survey, 46 percent (N=679) agreed to participate. In the sample of 575 who identified as being in an intimate relationship with a man, 18 percent (101) disclosed at least one form of IPV in their lifespan. A total of 13 percent of this cohort suggested psychological violence as the most frequent form of abuse. Similarly, a survey was conducted by Bradley et al. (2002). From the randomly selected sample of 1,871, 39 percent reported one episode of violent behaviour and 31 percent reported multiple episodes of violent behaviour. This was double the rate compared to what was previously reported in the Women's Aid study (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1995).

Other key pieces of Irish research include the 2002 SAVI report (Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland) report. The SAVI study conducted telephone interviews with 3,118 adult respondents selected at random, resulting in a participation rate of 71 percent. The research revealed that in instances of sexual violence experienced across the lifespan, the perpetrator was frequently someone known to the victim rather than a stranger (McGee et al., 2002).

The nationally representative survey conducted by the National Study of Domestic Abuse (NSDA) gives more insight into the nature, extent, and impact of IPV in Ireland (Watson and

Parsons, 2005). As the largest nationwide study, this incorporated a telephone methodology with 3,077 randomly selected participants. An important component of the survey was focusing on the impact of abuse which was measured as physical injuries and feelings of fear. This involved separating severe acts of abuse (significant and negative impact) from minor incidents (less of an impact). The average questionnaire took 21 minutes for non-victims and 38 minutes for victims to complete. Findings demonstrate that 15 percent of women (or about one in seven) and six percent of men (or one in 16) have experienced severe and persistent physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from a partner in their lifespan. This is estimated to equate to 213,000 female and 88,000 male victims. The survey itself embodied a pivotal shift as it was the first in Ireland to present data demonstrating that men were victims of IPV. Notably both men and women who experienced severe abuse emphasised emotional abuse as most significant, a finding that was previously threaded in the Women's Aid study (Kelleher and O'Connor, 1995).

However, one drawback of Watson and Parson's (2005) survey was its reliance on participants' accounts of what they interpret as 'fearful'. For example, men reported being slapped across the face more frequently than women. However, 70 percent of these men indicated they were 'not at all frightened'. This may be attributed to the discourse surrounding masculinity and IPV, whereby men may struggle to recognise the severity of their abuse or vocalise their fears out loud. As a result, men are likely to not provide accurate data when asked sensitive questions over the phone. Furthermore, the experiences of gay men who were abused, whilst probably included, remained outside the gaze of this inquiry. The survey did not record the participant's sexual orientation, nor the gender or sexuality of the perpetrator. Ironically, the authors make a distinction in which: 'the partner may be of the same sex or the opposite sex,' suggesting some cognisance of abuse experienced by non-heterosexual victims (Watson and Parsons, 2005 p. 38). This suggests that caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions about IPV in society as a whole when nationwide surveys fail to adequately capture the complexity of same-

gender relationships or diverse expressions of gender and sexuality. The limitations of national survey methodologies in capturing abuse experienced by gay men likely perpetuate the myth that abuse within their community is rare or non-existent, thus further contributing to the invisibility surrounding this phenomenon.

In 2006, a cross sectional survey of 237 people attending medical general practitioner services in Ireland was conducted (Paul et al., 2006). It was notable that more men reported experiencing abusive behaviours than women, though women were more likely to express fear of a partner. This would again suggest men may have trouble externalising the feelings and vulnerability that surrounds their abuse. Nevertheless, this research highlighted the existence of male victims in Ireland. Two years later research by COSC (National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence) found the Irish public perceived IPV to be more common against women who were impacted by more serious consequences than men (Horgan et al., 2008). This would suggest that public perceptions of IPV were shaped by the gendered perspective of IPV.

Currently there is no doctoral-level Irish research on gay men's experiences of IPV. However, Cahill (2019) completed her PhD thesis at Trinity College which included an interpretative phenomenological study on nine lesbian and bisexual women in abusive same-sex relationships. This pioneering study reveals that non-heterosexual women report multiple forms of IPV, including coercive control, physical, sexual, financial and psychological abuse. The sample also featured distinct descriptions of identity abuse (such as outing one's sexual orientation). It was interesting to note that this abuse occurred during and after relationship breakups. Similar accounts of masculinity constructions were found among heterosexual male victims in Corbally (2011) and Kestell (2019). Overall, Cahill's study laid the groundwork for future research on abuse transpiring in same-gender relationships.

The subject of male heterosexual victimisation began to attract the attention of Irish scholars in the late 20th century which resulted in a greater focus on their experiences as victims. Applying a biographical narrative interpretive approach, Corbally (2011) presented three cases of heterosexual men who experienced IPV from their female partners. In this pioneering study, men described abuse in two distinct categories, including “first wave abuse” and “second wave abuse”. ‘First wave abuse’ describes IPV carried out by the abusive partner, including physical and psychological abuse. During these experiences, the female partner intentionally isolated men from their children and made accusations of child abuse. Second-wave abuse involved abuse that was initiated by the abusive partner but not necessarily enacted by them. This encompasses situations where individuals other than the perpetrators, such as professionals in refugee centres, solicitors, judges, police, and social services, disbelieve participants’ abuse stories, causing additional harm. Overall male participants struggled with conflicting discourses of masculinity and IPV. They favoured three dominant narratives when accounting for their abuse, including the fatherhood narrative, the good husband narrative, and the abuse narrative.

Kestell (2019) conducted research eight years later with a narrative study of heterosexual male victims undergoing IPV. This was informed by Butler’s Gender performativity theory and Riessman’s (2008) dialogic narrative analysis. Findings from nine narrative interviews and 64 written accounts of Irish men revealed that men described IPV by their female partners as ranging from severe to more subtle. Like Corbally’s (2011), men in this study positioned their abuse within prevailing discourses of masculinity and IPV. They also positioned their abusive female partners as deviating from femininity. The fact that men struggled to articulate these experiences suggests that there was no dialogue available to depict male abuse. These novel studies make a case that open-ended narrative interviewing (as opposed to structured surveys) elicited greater biographical reflection in men and more nuanced descriptions of their abuse.

2.7.2 Irish Service Provision

In the 1970s, women's rights activists addressed abuse themselves, despite hostility from the authorities. This required ingenuity, such as setting up women's refuges to help victims in secret (Pizzey, 1974). As a result, scholars gained access to abused women in refugee shelters, which skewed the perception of this issue (Dutton and Nicholls, 2005). At present, the Istanbul Convention (Article 23) mandates the Irish government to provide appropriate accommodation to abuse victims (Thompson et al., 2022). Nevertheless, service provision in Ireland is moulded from a feminist heterosexual perspective, which according to Corbally (2011), 'presumes men's aggression and women's innocence' (p. 23). In other words, the response to IPV has been primarily female oriented and driven. For instance, Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) oversees the national provision of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence services in Ireland. However, they acknowledged in their recent evaluation of Irish state-funded IPV agencies, the focus of this document was on the needs analysis of 'women and children, taking into account well-documented gendered patterns in domestic violence and abuse, and the international obligations on gender-based violence' (Tusla, 2022, p. 24). They make no mention of gay men but acknowledge (perhaps tokenistically) that male victims face intersectoral barriers to accessing appropriate support. Despite raising the issue, they recommend a gendered approach instead of replicating additional accommodations for male victims (Tusla, 2022). The exclusion of heterosexual and gay male victims is significant here, as it influenced national strategy on domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence (Department of Justice, 2022). This would suggest a projected path to continue to direct service planning and service provision towards heterosexual women and render gay and heterosexual male victims invisible.

In the Republic of Ireland, there are 155 emergency accommodations, 145 refugees and ten safe homes refuge centres centred around the needs of women and children (Tusla, 2022). For men, there are thirteen male perpetrator programmes (UN Women, 2023). There is only one dedicated

national service for male abuse victims in Ireland, called Men's Aid Ireland (formally identified as AMEN) which was established in 1997. While mostly heterosexual men (mostly in the Northeast where the service is based) avail of this service, it caters for gay, bisexual, non-binary, intersex and transgender men. In 2020, Men's Aid supported 5,500 male victims. In the following year, the demand for the service grew by 40%, which included 8,000 contacts (Men's Aid Ireland, 2023). Among these were increased engagement of gay male victims. However, despite the vitality of the service, they receive little funding. According to the CEO of Men's Aid, Kathrina Bentley 'male victims are rarely mentioned and less than one percent of €30 million allocated to support services around the country goes to support male victims' (Sherry, 2022). This is a direct result of the gender specific approach to IPV service provision in Ireland.

Due to the "heterosexual face" of IPV there are no tailored abuse services such as emergency accommodation or refugee centres for gay men living in Ireland. All provision to date remains geared towards heterosexual women and children. This is problematic as gay men are recorded in the literature to be reluctant to seek help in fear of discrimination and view mainstream IPV services as designed exclusively for women. They describe increased experiences of isolation due to lack of service provision (Cruz, 2003; Dickerson-Amaya and Coston, 2019; Freedberg 2006). In reviewing safety planning and advocacy services for abused men, it was postulated that heterosexual and gay men required distinct approaches based on having diverse sets of needs (Robinson and Rowland, 2007). The shortage of care for gay men suggests that the unique context of their abuse is unknown to most IPV services and the body of professionals. Additionally, Cahill (2019) noted that Irish state-funded agencies provide tokenistic mentions (usually one sentence) of abuse in same-sex relationships without adequate knowledge or strategies to support these victims effectively. The first acknowledgement of gay men's abuse was by the HSE (Health Service Executive) in 2009. Based on a mapping of the health care needs of Irish sexual minorities, they noted they are subjected to abuse but have trouble accessing appropriate support services. They explain that 'LGBT people have not been a named target group within the HSE to date, which has resulted in inconsistent support for LGBT work

locally and nationally' (HSE, 2009, p. 66). As a result, local LGBTQ organisations (such as Outcomers Dundalk) have identified this service gap and offered informal support to sexual minority abuse victims (Tusla, 2022).

However, this study stands at a pivotal moment as Ireland is beginning to formally acknowledge the issue of abuse faced by gay men. Like any movement, it begins with dedicated and open-minded individuals on the front line. In June 2022, Men's Aid launched a training programme for LGBTQ victims, the first in Ireland. Educational officer and openly gay man, Derek Byrne carefully devised this pilot programme through a broad consultation with local LGBTQ organisations and Irish and International violence-based researchers. The first phase of this educational programme teaches professionals and LGBTQ individuals to identify abuse in same-sex relationships. The second phase tackles more general issues affecting the LGBTQ community (such as HIV or the chemsex phenomenon) (Men's Aid Ireland, 2022). The implementation of this initiative speaks to the full inclusion of gay men (and other LGBTQ individuals) as the next step in the evolution of tackling this phenomenon.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter critically analysed the accumulated knowledge regarding gay men and intimate partner violence. In the absence of a universal definition of IPV, it is difficult to determine the full scope of this issue. The literature reviewed above suggests that the epistemological understanding of this phenomenon is gendered and heteronormative, contributing to the underreporting of cases and perpetuating societal misconceptions surrounding the nature and seriousness of abuse in gay men's relationships.

This thesis is rooted in the principles of social constructivism, acknowledging the impact of societal constructs on the construction of gay men's biographical narratives. This conceptual framework underpinning this study focused on the concept of intimate citizenship among gay men, illustrating how the intersection of their public and private lives is influenced and strained by their invisibility within a heteronormative society (Plummer, 2003). Given that gender has influenced the social construction of IPV, it is critical to recognise that gender also influences how men present themselves, particularly in how they perform their masculinity and articulate their experiences of abuse within their life stories.

According to the literature, gay men experience a double marginalisation when situating themselves within gender discourses and heteronormativity (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Paradoxically, gay men are susceptible to feminization while concurrently being subject to societal expectations of stoicism and resilience traditionally linked with masculinity (Connell, 2002). This is further exacerbated by the lack of societal understanding surrounding abuse in male to male relationships, with men often being traditionally portrayed as perpetrators rather than victims (Corbally, 2011).

In addition, the conceptual framework of this study delves into the theorization and social performances surrounding masculinity. Connell's theory of masculinity is an important theoretical perspective for comprehending the societal positioning of gay men within the gender order. In particular, gay men are frequently assigned a 'subordinate masculinity' in contrast to 'hegemonic masculinity' which underscores their social stigmatisation in society (Connell, 2005). Social discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity were delineated as crucial components of the conceptual framework of the current study, aimed at understanding how gay men interpret experiences of IPV. This is because when men articulate their abuse, they must align their experiences to their 'gendered self' (Hart, 1996).

Donovan and Hester's (2015) conceptualization of love practices and relationship rules serve as a useful perspective to comprehend the dynamics of abusive relationships among gay men and their articulation of these experiences. It is important to note that this study shifts the focus to a different perspective by exploring how gay men uniquely account for dynamics in their abusive relationships through an examination of their narrative portrayals and understanding of masculinity. The concept of 'minority stress' is also employed in this thesis to examine the potential impact of men's affiliation with the marginalised sexual community and how this affiliation may shape their relationships and the construction of their life stories (Meyer, 2003).

While traditional theoretical literature on IPV has primarily focused on female victim cohorts, overlooking the intersecting experiences of marginalised victims, research indicates that IPV paradigms constructed for heterosexual relationships can help explain violence in gay men's relationships. This would suggest that the expressions of violence and dominance, as elucidated in these theoretical frameworks, are universal, manifesting in the intricate ways humans regardless of their gender or sexual orientation navigate their intimate relationships. In particular, this study delves into these theories, encompassing the perspectives of Walker (1979, 2000), Johnson (1995, 2006), and Stark (2007) to comprehend the nature of abuse as narrated by gay men in their life stories.

This chapter situated this study in an Irish context and delved into the historical criminalisation of gay men. A significant finding concerns the invisibility of gay male victims in Ireland, characterised by scarcity of research, societal awareness and service provision. This finding serves as a compelling rationale for conducting this study to illuminate an underexplored area and better understand the experiences of this marginalised population.

This literature review suggests that IPV is highly prevalent, and while gay men's abuse experiences may align with traditional abuse representations, they may also encounter distinct forms of abuse not adequately captured within heterosexual IPV paradigms. This chapter highlights the drawbacks of conducting quantitative research on gay men's abuse, given the lack of consensus about IPV definitions and paradigms. While the literature review pinpointed similarities (psychological, physical, financial, and sexual violence) and differences (sexual minority stress, outing, societal and internalised homophobia) between abuse experienced by gay men and heterosexual women, the role of these phenomena is frequently unclear, partly due to the paucity of qualitative studies on sexual minority victims. This calls for a closer look at gay men's lived experiences with first-hand knowledge of IPV. Using BNIM and collecting abuse narratives from gay men, this study addresses this gap. The next chapter summarises the research methodological approach and analytical framework underpinning this current study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) that was used in this study. BNIM serves as both a methodology and a method for conducting narrative research. The section delves into the underlying principles of this methodology and the specific techniques employed for data collection and analysis. To begin, this chapter situates BNIM within the interpretivism paradigm. The central tenets of and the reasons for choosing this methodology are explored below. The chapter concludes with a discussion and reflective account of the practical application of BNIM to this study.

3.1 Study Design

In this study, it was crucial to clarify the underlying assumptions of ontology and epistemology. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality as it relates to the phenomenon under investigation (Crotty, 1998). The ontological position adopted in this thesis is centred on interpretivism (embolic of the 'I' in BNIM) by which reality is not fixed but socially constructed through shared understandings, language, and interactions (Ryan, 2008). On the other hand, epistemology refers to the researcher's assumptions concerning how knowledge is obtained (Crotty, 1998). This study adopts an epistemological stance that emphasises the significance of participants' narratives in assigning meaning to their experiences and actions. Thus, knowledge and understanding of abuse is explored through the lens of men's subjective lived experiences (Wengraf, 2001).

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that emphasises the role of social and cultural processes in shaping the epistemology of knowledge (Burr 2008; Gubirum and Holstein, 1997). Thus, human behaviour is governed by meanings and such meanings are bound to the individual's own understanding of a situation or how they have experienced it (Blumer, 1969).

When considering the assumptions of narrative (embolic of the 'N' in BNIM) 'talk' is an extension of 'self' and society' (Bruner, 1987; Chamberlayne and King, 2000; Plummer, 2001; Riessman, 1993). In other words, how the narrator understands himself is deeply connected to how he experiences his world (Vice, 2003). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) refer to the 'narrative self' as 'locally shared' as it continually transitions between 'institutional discourses and everyday life' (p. 232). Wengraf (2008) calls this 'situated subjectivity' which makes clear that the 'narrative self' is tethered to a situation in time and space (such as geographical, cultural and social locations) (Moen, 2018). The concept of 'positioning' usefully examines how individuals take up a position in their narratives and assign meaning to discursive practices and situational categories, such as parts and characters i.e. man, gay, partner, son etc. (Davies and Harré, 1990). This acknowledges that embedded in narratives are the portrayal of a multiplicity of selves and positions, whereby less desirable identities are minimised to favour more desirable ones (Corbally, 2011). In addition, Riemann and Schutze's work (2005) offers a valuable lens for comprehending the transformation of narrative self in the face of trauma. The biogeographical processes inherent in this theoretical framework will be detailed later in this chapter.

3.2 Situating Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry represents a branch of methodological approaches which focuses on the study of human experiences through the use of storytelling and narratives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). According to Bruner (1986), there are two lenses from which to view the world. The paradigmatic mode of thought is concerned with the mode of science, such as theory, cause and effect. The Narrative mode emerged from the limitations of realist, positivist and scientific views, which struggled to account for complicated social life (Bruner, 1991; Riessman, 1993). As a result, personal storytelling became a valid method of producing knowledge (Fraser, 2004; Plummer, 1995; Reissman, 1990). Situated at the point of postmodern social change (Etherington, 2007), the 'narrative turn' illustrated the rising popularity of qualitative research whereby stories became increasingly fruitful to investigate human activity (Elliot, 2005; Squire,

2008). Narrative research has captured the interest of scholars globally and incorporates a broad spectrum of methods and theoretical perspectives (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 1993; Somers, 1994). Despite crossing disciplinary boundaries, the common denominator of narrative inquiry is its focus on texts and dialogue which ‘bring stories of personal experience into being’ which can include ‘first-person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience’ (Patterson, 2002, p. 43). Thus, narrative methods are recognised as ‘inclusive research’ (Peta et al., 2019), which have the means to examine sensitive populations and subject matter while magnifying the voices of those who are marginalised or who may have gone otherwise unheard in academic and social discourses (Jones, 2003; Reissman, 2008; Ryan, 2004).

When discussing the drawbacks of narrative (as a school of inquiry), some have compared the field to a ‘near-anarchy’ (Mishler, 1995, p. 88). Its application across a multitude of disciplines has resulted in a plethora of definitions (Frey, 2018), theoretical positions (Etherington, 2006; Mishler, 1995), and research methods (McAlpine, 2016) all considered as narrative inquiry. This is also typified by the elusive answers to the question of how to define ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ in this field (Elliott, 2005; Mishler, 1995; Temple, 2008). The lack of clearly defined boundaries of narrative terminology is likely to infringe on the quality and rigour of narrative research projects. The strengths of narrative methodologies lie in their capacity to draw attention to individuals’ voices while illuminating broader issues and events (Miller, 2000). Narrative research is recognised for its epistemological and ethical values to present experience as holistically as possible (Temple, 2008). It has a capacity to recognise people’s strengths (Fraser, 2004) and help them organise their experiences meaningfully (Berger, 1997). These factors contributed to the choice of the methodology for this study.

3.3 Situating BNIM

BNIM constitutes a ‘powerful methodology for capturing lived situations and experiences through narrative interviewing’ (Smith, 2012, p.3). Its history traces back to Germany after World War II when Holocaust survivors were interviewed about their life experiences using biographical methods. This yielded a surge in case studies, biographies, and life history research to investigate social phenomena (Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal, 1997). Over the last twenty-two years, Wengraf (2008) developed BNIM as a distinct interviewing technique and analytical method. BNIM is interdisciplinary in nature and draws from principles of phenomenology, interactionism, and hermeneutics. Wengraf (2011) describes this as giving route to ‘conscious concerns and unconscious cultural, societal and individual presuppositions and processes’ (p. 56). Even though Wengraf accentuates these narratives as 'free flowing', the method is paradoxically 'rule-bound' (Moran et al., 2022). The formulaic component of BNIM facilitates a deep reflection on the positionalities of researcher and participant and thus lends itself to exploring past, present and future subjectivities (Jones, 2003).

It is important to consider that biographical stories (emblematic of the ‘B’ in BNIM) are seen as situational interpretations of events as opposed to what is traditionally recognized as the ‘truth’ (Chamberlayne et al., 2000). This was clarified by Wengraf (2017) as ‘somebody’s experiencing of something’ (p. 15). Thus, as opposed to fact finding, this study was concerned with how men presented their abuse through a multitude of interpreted and changeable storylines. Verisimilitude, described by Brunner (1991), is concerned with what appears factual or real but is based on interpretation as opposed to fact. Therefore, whether true or false, the narrative itself is consequential. Positivists may criticise such ambiguity and dismiss these findings as lacking in 'truth' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). However, the merits of BNIM recognise the interpretive nature of truth (or narratable truth) and intentionally view social phenomena broadly by what is

believable or plausible or what may lie outside 'logic' such as emotions, meanings and unconscious human performances (Corbally, 2011; Squire, 2008).

As discussed earlier, by choosing narrative interviewing, the study was placed squarely within the tradition of interpretive qualitative inquiry. Biography is the process by which one accounts for their life history or life story (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014). Given that this includes all personal life experiences deemed relevant by the biographer under the aim of accounting for oneself and one's life, it is clear that BNIM serves as a powerful means to examine how identity is constructed (Squire, 2008). As Taylor (1992) contends, 'we cannot but strive to give our lives meaning or substance, and ... this means that we understand ourselves inescapably in narrative' (p. 51). When weaving stories together, the self is continually reworked according to social discourses and categories. Thus, personal or identity transformation occurs 'across' narratives touching on to the past, the present and the future (Davies and Harré, 1990; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Squire, 2008). As a result, BNIM is useful to track transitions within the lived life including turning points and epiphanies (Denzin 1989). Through exploring 'self' and 'society', it is possible to trace the construction and transitory nature of private and public identities (Plummer, 2001). By that reason, interpretivist studies have a remarkable aptness to trace how the self is altered by trauma and re-altered by recovery and healing (Bruner, 2004; Corbally, 2011; Riessman, 2008)

The use of narrative methodology capitalises on the innate human inclination towards storytelling (Reissman, 1993). This was reinforced by Connelly and Clandinn (1990), who suggest people are naturally 'storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives' (p. 2). However, given its colloquial usage, 'story' and 'narrative' are treated synonymously, despite their meanings being fundamentally different. A story encompasses interweaving elements of plot, characters and a problem which evoke a particular response from

the reader and audience. However, stories can only transform into narratives when intentionally sequenced (Reissman, 1993). Temporal ordering is the process by which stories are organised in sequential order across time and space (Elliot, 2005). This is reiterated by Wengraf (2020) who suggests ‘the concept of a ‘narrative’ is that of something arranged in a sequence over time—first this, then that: a story’ (p.12). Similarly, Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) describe narratives as discourses with a recognisable sequential order. Furthermore, narratives consist of a co-construction of performances, meanings and subjectivities by narrator and listener who both contribute to the semantics of the interview data (Riessman 2008; Squire, 2008).

By being situated in social interpretivism, biographical stories are not fixed in time but continually change due to ongoing interactions between the narrator, researcher and audience (Plummer, 1995; Elliot, 2005; Greenhalgh, Russell and Swinglehurst, 2005). For example, Burkitt (1999) refers to self as a ‘socially cultured agent’ influenced by social interactions. Likewise, Goffman (1990) likens social interaction to a theatrical performance. The ‘self’ is considered a ‘situational managed performance’ characterised by a conscious and unconscious management of how one is perceived by others. Therefore, narratives are constructed by ‘actors’ through ‘performances’, shaped by an ‘audience’. However, 18th-century French writer La Rochefoucault warned of how the portrayal of self may be self-serving, as ‘though truths emerge in what’s said, words were given to men to hide their thoughts’ (as cited in Wengraf, 2020, p. 17). Thus, the vulnerability (and arguably merit) of BNIM lies in relinquishing control of the flow of interview to the narrator who is likely to intentionally and unintentionally control their impression within their biographical stories (also called narrative identity or narrative portrayal). This will likely influence the structure of spoken and body language, in which stories may be modified to preserve the portrayal of self (Squire, 2008; Goffman, 1990). In the context of this study, gendered and heterosexist discourses surrounding IPV and masculinity influenced how

men in this study presented themselves, as they either eschewed or favoured narrative strategies when constructing their accounts of IPV.

BNIM was chosen to facilitate the voice of sexual minority survivors for the following reasons. The life stories of gay men with lived experiences of abuse have not been analysed using this specific narrative method in Ireland and most likely on an international level. Ricoeur (2004) contends that narratives reflect the realities 'behind' the experience and provide 'practical wisdom' about social issues (p. 692). At present, most knowledge about IPV among gay men is based on quantitative studies (see the above literature review). Therefore, first-person testimony in the form of biographical narratives from gay men who have experienced abuse is a 'story not yet told' (Squire, 2008 p.25). This observation is problematic, because sharing one's story is often a prerequisite for recovery. Life stories serve many purposes, including organising historical events and advancing personal knowledge of oneself and the lived life through oral expression. As a result, lived experiences, including trauma and abuse, become more coherent and meaningful to the survivor through storytelling (Wengraf, 2008). This is in tandem with Frosh et al. (2002), who suggests narratives serve as a path to unspoken meanings. Stark (2007) also emphasises the credentials in storytelling, specifically victims must tell their story to receive support and for political and legal reforms to be tailored. Therefore, stories of abuse must 'fit into a narrative that evokes public interest in intervention' (p. 371). However, current IPV approaches have gained visibility through the dissemination of narratives told by female victims insofar as women have subsumed culturally familiar plotlines and characters in depictions of this issue. In light of how new stories must defend against their ancestors, gay men's stories risk being regarded as unintelligible (Polletta, 2009). However, the prioritising of public life over private life has led those who are located at the periphery of society to be heard and for new voices to be told (Plummer, 2001). Moreover, BNIM has the means 'to raise new kinds of voices', which necessitates the eliciting life stories from gay men (Peta et al., 2019, p. 525).

The core reason for choosing BNIM was its unique examination of temporality. This is due to the fact that three interrelated facets of humanity are examined in this method. This includes the person's life histories (biography), how they tell their story (narrative) whilst appreciating that biographical narratives are bound by social interpretation (interpretive) (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014). This is further divided into a two track analysis of the objective 'lived life' including events that occurred chronologically over the life-period and 'told story' which retails meanings specific to the narrator, such as unconscious meanings and presentations that flowed within their narrative (Squire, 2008; Wengraf, 2006). Therefore, this method provides rich detail on men's intimate lives and how they are influenced by their public world including broader social and structural settings (Roberts, 2002). Wengraf (2008) refers to this as "historical situatedness" (p. 1). In Ireland, gay men's history of criminalisation and stigmatisation will likely shape their recollection of their lived lives and told stories (as discussed in the literature review above). Cultural perspectives on being a gay man in Ireland and elsewhere may influence their portrayal of abuse. Of particular interest is how abuse among gay men is likely to be hidden in society and this invisibility is likely to permeate men's narrative construction. For this reason, BNIM was selected because it seeks to 'situate' these men within these broader social contexts. This is certainly the meaning that can be gleaned from Wengraf (2021) in his most recent writing:

'BNIM is a method of research: sometimes for history for its own sake (oral history), more often as a part of oral sociology exploring the lived experience of people belonging to different generations and sectors, dated and situated in recent or currently-happening personal and collective transitions, as lived from multiple and often contradictory viewpoints. The task is to describe, but also to understand, recent and present-day experiences and lived situations, practices and choice-points as they recall their past lived experiencing' (p.13)

In choosing the classic (non-modified) rendering of the BNIM, a number of factors were taken into consideration. Firstly, given the sensitive nature of disclosing intimate details of abuse, it was important that men guided the interview process in their own time. Central to this interview technique is empowering the interviewee to tell an improvised story whereby they begin and end their uninterrupted initial narration (Wengraf, 2001, 2021). As a result, proponents of BNIM

advocate for its therapeutic and empowering benefits for research participants who tell stories from their own frame of reference (Corbally, 2011; Corbally and O'Neill, 2014; Peta et al., 2019). Rather than ask men questions deemed significant by the interviewer, they imposed their own ordering, significance and construction on what abuse looked like for them.

Lastly, the choice of this method is situated within 'the paradigm wars' in which positivists seek to deny the legitimacy of interpretivist studies (Bryman, 2008). Thus, BNIM is bolstered by a robust interview style and lengthy analytical procedure. Its greatest strength is the maximum of three interpretive panels per case, which allow for a broader range of viewpoints, perspectives, and subjectivities to be considered (Wengraf, 2020). The strengths of the methodology and caveats are presented in this chapter. This section has justified BNIM as suitable methodology (underlying principles of interpretivism) to explore the social construction of IPV as it relates to one's biography. The next section clarifies the process by which the data of this study was collected and analysed.

3.4 Data Collection

The following section describes the methods that were used to access and collect data from the participants in this study.

3.4.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee in June 2020. The sensitive nature of this study was apparent for a number of reasons. Given that gay men constitute a vulnerable sexual minority population (Salerno et al., 2020) and that IPV encompasses a sensitive research topic (Hyden, 2008), the risks associated with disclosing one's sexuality and sharing one's abuse story were minimised when possible. This involved the researcher taking responsibility for managing and anticipating potential risks and

harm to both themselves and the participants (McCosker et al., 2001). For this reason, a safety protocol guided by the work of Langford (2000) and Corbally (2011) was initiated to ensure the safety of both parties in the recruitment and online interview phases of this study (see Appendix D). On reflection, this protocol prioritised the physical safety over the emotional safety of the participants and researcher; it would have been useful to have more explicit guidance on managing sensitive topics in the interview. However, due to my social care background, I was able to use my own initiative to emotionally check in with participants, suggest taking temporary breaks and ensure that participants were comfortable to talk about sensitive topics. Nevertheless, it is important to make these measures more explicit in future research protocols.

Prior to the interviews, written consent was obtained from all participants and a plain language statement was provided. In these documents, the study was explicitly outlined in terms of its purpose and risks (see Appendix E and F). This ensured that participants were informed before voluntarily accepting or refusing to participate in this study (Orb et al., 2000). To ensure the men remained willing to engage in this study (and that no new issues had arisen), consent was obtained audibly through a voice recorder on the day of the interview. Participants were also given the opportunity to discuss any questions, issues or concerns prior to the commencement of the interview. Regarding confidentiality, the names of all participants presented in this study are pseudonyms, meaning details of their real names and all identifying biographical details (such as full dates of birth, locations etc) have been changed or omitted to provide anonymity.

Despite these measures, biographical studies pose ethical and methodological challenges regarding confidentiality. This is because respondents play active roles when constructing their idiographic narratives, as they or their stories may be recognised despite explicit anonymity measures (Elliot, 2005). Plummer (2001) also expressed this concern: ‘With many life documents the issue of confidentiality is an acute one: stories of lives by their very nature usually

render their authors recognisable.’ (p. 217). Thus, participants were briefed regarding the limitations of maintaining complete anonymity in this narrative study. Despite being informed of these potential risks, all participants were happy to share their life stories. During the collection and storage of participant data, all information was treated safely and confidentially. After the interview, the men were offered a debriefing session in which they could voice their concerns with the researcher. They were also provided with LGBTQ friendly counsellors and services for additional support (See appendix G).

3.4.2 Recruitment of Participants

In line with the theoretical and methodological tenets of BNIM, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed whereby participants were recruited based on their previous experiences of IPV with a male partner (Cresswell et al., 2011). This maximises the likelihood of accessing information-rich cases that are likely to illuminate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015; Bungay et al., 2016). Furthermore, non-random or convenience sampling, whereby the researcher directly recruits from a convenient source, was a feasible recruitment strategy to target gay men who are a hidden or underrepresented population without adequate lists and sampling frames (Bungay et al., 2016). Therefore, in collaboration with LGBTQ organisations in Ireland, a promotional research poster highlighting information about the study (See Appendix H) was circulated to gay and bisexual men. In addition, a dedicated Facebook page was set-up to provide information to potential participants and offer another channel for participants to ask questions. Between November 2020 and June 2021, six men were interviewed using the BNIM.

The recruitment phase of this study coincided with the global outbreak of COVID-19, an infectious disease that resulted in unprecedented levels of confirmed cases, hospital admissions and fatalities (Crowley and Hughes, 2021). In March 2020, the Irish government introduced

stay-at-home orders and movement restrictions to mitigate the community spread of the virus (Owens and Cassarino, 2022). However, these stringent measures paradoxically confined potential victims to their homes with their abusers (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020). Experts coined the surge in IPV prevalence attributed to COVID-19 as the 'shadow pandemic' (Kersten et al. 2023; Wake and Kandula, 2022; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True, 2020). Three months after societal restrictions were in place in Ireland, recruitment of this study began. As a result of the COVID restrictions, LGBTQ organisations ceased operating in their physical premises and offered limited services remotely. This significantly curtailed the distribution of the recruitment research poster and awareness of the study. The purposeful sampling strategy was moved online to overcome this recruitment challenge. A social media recruitment strategy was utilised to boost the engagement of historically hidden populations (Gelinas et al., 2017). This has been successfully operationalised to recruit gay male victims in previous studies (Finneran et al., 2012; Finneran and Stephenson, 2014; KwongLai Poon, 2010; Yu et al., 2013;). This entailed asking LGBTQ organisations, magazines, social media groups, public figures and advocates to share the recruitment poster throughout their online social media platforms. In addition, a direct advertisement for this study was shared on the Dublin City University website (See Appendix I).

The strongest limitation of purposeful sampling is its exclusion of a diverse representation of a group (Benoit et al. 2005). Therefore, this recruitment strategy narrowed to specific groups of adult men within the sexual minority community who were 'out' about their sexual orientation, recognised to some degree that they had experienced IPV and who was likely to engage with the LGBTQ community (especially during peak recruitment phases of this study). Given the challenges of recruiting a hidden population in a global pandemic, the recruitment stage took over ten months to complete (June 2020 - March 2021).

The original design for data collection was impacted by the circumstances arising from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the wake of the stay-at-home orders in Ireland, interviews with the six participants (which were originally intended to be undertaken face-to-face) were conducted exclusively online via Zoom or by telephone. This unexpected shift to online engagement presented a distinctive challenge given the absence of established research guidelines and prior examples of this particular approach (Wengraf, 2021). The safety protocol was adapted with additional security encryption measures for the Zoom platform (see Appendix D). Whilst this shift prompted initial questions and considerations regarding negotiating consent, ensuring reliable internet access, whether rapport, depth of narrative and trust was possible, it transpired that online interviewing brought unanticipated benefits. Engaging in preliminary conversations before the interview proved beneficial in establishing rapport, and participants seemed comfortable sharing their experiences over Zoom. Interestingly, the perceived anonymity of the online setting appeared to encourage participants to be more forthcoming than expected with their abuse stories. The benefit of conducting online interviews meant that participants had control over the accessibility of the location of their interview. Participants were situated in a quiet environment of their choosing. Some participants chose to be interviewed while travelling abroad or at times that suited them, occasionally even during their work hours. Online interviewing avoided scheduling conflicts and logistical issues often associated with face-to-face meetings. Some participants also reported feeling more at ease sharing sensitive information from the comfort of a familiar environment. In summary, the move to online interviewing arising from the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic did not adversely impact on the quality of data collected and was a convenient means for participants to share their stories.

3.4.3 BNIM Interviewing

BNIM interviewing was the means by which data were collected for the study. It has a particularised interview technique, using a two-session format (Wengraf, 2006). Collectively,

all six participants participated in two sequential interviews: subsession one and subsession two.

A detailed breakdown of the BNIM interview process is located in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Overview of the structure of the BNIM interview		
	Subsession 1: In pursuit of a life story	Subsession 2: Follow up from a life story
Purpose of the interview	To prompt participants to tell their official improvised story, a single narrative-inducing question (SQUIN) is used. This ensures that the participant controls the beginning, ending and overall flow of the interview.	To push for Particular Incident Narratives (PINS) in which participants are encouraged to describe in greater detail the events previously discussed in the first session.
Structure of the interview	‘As you know, I am researching gay and bisexual men’s experiences of domestic violence, and the impact or effects of those experiences. I understand you have had those experiences. So, tell me your story of domestic violence, all the events and experiences which were important for you... up until now. You can begin whenever you like. Please take your time and go as slowly as you like. I will just listen quietly and not interrupt. I may take down some notes in case I have any further questions for you. However, I will only ask the questions once you have finished telling me about your story’.	‘You said X do you remember any more about that particular occasion? How did it all happen?’ OR ‘You said X do you have any thoughts (or feelings) about that time?’ *Depending on the context of the question, the words can be interchanged with: Incident, Event, Moment, Time, Situation, Phase.

Table 1: Overview of the Structure of the BNIM interview

As illustrated in Table 1, the first subsession consisted of the interviewer asking the participant a single question which seeks to elicit their life story. This 'Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative' (abbreviated as SQUIN) detailed above provides a narrative stimulus presented through an open-ended framing question (See Appendix J). This technique created openings for a narrative to unfold' (Galleta, 2001, p. 2). The rationale for asking one core question over several formulated questions reduced the risk of the researcher overly leading the participant and skewing the results (Squire, 2008). Thus, rich layers of insight into men's private worlds were garnered by encouraging them to tell an uninterrupted life story. To ensure successful implementation of this technique, the researcher completed a two day BNIM interview training workshop facilitated by the pioneer of the method Tom Wengraf. During the first BNIM interview, the free-associative approach gives rise to a distinctive sequence of topics, entirely guided by the participant, commonly referred to as a 'gestalt' (Schutze, 1999). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) describe the 'gestalt' as 'a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda informing each person's life' (p. 34). It is the role of interviewer to facilitate the free development of the interviewee's 'gestalt' through passive, non-interruptive intervention (such as smiles, nods, repeating 'hmm' etc.) that encourages the participant to begin and end the interview at their own pace (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2015). This provides access to the overall key meaning of the interview and how each man (independent of the researcher) accounted for their own abuse (Schutze, 1992).

In summary, the SQUIN interview technique ensures the centrality of the participant who sets their own boundaries of what they wish to discuss (Wengraf, 2020). This serves two purposes: to empower participants whilst allowing the researcher to actively listen and take notes (Wengraf, 2001) and to carefully untangle sensitive IPV stories (Corbally, 2011). This is reinforced by Wengraf (2020) who refers to BNIM as a 'powerful and delicately sensitive tool' to unravel complex subjects (p. 4). The significance of this open structure allows participants to

author their own stories as opposed to responding to researcher-led questioning (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997). Closure of the sub-session one interview was typically framed by the participants' own conclusions of their unscripted stories: *'I think I kind of waffled on for long enough. Em... I'll let you go, shall I?'* (Will) *'And that is it, that is my story'* (Sam). *'I suppose that is probably the bulk of the story'* (Tom) *'That is the story anyway'* (Cole). The sub-session one interviews ranged from between 40 minutes to three hours in duration. Sub-session two (informed by the details provided in the first interview) took place following a 10-15 minute break which allowed the participants to collect their thoughts whilst the interviewer reviewed their field notes and planned the questions for sub-session two.

There was a striking contrast between the interviewer's minimal intervention in the opening interview and their more prominent presence in sub-session two. In this regard, the researcher pushed for 'deeper' or 'fleshed out' details through a series of 'narrative-pointed' questions (Wengraf, 2001 (See Appendix J). This technique preserves the interviewee's 'gestalt' or imposed ordering of events as brought up in the first sub-session. In other words, men were asked carefully constructed questions following the precise order and wording as told in their 'whole story' (Peta et al., 2020, 2019, 2006). Table 1 highlights the formulaic structure of these repetitive event-focused questions. Structural elements of this question changed depending on the context of the PIN and key words were interchanged with more appropriate phases (e.g. event, situation, phase, moment). These are described as 'PIN-seeking questions' due to their aptness to excavate new details about specific occasions, happenings and narrative turning points (or PINS) (Peta et al., 2020). For all six participants, the second interview was considerably longer and more detailed, as they disclosed more detail of abuse incidents, ranging from one to four hours. This would suggest the merit of this rigid format of 'pushing for PINS' to prompt men to phenomenologically revisit these experiences was helpful for overcoming the

emotional distance between them and their abuse narratives. In these moments, men appeared more open and seemingly embraced their vulnerability.

At the end of each interview, the researcher compiled free associative debriefing field notes (including transcribed or audio recordings) on their thoughts, feelings and notes of what was observed in the interview scene. This includes ‘all outer realities and all inner experiences’ evoked by the researcher when interacting with the respondent (Wengraf, 2001, p. 48). According to Wengraf (2020), rich field notes are crucial for supplementing collected data and for informal tacit sense-making for the researcher. This facilitated the inclusion of an ethnographic perspective, recognising that some observational data (such as capturing interviewees’ unspoken cues and gestures) may not be detected among the interview data (Fisher, 1978). Serendipitously, composing private field notes sparked an immediate organisation of my own thoughts as I was forced to meditatively ‘talk out’ the stirred-up personal experiences, images and reflections arising in the interviews. Therefore, this self-monitoring process served as a personal debrief and powerful buffer from the enviable stressors related to the active listening of traumatic stories (Liamputtong, 2007).

In summary, the BNIM interview style elicited narratives of remarkable depth, capturing the ubiquity and intricacy of everyday life and experience (Moran et al., 2022). At times this required examining the life experiences volunteered by participants but also examining the topics that were deliberately hidden within the contradictions and the silences (Wengraf, 2008).

‘By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate, not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means, the mechanisms by which they are consumed, and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted. All these areas of inquiry can help us describe, understand and even explain important aspects of the world.’ (Squire, 2008, p. 5)

In keeping with the tenets of BNIM, all interview audio files recordings in this study underwent a verbatim transcription process (Wengraf, 2001). Verbatim transcription concerns the word for word or exact replication of audio recordings into a written format (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006). A private transcription service associated with Dublin City University was contracted to transcribe all interview data collected in this study. This was due to the labour-intensive nature of verbatim transcription and the extensive amount of interview material that was collected (Britten, 1995).

3.4.4 Case Selection

All six participants were interviewed using the BNIM interview technique (see section 3.4.3). However, given the labour-intensive nature of the BNIM data analysis approach, Wengraf (2008) advises focusing on a small number of cases for the full BNIM analysis, to identify key themes and patterns. In this study, three whole cases were selected for full BNIM analysis, allowing comparison of individual dynamics, forming the basis of broader theorisation (Wengraf 200, 2002). Paradoxically, Wengraf's analytical framework recommended identifying three 'gold star' cases but did not offer explicit guidance on this selection process. Plummer (2005) offers clarity by suggesting inclusion criteria should include a narrative with a degree of temporal ordering, a sense of narrative identity in which the narrator's voice and perspective are clearly expressed, and causality whereby there is an evolution of plots within life narratives. Moreover, Wengraf (2008) emphasised 'Particular Incident Narratives' (PINS) as a marker of narrative depth. A PIN constitutes the participant recalling and reliving personal experiences and past events. The individual appears to be partially returning back 'in' to the historical experience to provide rich narrative detail (Wengraf, 2001). Through this process, participants gain insight into the connections and antecedents between life events (Moran, Green and Warwick, 2022). Flynn (2014) recommended choosing the most appropriate cases for in-depth examination based on the research questions that underlie the study. Therefore, in adherence to the principles of BNIM, I selected the three cases based on the narrative depth and the largest

number of PINS; as categorised by incidents that inferred or conveyed explicit details of IPV. The individual cases of **Will, George and Sam** were chosen for the classical application of BNIM analytical conventions. It is the data from these case accounts which figures most prominently in the empirical section of this thesis. The presentation of these cases are located in chapter five.

To supplement the three core cases of Will, George and Sam, the three remaining cases (**Tom, James and Cole**) were analysed using a narrative analysis process, outlined by Polkinghorne (1995) (see section 3.4.4.6) using the core themes identified in the BNIM with the first three cases. Table 2 below provides a visual overview of the distinction on how analysis was applied to participant cases. Although Tom, James and Cole's cases were supplementary, their inclusion as narrative cases allow for connections to be made across cases (see Chapter six). Peta et al. (2019) established this precedent by transforming the large data sets elicited from disabled women into whole life stories as opposed to undergoing the purest BNIM data analysis. As stated by the authors: 'a researcher can still choose to use non-BNIM interpretive techniques even after generating data through BNIM interviews' (p. 518).

Table 2: Overview of how analysis was undertaken amongst participant cases		
	Will, George and Sam	Tom, James and Cole
Interview phase	Each participant underwent the BNIM interview, which encompassed both subsession 1, during which they shared their life story, and subsession 2, where they provided additional narrative details.	Every participant underwent the BNIM interview, which encompassed both subsession 1, during which they shared their life story, and subsession 2, where they provided additional narrative details.
Analysis phase	<p>Subjected to the complete BNIM analytical framework, involving all nine stages for each individual case (Wengraf, 2001)</p> <p>This includes the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biographical Data Chronology creation 2. lived life interpretive panel analysis 3. Biographical Data Analysis creation 4. Text Structure Sequentialisation creation 5. Told story interpretive panel analysis, 6. Interpretive panel microanalysis, 7. Thematic Field Analysis creation 8. Comparing lived life with the told story. 	<p>Subjected to the three-stage narrative analysis process outlined by Polkinghorne (1995).</p> <p>This includes the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the denouement of the participant's life story. 2. Organising the data in a chronological order. 3. Assemble data elements into a plotted whole story.
Cross case analysis compared similarities across all six cases		

Table 2: Overview of the analysis stages of this study.

3.4.4.1 BNIM Analysis

A total of three participants (Will, George, Sam) underwent the classical application of BNIM analysis, which consisted of nine stages (Wengraf, 2001). A pictorial demonstration of the BNIM interpretation model is illustrated in Figure 2. The outcome of this procedure including the three cases are presented in Chapter 5. The last stage of BNIM analysis framework incorporated a cross case theorisation, whereby all six cases (Wil, George, Sam, Cole James and Tom) were comparatively inspected for common themes, patterns and narrative meaning. Lastly, this chapter discusses some methodological challenges and limitations that arose during the implementation of BNIM analysis.

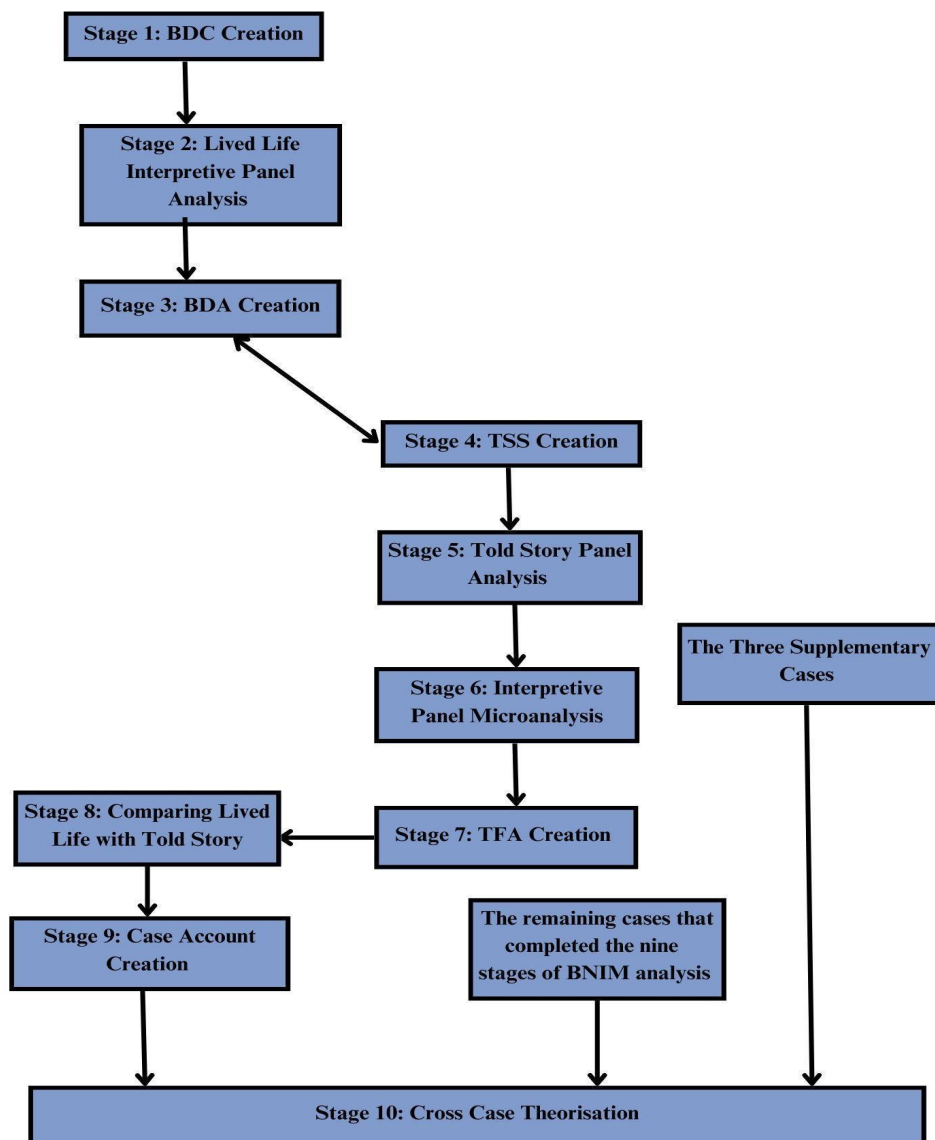


Figure 2: Overview of the BNIM Analysis Framework Adapted from Corbally & O'Neill (2014, p. 37)²

As depicted in figure 2, the nine-stage process of BNIM case reconstruction encompassed a twin track interpretation procedure distinguishing between **the objective lived life and subjective told story**. This involved tracking the flows of decisions made in men's chronological lives seeking to answer how and why their lives were fashioned in that way. Lastly, the flows of decisions during the narration of their life stories were examined, including how and why men patterned their stories in this way (Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Wengraf 2006). Both of these stages were subject to interpretive panels to enhance the depth and richness of interpretation. These two patterns (the lived life and told story) were first interpreted separately and then together through a hermeneutic case construction. This resulted in the development of a comprehensive case account for the three participants in this study (Breckner and Rupp 2002). The following section explains each process in detail.

‘Once the interview material has been worked over to produce answers to these two theory questions - what is the pattern of the lived life? What is the pattern of the told story and the self-presentation? - In the way that I shall try to show, this is not the end of the matter. We are also interested in the relationship between that structure of the lived life and that structure of the told story’ (Wengraf, 2001, p. 232).

From that vantage point, this analysis provides rich detail of life events and contributes to an understanding of how participants account for themselves and specifically how they make sense of these experiences by imposing their own order and meaningfulness. Similar remarks are proposed by Pennebaker:

‘The beauty of a narrative is that it allows us to tie all of the changes in our life into a broad comprehensive story. That is, in the same story we can talk both about the cause of the event and its many implications. Much as in any story, there can be overarching themes, plots, and subplots—many of them arranged logically and/or hierarchically. Through this process, then, the many facets of the presumed single event are organized into a more coherent whole’ (2000, p.12)

² As will be explained below, BDC is an abbreviation of Biographical Data Chronology and TFA is an abbreviation of Thematic Field Analysis.

3.4.4.2 Lived Life Analysis

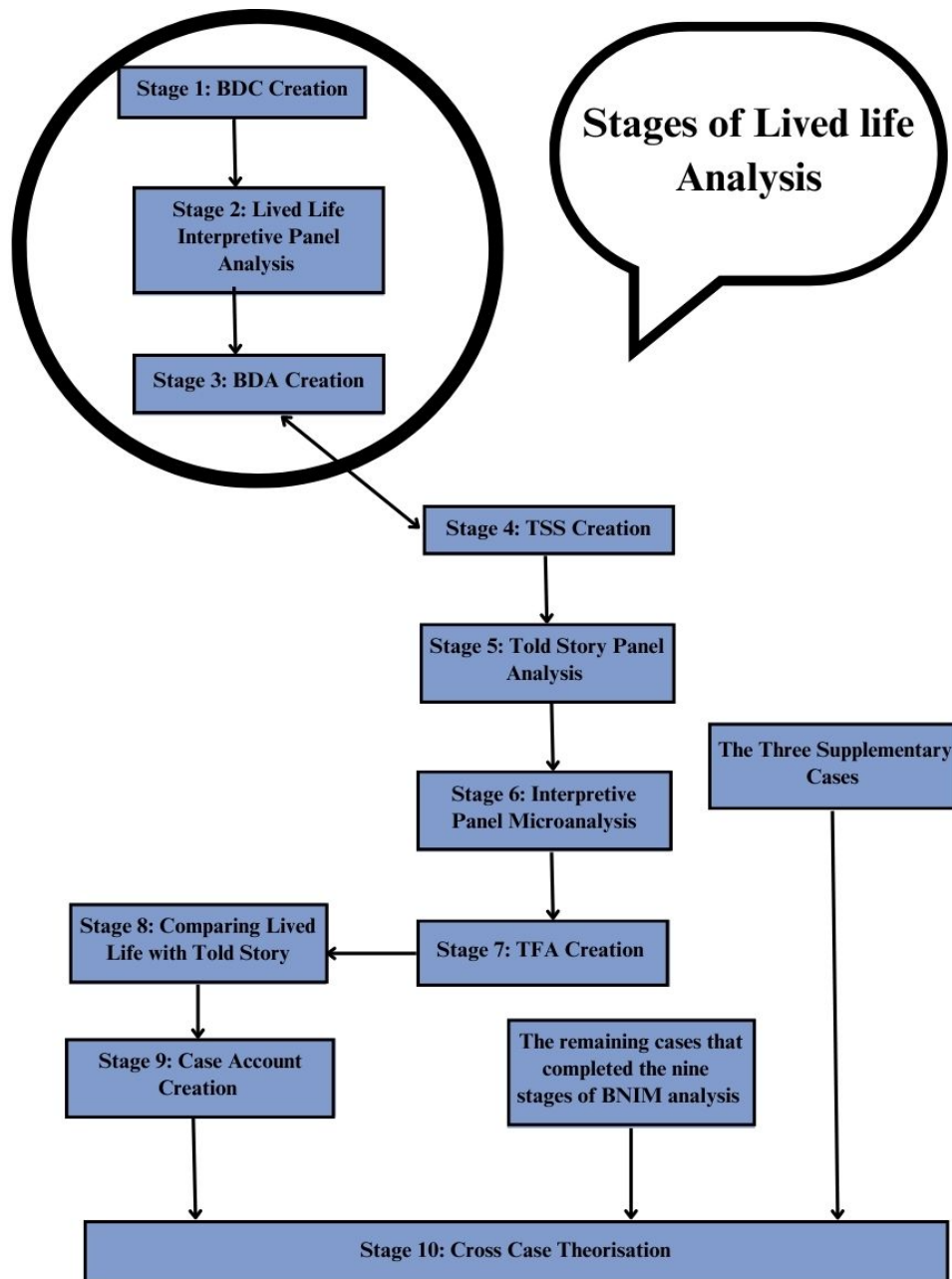


Figure 3: Overview of the Lived Life Analysis process

In BNIM, the lived life pattern comprises all life events described by the participant. This includes objective biographical data which elucidates on the lived texture and historical context of men's lives. The first stage of this analytical model begins with the researcher identifying key events and decisions embedded in a person's life and chronologically positioning these events to form a Biographical Data Chronology (BDC). This process included distinguishing the

verifiable life facts embedded in men's life stories (date of birth, period of schooling, first employment, first relationship) while omitting insupportable material (Wengraf, 2001, 2006). It was, however, a methodological challenge to determine what was verifiable in the context of abuse narratives since abuse is typically 'alleged' occurring in seclusion, making external verification challenging. Likewise, Corbally (2014) reported the complexities of applying the full BNIM criteria to establishing the verifiability of abuse incidents expressed by male victims. However, together, Wengraf (2009) and Corbally (2011) argue that private and public abuse accounts must be regarded as reliable facts to inform a full life and an abuse chronology. Therefore, in this study, abuse incidents expressed in the interview material were implemented into the Biographical Data Chronology (BDC).

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the BDC chronological document was prepared for a lived life interpretive panel. The panels consisted of three members of the public (crossing different genders and socio-demographics) who gathered in person and remotely. For a more detailed understanding of how panellists were recruited and the procedure underpinning each interpretive panel, please refer to section 3.4.4.4. The panel were presented with blind chunks of data, which they offered interpretations of the participant's life history (Wengraf, 2001; 2006). It was the researcher's role to encourage panellists to reflect on the situated subjectivity of the participant by hypothesising how chronological life facts were experienced in relation to age, personal development, family, generation, and cultural contexts. In other words, the panellists sought to reconstruct how the interviewee experienced key life experiences and generate hypotheses about possible meanings of turning-points and about future events in the participant's life-sequences. Findings distilled from the interpretations of the researcher and the lived life interpretive panel were compiled into a written document known as the Biographical Data Analysis (BDA). This encapsulates a more complete interpretation of all events in the participant's lived life (Wengraf, 2006). An example of a BDC document in relation to George is presented in Appendix K. These

analytic strategies were performed in all three cases (Will, George and Sam) and concluded the first track series and the lived life portion of the BNIM analysis framework.

3.4.4.3 Told Story Analysis

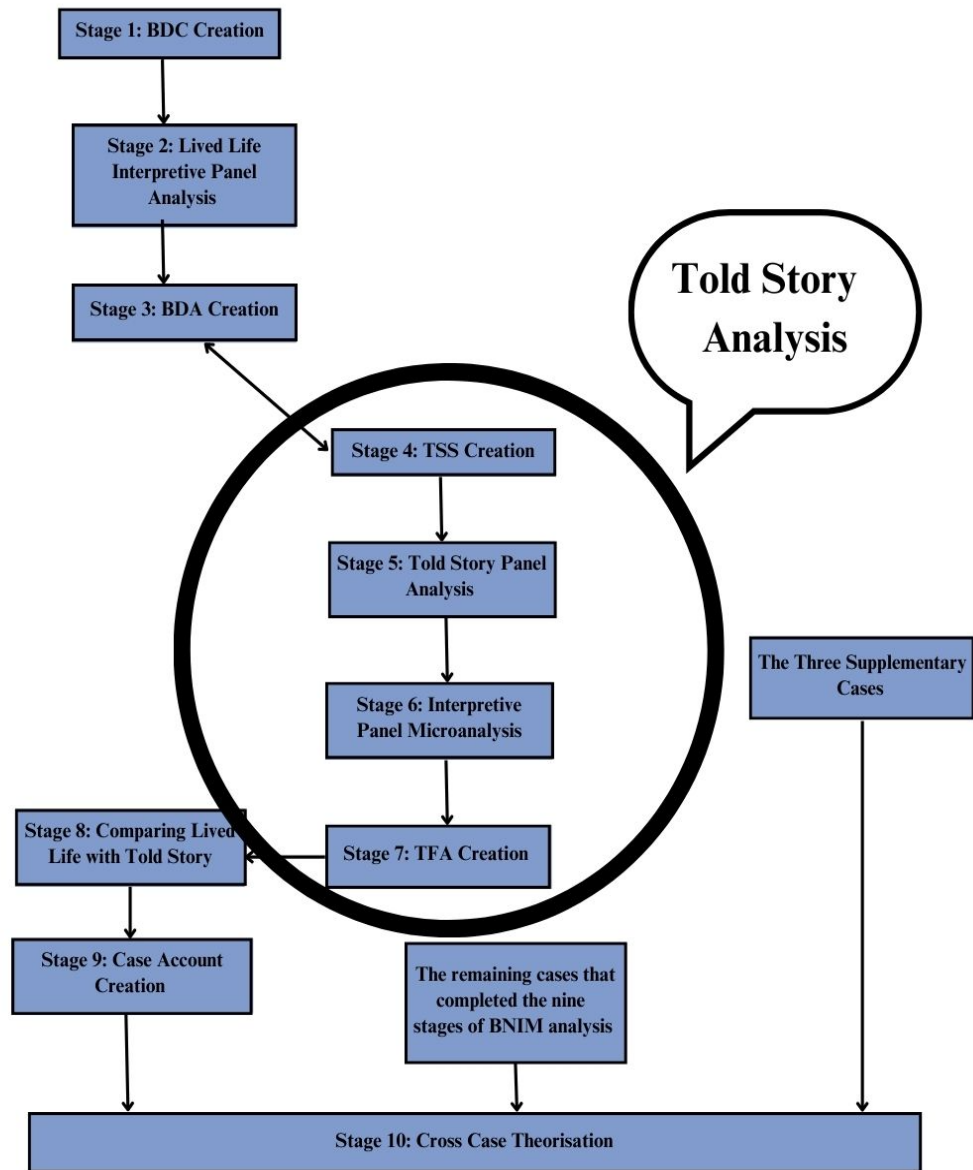


Figure 4: Overview of the Told Story Analysis process.

Proceeding to the second stage of the BNIM twin track interpretation method, stage four through seven concerns the subjective telling of the participant's life story. These four analytical processes are highlighted in the figure 4 above. The telling of the told story can be understood by the participant's improvised 'performance' arising from the interview interaction (Wengraf, 2001). This incorporated the more complex phases of this analytic model, which included a closer inspection of the text through a structural linguistic procedure known as 'Text Structure Sequentialisation' which is abbreviated as TSS (as illustrated as stage 4 in the pictorial above). This formula, coined by Wengraf as 'TextSort', seeks to identify structural changes in the participant's narration. It was inspired by Labov and Waletzky's (1997) theory of structure within textual narratives. This began by dissecting the interview transcript into segments or 'chunks' beginning with any changes in the speaker, topic, or and tone in the interview transcript. Secondly, each segment depicting a topic change was closely inspected for five empirical judgement categories known as textsorts. They consisted of description, argumentation, reporting, narratives, evaluation (as summarised under the acronym 'DARNE'). An explanation of the DARNE textsorts informing this study are provided in Appendix L.

The 'narrative' segment was further branched into the telling of a story through general incident narratives (GINS), particular incident narratives (PINS) and typical incident narratives (TINS) (2008). As opposed to recalling rich detail in PINS, GINS and TINS encapsulate a more distant or vague recalling of a past experience usually occurring over several incidents as opposed to one single incident (Wengraf 2006; Wengraf 2009). However, in the operation of the BNIM analysis, it was difficult obtaining clarity on the individual meaning behind the individual textsorts of the TSS. This initial confusion was due to how the BNIM analytic method has continued to evolve and its modifications vary across a wide distribution of publications, discussion in training workshops and regular emails by Wengraf (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014; Wengraf 2006; Wengraf 2009). For instance, there was less information about TINS and GINS when compared to what is known about PINS in Wengraf's extensive writings. This was

problematic given the assumed correlations of these textsorts. I wrote to Tom Wengraf seeking advice about this distinction. This exchange can be found in the appendix M.

Although there are similarities between TINS and GINs, they proved helpful to distinguish between men's distinctive narrative patterns, who spoke broadly about their past abuse (GIN) and indicated that they persistently endured their partner's abusive behaviour (TIN) that it was difficult for them to hone in on a single defining moment (PIN). A sample of the TSS document generated for Sam is contained in Appendix N. In stage five of BNIM, the TSS document was subject to analysis by the told story interpretive panel. This included three additional panellists (who convened in person or remotely) who collaboratively examined blind chunks of interview data. For further explanation on the recruitment process and procedures of this panel, please refer to section 3.4.4.4 below.

In contrast to the lived life panel, this second panel interpreted the textual structure and sequencing of the participant's improvised story. In doing so, the panel analysed identifiable textsorts and hidden agendas in men's narration, which elucidated on why and how certain experiences were presented in the life story (Corbally, 2011; Wengraf, 2006; Wengraf, 2009). This process was the most meaningful to generate multiple hypotheses regarding men's narrative construction, particularly their use of distant narration to talk about their abuse. The sixth component of BNIM, known as the 'microanalysis' interpretive panel, was an optional step to investigate oddities or complicated text arising in the transcript (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014; Wengraf, 2006). The outcome of this panel is discussed in section 3.4.4.4.

Now enriched by their own insights and those generated by the interpretive panels, the researcher constructed a 'thematic field analysis' (TFA) which comprises an understanding of

the told story of the individual’s life narration through the means of gestalt, pattern, and common structures. This document combined the structural analysis of the text with a thematic analysis of the data (Wengraf, 2001). Following the life-sequentialization of the men’s objective life-events (Biographical Data Chronology) and a text-sequentialization of the structuring principles of their narratives (Text Structure Sequentialization and TFA), a final process followed in which the lived life and told story were combined (Wengraf, 2001, 2006). A demonstration of this merging process can be found in Appendix O. By completion of the BNIM analytical process, three separate case accounts under the pseudonyms of Will, George and Sam were generated and are presented in Chapter 6.

3.4.4.4 Interpretive Panels

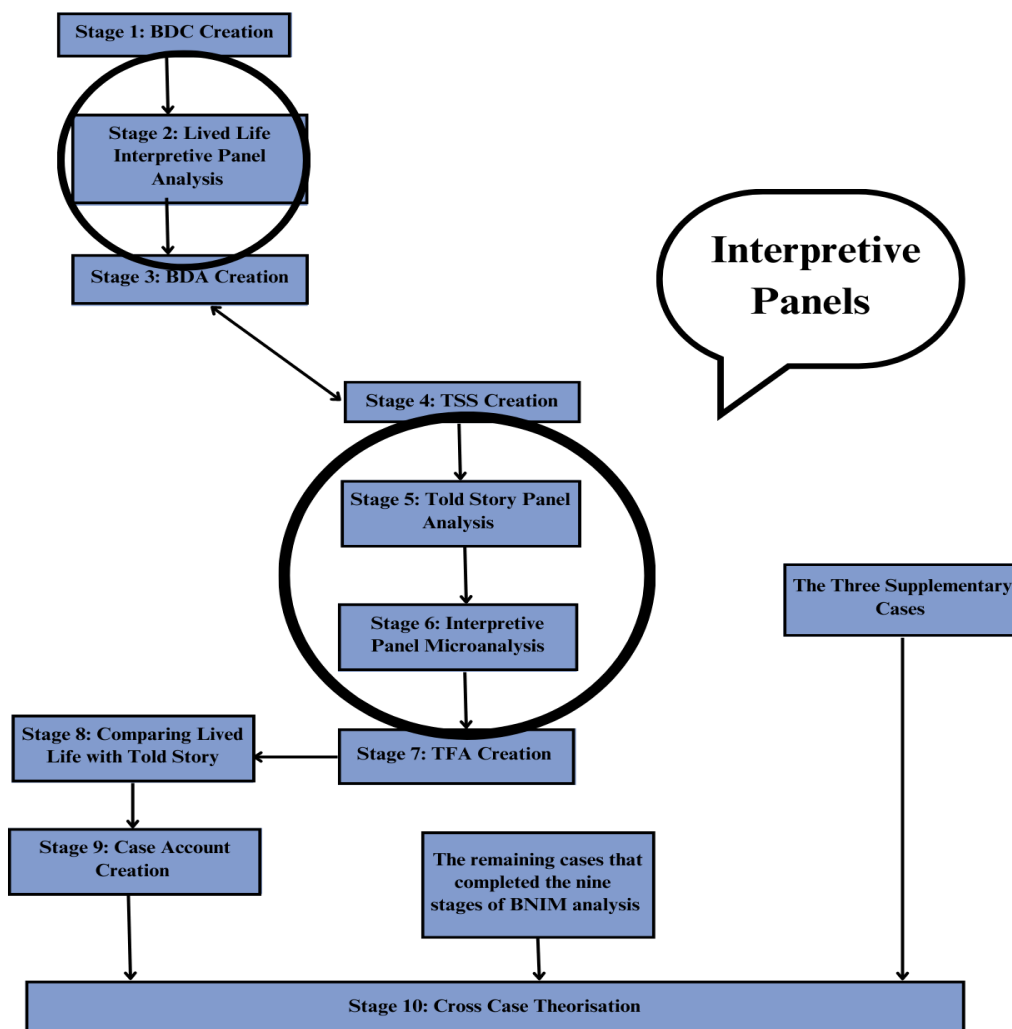


Figure 5: Overview of the Interpretive Panel analysis

‘The function of the panel and the recording of its deliberations is to overcome the distorting effects of the blind spots and the hotspots, the defended subjectivity of you as an individual researcher... and to widen your imagination irreversibly for post-panel work.’ (Wengraf 2008 p. 241)

A fundamental tenet of BNIM analysis is the utilisation of interpretive panels to enrich data analysis at particular stages. As depicted in Figure 5, a maximum of three panels can be applied to each case: a lived life panel, a told story panel (both mandatory in BNIM analysis) and a microanalysis panel (optional in BNIM analysis) (Wengraf, 2009). In total, seven interpretive analysis panels (three lived life panels and three told story panels and one microanalysis panel) were conducted in this study. Each panel was governed by its own unique procedure and style of questioning. The specific questions utilised in panels are located in Appendix P.

This section provides an explanation about how the panels were constructed and their contributions to the research analysis. Following Wengraf's (2006) recommendation, heterogeneous sampling for interpretive panels was utilised throughout. The recruitment process took place through the researcher's informal and formal networks, involving colleagues and peers. Each panel was intentionally composed of a heterogeneous group of between three to five individuals representing various age brackets, diverse socio-demographic backgrounds, and a range of gender identities, which encompassed cisgender men, women, and non-binary individuals. Notably, panel members were not required to have expertise or knowledge regarding IPV in relationships involving gay men. This facilitated diverse perspectives and enriched discussions, incorporating insights from individuals with and without prior knowledge of the topic. Furthermore, within each panel, one member self-identified as a part of the LGBTQ community, ensuring that perspectives from this community were represented (this included gay men, lesbian and bisexual women). The panels were held in person or remotely over Zoom,

depending on the availability of panellists. In total, there were three in-person panels and four conducted online.

During the interpretive panel analysis process, the group was presented with a single unit of text and asked to interpret this prior to moving to the next 'chunk' of data. The visual presentation of data in selected small segments enabled the panels to explore all possible interpretations of the data in a wider way than could be done by a single researcher. In doing so, the panel imagined how the participants subjectively lived and told stories about their lives (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000; Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2007). Overall, the close scrutiny of single quotations resulted in the generation of future-blind hypotheses and counter-hypotheses that were either supported or refuted as the participant's life story unfolded (Chamberlayne and King, 2000; Ramv, 2015; Wengraf, 2006; Wengraf, 2020).

Each panel commenced with members being presented a brief quotation in chronological order from the participant's story. The researcher used a portable laptop, positioned at the centre of the room, to transcribe the panel's ideas, thoughts, and hypotheses, allowing the group to observe this process. The hypotheses generated by panellists were recorded in regular font within a Word document, while any support or refutation of these hypotheses was distinguished in bold font. These hypotheses were classified as follows: what the narrator might be experiencing (experiencing hypotheses), what he might not be experiencing (counter hypotheses), wild speculations about what might have been happening (tangential hypotheses) as well as the overarching themes or threads within the life story (structural hypotheses) (Corbally, 2011; Wengraf, 2006). A similar process was implemented during virtual panel sessions, wherein the panellists convened on Zoom. The researcher shared their screen to present one short quotation at a time, following which the panel's inputs were electronically transcribed in a similar format.

Upon completing the interpretive panel, panel members were asked to complete a written case summary.

The photograph below (Figure 6) depicts an example of the process of conducting a Biographical Data Chronology interpretive panel and highlights the ‘chunks’ of chronological data presented to the panels.

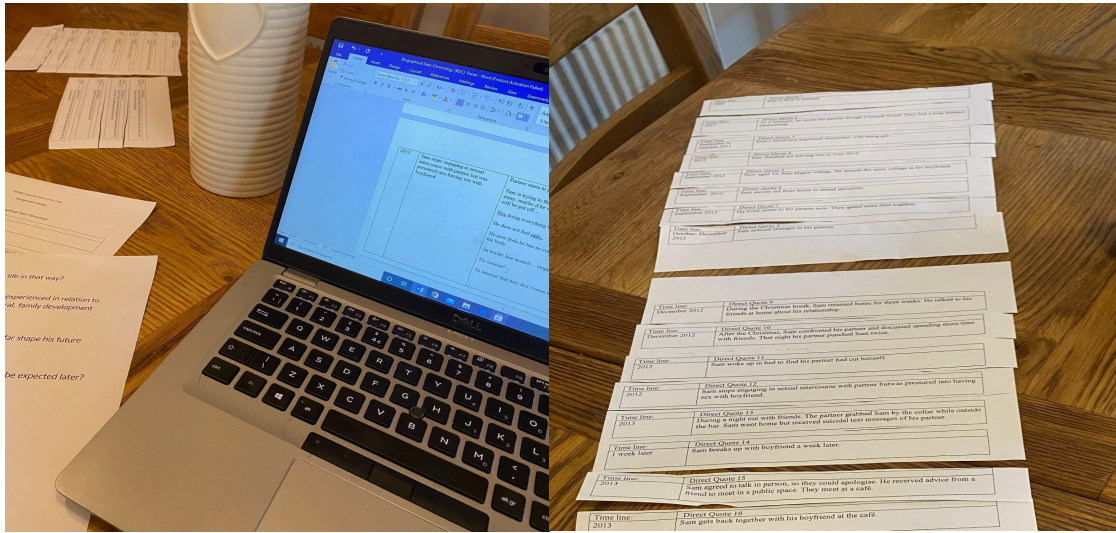


Figure 6: Example of BDC panel discussion output

Overall, the interpretive panels informed the creation of the relevant Biographical Data Analysis and Thematic Field Analysis. All of these extensive inputs invariably resulted in a broader interpretation of meaning generated by the researcher and influenced the creation of the individual interpretive case accounts. The length of each interpretive analysis panel ranged from three to four hours. In total, one separate microanalysis panel was convened with an individual who was a university lecturer and researcher with expertise in the IPV field concerning gay men. In this way, ideas were exchanged directly with an expert who directly examined complex narrative quotations emerging from the transcripts (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014; Wengraf, 2006).

Whilst the interpretive panels were time consuming, the inclusion of diverse voices within the analysis stage took cognizance of how experiences are socially and discursively produced (Hsiao, 1985) and served as a useful ‘sounding board’ for the researcher’s own interpretations or ideas (Flynn, 2014; Wengraf, 2001, 2015) making for a more rounded analytic approach. A reflective account of the interpretive panel can be found in section 3.6.3 below.

3.4.4.5 Cross Case Theorisation

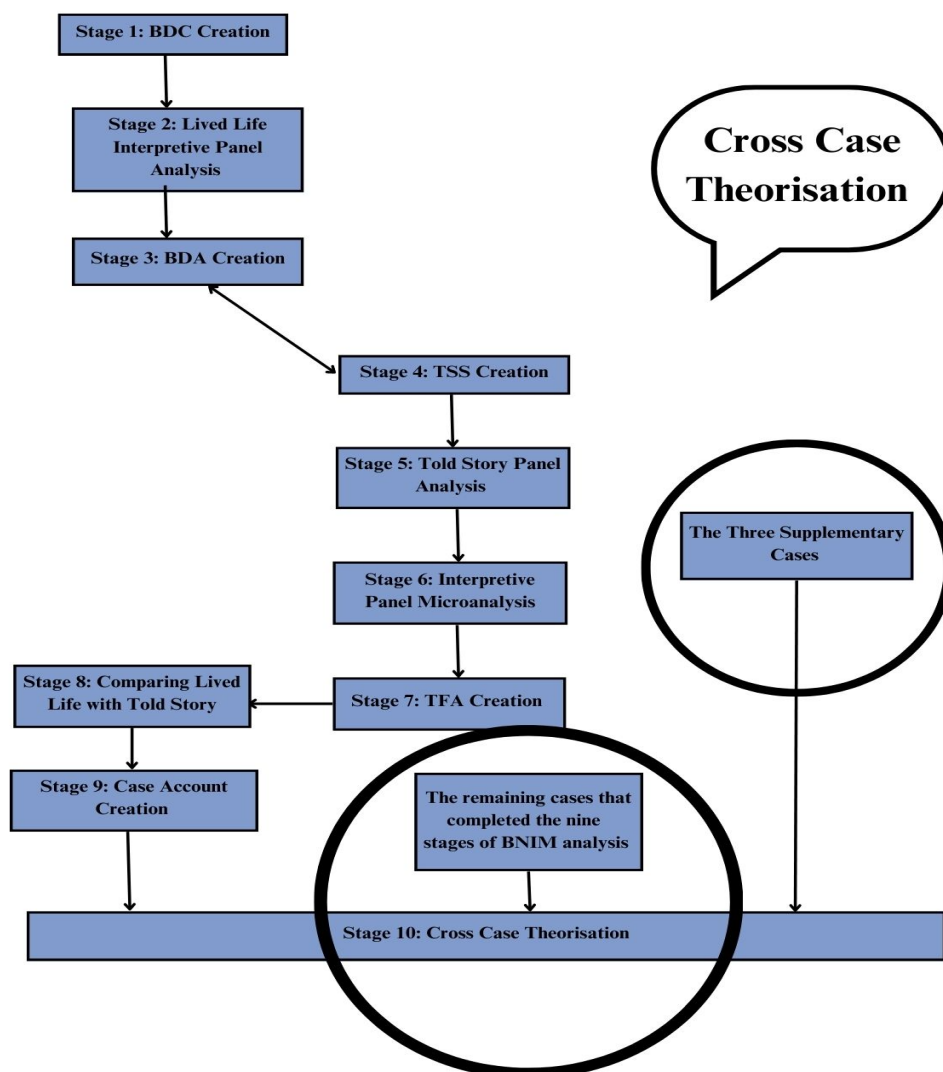


Figure 7: Overview of the Cross Case Theorisation process

The tenth and final stage of BNIM incorporated a cross-case theorisation whereby insights were ascertained from the combined analysis of the collected case accounts. The researcher identified

the 'thematic threads' that underlined the research data which were lastly 'knitted together' as findings to reflect the aims of this study. The three BNIM cases and the three narrative cases were comparatively analysed in this stage as to both supplement the findings and demonstrate a sense of generalisability of the key themes featured in all six cases. A visual representation of this process is presented in figure 7 (Wengraf, 2008). More details of this analytical stage and the outcomes are found in the following section below.

3.4.4.6 Narrative Analysis for Supplementary Cases

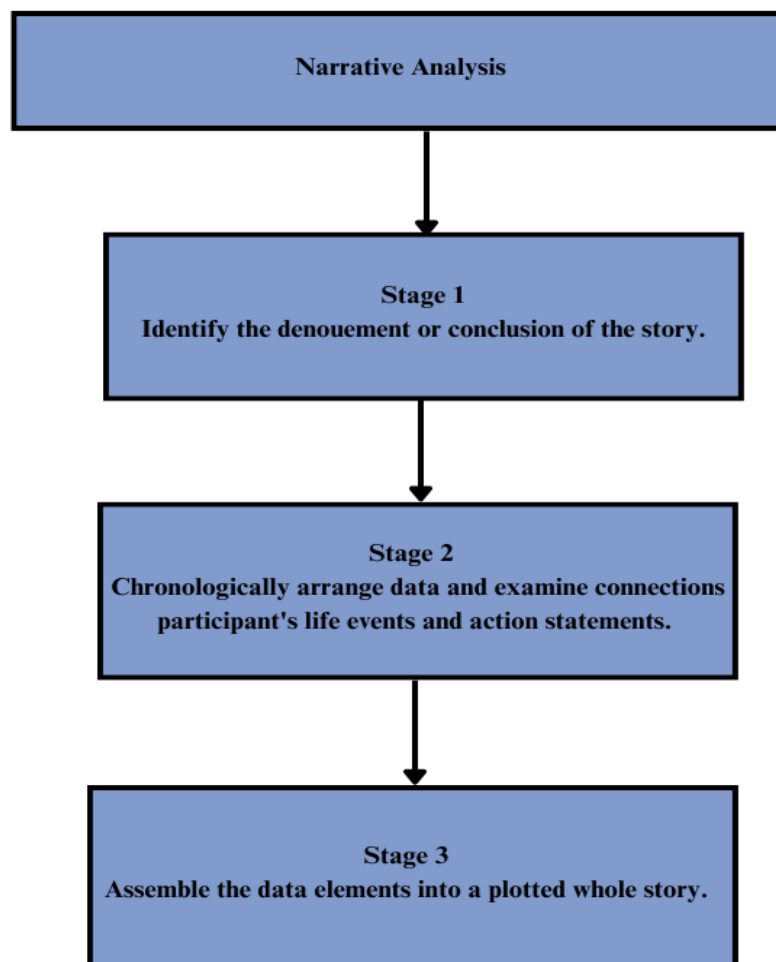


Figure 8: Demonstration of the three-stage narrative analysis process as outlined by Polkinghorne (1995)

This section outlines the procedure for how the remaining three cases of Tom, James and Cole underwent a narrative analysis as opposed to the BNIM analytic framework. As depicted in Figure 8, Polkinghorne (1995) formulated a three-phase approach to narrative analysis. The process commences with the researcher specifying the denouement of the participant's life story. Through the determination of the narrative's conclusion or outcome, the researcher retroactively 'locates a viewing point from which to select data events necessary for producing the conclusion' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18). This method of identifying the denouement establishes a clear destination or endpoint within the participant's storied narrative. It allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the sequence of events leading up to this pivotal juncture. In the context of men's stories, the denouement pertains to their experiences of abuse and the various events, occurrences, and actions that significantly contributed to their journey toward recovery.

The second stage of the narrative analysis involved the chronological sequencing of data (Creswell, 2007). This process enables the researcher to uncover connections or causal relationships among life events that contributed to men's experiences of abuse, as well as to observe how certain events unfolded over time (Polkinghorne, 1995). This, in turn, provides a deeper understanding of the temporal dimensions within the men's abuse stories. This includes identifying action statements embedded in men's narratives and their underlying reasons, as reiterated by the "because of" and "in order to" rationales (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). In essence, this stage allowed the researcher to systematically organise life events, incidents, and pivotal moments to comprehend how the men responded to and constructed their experiences of abuse. A sample of the narrative analysis document generated for Tom is presented in Appendix Q.

The last stage of narrative analysis consisted of crafting the participant's story. Akin to BNIM, this stage complies with a 'temporal gestalt,' where the meaning of each part is made clear through its reciprocal relationships with the plotted whole (Vanhoozer, 1991). In other words, the plot serves as a cohesive force binding the various parts of the story together (Stake, 1988). During this final stage, the researcher assembled the data elements together to form three individual 'plotted whole stories'. The narrative accounts of Tom, James, and Cole are presented in chapter five.

3.5 Riemann and Schutze's Theory of Biogeographical Processes

The preceding section discussed the ten stage BNIM analysis procedure. In addition to this, the study adopted Riemann and Schutze's (2005) theory of biogeographical processes as a framework to examine how men accounted for their abuse in their biographies. Four kinds of process structures embedded in biographical accounts were identified by Riemann and Schutze. These include biographical action schemes, trajectories of suffering, institutional expectation patterns and creative biographical metamorphoses (Riemann and Schutze 1991, 2005; Schutze 2008). Figure 9 shows a visual demonstration of the sequencing of these biographical processes. It is suggested that their order is not arbitrary but guided by the central ordering principle or 'narrative gestalt' which refers to the moral of the story (Riemann and Schutze, 2005). In a similar vein, Bruner (2004) describes the sequential organisation of a narrative as influenced by its transcendent plight called a "fabula". A more detailed explanation of Riemann and Schutze's (2005) biogeographical processes which provided the basis for the individual and comparative analysis of men's cases is presented below.

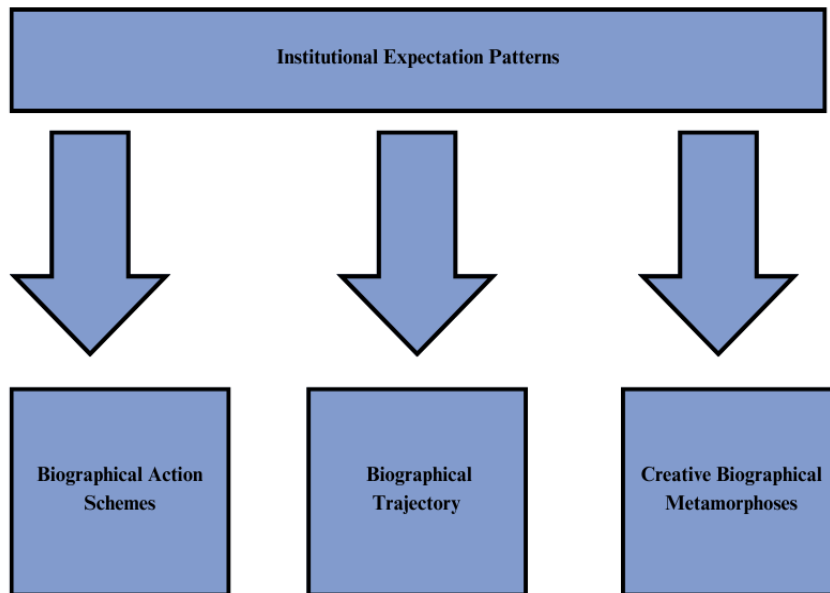


Figure 9: Conceptual representation of Riemann and Schutze’s theory of biographical processes

Institutionalised expectation patterns were focused on how one’s biography is shaped by membership in the social world. These patterns resemble Wengraf’s conceptualization of ‘situated subjectivity’ in BNIM and include socially produced schemes and principles that directly influence the order in a person’s lived life, such as family, interpersonal relationships, life cycles or career patterns, etc. (Schutze, 2008). This necessitated the examination of men’s values systems, including their social conditioning (Erickson, 1968). In other words, how men redefined or mirrored institutionalised expectation patterns shaped the structure of their abuse stories (Schutze, 1992). Concerning institutional patterns at play in men’s biographies, a historical overview of how Irish social institutions treated gay men is presented in section 2.7. Similarly, the constructions of IPV and masculinity and their correlation to institutional value systems are explored in section 2.2.1.1.

Biographical action schemes refer to the intentional modes of activity in a person's life (Schutze, 2008). They require careful planning, initiative and action, whereby one's identity and self-drive determine specific life plans (Schutze, 1992; Bornat et al., 2000). By this premise, Corbally (2011) suggests that biographical action schemes are better described as the cares in life whereby the biographer intentionally constructs their narratives around these goals and ambitions, i.e. to find love, companionship and build a relationship. If 'metamorphoses' signifies change, **creative biographical metamorphoses** concern the transformation of biographical identity. This refers to a sudden surge of self-creative capacity, which alters one's outlook on life. A metamorphosis typically featured in biographical accounts is the change between who the person was before their suffering, during and who they are after (Schutze, 1992; Riemann, 2006; Schutze, 2008). This highlights the importance of examining men's narrative identity portrayals and how they were reconstructed during the extempore abuse narrative.

The concept of a biographical trajectory, also called trajectories of suffering, describes a traumatic narrated event that interrupts a person's life and ability to pursue biographical action schemes (Riemann and Schutze, 1991). Bury (1982) describes this process as a 'biographical disruption'. The phases of a biographical trajectory depicts a) the person being overcome with disbelief over their suffering. b) they convey an increasing awareness of overwhelming external forces. c) the individual deems these powerful forces as inconceivable. d) the individual depicts a loss of control over everyday affairs. e) is marked by feelings of alienation from themselves and others. f) involves a 'downward spiral' illustrating a decline in the person's ability to make social connections or place trust in professionals, also known as biographical caretakers. g) includes an existential shrinkage of the individual's world due to the isolation, loss of control and negative spiralling mentioned in the previous phases. h) features a complete disturbance or stoppage of the person's ability to navigate the life they were once able to lead (Corbally, 2011; Riemann and Schutze, 2005). The outcome of this analysis is presented in three chapters,

including the individualised case accounts in chapter 5 and 6 and in the cross-case analysis in chapter 7. The following section contains a personal reflection about conducting the overall study, including the facilitation of interpretive panels.

3.6 Researcher Reflexivity

‘Your concern to register and explore, understand and communicate, something of the lived experiencing of your eventual interviewees, to be done well, researchers are..., required to register and explore, understand and maybe communicate to your various intended ‘audiences’ (readers) something of your own lived experience as your personal research project proceeds’ (Wengraf, 2021, p. 37)

Given that this narrative study is underpinned by an interpretive framework (according to which experiences are socially constructed), it is recommended that the narrative researcher actively engages in reflexivity (Lambert et al., 2010). This concerns the representation and interpretation of the researcher, as a critical gaze is directed to ‘what is going on’ during the use of research methods (Lenzo, 1995; Koch and Harrington, 1998). In essence, reflexivity involves the ‘analytic attention to the researcher’s role’ (Gouldner, 1971, p. 16), which is to directly influence the creation of a text (Koch and Harrington, 1998; Plummer, 2001). The central tenet of BNIM underscores the active role of the researcher to co-construct biographical narratives with the participants (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Wengraf, 2006). Wengraf (2021) recommends compiling a personal research journal to document the internal logic, thoughts, feelings and possible decisions and turning points of the researcher. He describes this as ongoing reflexive ‘self-interviewing’. As indicated earlier, ongoing free-associative field notes and a private research diary were composed throughout this research process. As Koch and Harrington (1998) point out, making clear the location and moral socio-politics of the researcher lends legitimacy to qualitative research. The following section presents a reflective account of the politics of my own location and positioning as it informs the practice of BNIM interviewing and analysis. It is hoped this will facilitate the reader in having a more informed interpretation of this thesis as

they travel through the situated subjectivity of the participants and the researcher. For ease of reading, the order of this section adheres to the chronology of the study.

3.6.1 Reflections Prior to Data Collection

Researchers are encouraged to clarify their predispositions and beliefs prior to the data generation phase of the research process (Koch and Harrington, 1998) Along these lines, I suggest that a researcher must be vulnerable first before requesting vulnerability from others. This concerns one's positioning within moral and socio-political contexts (Davies and Harré, 1990). My positioning as a bisexual cisgender female academic interested in eliciting gay men's experiences superseded this research project. Because of my gender, I was unsure if I was the right researcher to collect men's abuse stories. I wondered if my rapport with the LGBTQ community was strong enough to effectively carry out this research. As a bisexual woman, I personally experienced uncertainty regarding how I represented the LGBTQ community. These feelings were likely the product of bisexual erasure, i.e. the social invisibility of bisexual people in heterosexual and LGBTQ settings (Yoshino, 2000). Recognizing the potential sensitivity surrounding IPV, I engaged with stakeholders and experts in the field. I was struck by the overwhelming reception I received from LGBTQ networks. One manager of a social support group for LGBTQ people commented: 'Aisling Callan has spoken to me before on this issue and she seems to be very passionate and sensitive about it, as a result our organisation would be delighted to support her'. As for what this expert was seeing on the field, they commented:

'In Ireland there is not a lot of research/ work being carried out on this issue and we need to support people who are doing it.... over the years we have supported LGBT people who have been in violent and abusive relationships that have gone relatively unnoticed or supported, we have supported people to leave people and homes where they were unsafe and sometimes, we have just been a listening ear.'

It became clear that my passion and sensitivity to this subject and the need to raise the profile of the sexual minority community were more relevant than the location of my gender and sexuality. As a social care practitioner, I helped those who were vulnerable. It was surprising to

learn that many LGBTQ organisations knew little about the abuse transpiring in gay men's relationships. A small number were not willing to discuss this subject, opting to ignore my emails, phone calls and some refused to share the recruitment posters on their premises. Perhaps this was due to their desire to avoid talking openly about abuse for fear of inflaming the existing stigma surrounding this population (As previously highlighted by Ristock (2002)). Overall, my experience with the LGBTQ community was polarised between unwavering support and resistance to this research project.

3.6.2 Reflections During Data Collection

During data collection, the topic of my gender and sexuality was raised almost immediately. Some men naturally assumed I was heterosexual, which they surprisingly found comfort in. This was made most apparent by Will: 'oftentimes it's actually better when these things are done by somebody outside of the community because they can actually be more objective about it'. Since the structure of the BNIM interview precluded me from interrupting, I decided not to correct the participant that I was 'inside the community' (Wengraf, 2006). On the other hand, Cole immediately commented on the gender dimension before his interview, asking why I did not interview women instead of gay men. Cole probed further after his interview: 'Personally, did you have any particular experiences that prompted you to pick it, or was it just a general choice? Cole's need to relate to the person he had just confided in was understandable. Although I had no personal experiences of IPV, I wanted him to know his words resonated, and I could empathise with his story. My response to him was as follows: 'I am bisexual myself, so I have always been interested in LGBTQ issues. But as well, I never not see myself in the person I am talking to; there are things that you have said that I have empathised with'. Koch and Harrington (1984), explore the idea of the representation of the researcher, asking how do we study the other, without studying ourselves? In that moment, I chose to disclose my own sexuality, recognizing it as an extension of my vulnerability. I realised that only by being vulnerable myself could I validate the participant's emotions and experiences.

Tom suggested that my gender helped men feel more comfortable sharing intimate details about their lives: ‘I think it will stand to you ... to be a woman studying this because I think men instinctively presume that women understand the story. Whereas I think gay men may not trust men to understand the story’. This observation aligns with what was reported previously by Kestell (2019) and Corbally (2011) that male participants were more likely to convey sensitive details when interviewed by a female. I felt privileged to hear their stories. I realised what mattered most was not my gender as such but how I expressed my gender, including the displays of sincerity and honesty in my interactions with the interviewed men.

In my naivety, I assumed that upon men entering the interview, abuse details would be more accessible in their life stories. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that participants were reluctant to talk about painful or embarrassing aspects of their abuse. I was initially puzzled by this and remarked to myself that it was as if men were building a fortress of defensive walls around themselves and the abuse they experienced. However, I asked myself how often do I naturally open up about painful experiences in my own life? I realised that being vulnerable or being seen by others in such a raw state is no easy task. In fact, fear of judgement, emotional discomfort, societal norms, and self-protection are all understandable reasons to want to conceal vulnerable moments.

Through conducting narrative interviews, I observed that men collectively relied on narrative strategies to conceal or minimise their abuse, as discussed in greater detail in chapter 7. At times, men resisted the BNIM interview technique in subsession two, as outlined in Table 1 (Wengraf, 2008). As a way of illustration, Will was asked several narrative pointed questions based on certain phrases in his first interview. However, his responses were often guarded, offering only surface-level insights: *‘it was little things like the very controlling behaviour’* or *‘again, like I*

say, just everything really'. Other times, Will deviated from sensitive topics altogether: *'not really, there is nothing else really to recall about it'*. It quickly dawned on me that the role of interviewer was to adapt (often on the spot) to each participant's distinct narrative style and gently 'push' for PINS which featured their abuse. A precedent for such questioning was outlined by Wengraf (2011), who suggested that:

'If you don't take their leads towards 'PINs of Suffering', you add to their current suffering, discouraging them... from starting to open up about their personal history to others. This will result in disappointment to yourself and discouragement from them, which in my view is ethically more important'. (p. 86–87).

The above advice cemented my realisation that I needed to gently prompt men to move past their initial silences and contradictions, so they could achieve their own personal goals of telling their stories. Aware of the sensitive nature of IPV, I approached this line of inquiry with utmost caution and sensitivity. It was essential that I struck a balance between encouraging self-reflection and respecting the participant's autonomy and comfort levels. I frequently asked men if they felt comfortable answering my questions and proceeding with the interview.

Furthermore, Wengraf (2021) remarked on the inevitable 'situatedness' present in BNIM interviews. In the case of my own interview style, this derived from men's difficulty with their vulnerability and my need to eventually broach sensitive subjects with compassion, and patience. At one stage, I adapted my questioning technique, framing questions towards sensory based details such as asking men what behaviours, images, and emotions they were feeling or seeing at the time. It became clear that asking men literal questions such as what they were observing in that moment gradually dismantled their defences. It was during these moments, that their guarded responses started to give way to deeper reflections of their abuse. Overall, the six interviews left a lasting impact on my approach as a narrative researcher. I realise that while human lives are marked to some extent by traumas, I have a deeper understanding of the challenges surrounding such conversations and how compassion and flexibility on my part were required.

Overall, I found that the BNIM interview technique provided an effective means to elicit the abuse narratives of gay men and consequently, the narrative depth and length varied considerably among those who were interviewed. In addition, men spoke of the cathartic benefits to this process, similar to findings reported by Corbally (2011) and Rosenthal and Henderson (2003). This would suggest sharing life stories, however long or emotionally draining, can serve as a window into more profound 'sensemaking' for men. As illustrated by participants below:

'Sometimes it's easier to talk to a stranger than somebody you actually know.' (Will)

'I unfortunately felt kind of angry with life. My sense for a very long time, most of my timeline was that it started off quite cute and romantic. We had this great relationship and then it started getting a bit complicated and then like crazy. And the timeline wasn't me but if I actually look back at it I realise that I just plonked it into one solid line of chaos' (George)

'I am really glad we did this today. It has really helped me for sure. It is all unboxed in my brain and it is all there, I haven't repressed it or anything... I wanted to make sure I got it right and chronological as much as I could because I didn't want to start with him being an absolute monster and then end with him being pretty chill, a bit questionable. Do you get me? I wanted it to be as true to life as it was' (Sam)

'it is nice, it is almost a form of counselling in some ways as well to off load about it' (Cole)

As highlighted earlier, the intensity of BNIM analysis required three 'gold star' cases resulting in a surplus of interview material (Wengraf, 2008). The question of how to approach the remaining three accounts was one of the more difficult decisions on my doctoral journey. I recognised that men themselves were grappling with the invisibility of their abuse. I appreciated the immense courage it took for men to reveal their vulnerabilities. As emphasised earlier, my role was to serve as the conduit for their stories. In turn, I felt entrusted to not only listen but share men's stories. Upon consultation with my supervisors, I decided to include the remaining three cases through a supplementary narrative analysis. During my attendance at a local event, a familiar face in the room caught my attention. It was by chance that I met Tom, one of the six participants from this study. As our paths eventually converged, Tom smiled and hugged me. I

was filled with a sense of nostalgia as he expressed his gratitude for listening to his experiences in an interview that occurred the year previously. In Tom's voice, I detected an eagerness for his story to be heard and understood. It was through this serendipitous encounter, that I knew I had made the right decision to include the stories so generously provided by these men.

3.6.3 Reflections During Interpretative Panels

Overall, the implementation of interpretive panels greatly contributed to the data analysis stage of this research project. It enabled me to collect diverse perspectives from individuals from all walks of life, while also increasing my awareness of my own 'sub-cultural presuppositions, prejudices, and blind spots' (Ramv, 2015, p. 3). For instance, my own membership within the LGBTQ community highlighted the importance of including panellists who identified as heterosexual and openly acknowledged their limited knowledge of LGBTQ issues. This allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how the public perceives abuse among gay men and shed light on the misconceptions surrounding this topic. For example, some panellists drew on gendered narratives and commented on how masculine and feminine the participants presented which influenced their interpretations of their life stories. Examples include hypotheses based on the participants appearing flamboyant in voice or manner or acting as 'the woman in the relationship' or 'not acting as the man of the relationship'. This was best illustrated when one panel member said: *'I wonder if he had a girly voice'*. These observations were notably given that these hypotheses materialised from blind transcript segments where any identifying markers about the men under examination were omitted (Wengraf, 2001).

It appeared that the panellists instinctively perceived gay men to exhibit expressions of femininity and perform traditional gender roles more typically associated with women. This observation aligns with findings from the literature review, indicating that gay men often

undergo feminisation (Connell, 1995; Messner, 1994). This may allude to why, when narrating their life stories, the participants portrayed themselves as more masculine. As the panel discussion evolved, the group naturally began to question and debunk the gender stereotypes about the male participants. Arguably, these stereotypes likely stemmed from a lack of awareness among panel members regarding IPV occurring within male same-sex relationships. In the beginning, panellists typically remarked: *'You would never think about it happening in a gay relationship'* and *'It's something I have never seen or heard before'*. This was compounded by their understanding of IPV victims as typically women: *'the female is usually the victim'*. It is clear that due to the invisibility surrounding this phenomenon, many panel members persistently referenced heterosexual relationships featuring traditional gender roles. This point is reinforced by Koch and Harrington (1998), who argue that *'we understand something by comparing it to what we know'* (p. 888). This raises the question of how one can develop an understanding of abuse among gay men when its invisibility obstructs its recognition. This underscores the significance of this research project in shedding light on the often overlooked narratives of abused gay men.

3.6.4 Reflections During Data Analysis

Although facilitating interpretive panels was time consuming, they unexpectedly served as a therapeutic outlet. Given that the road of a researcher is often described as a lonely one, I welcomed the candid discussions about the sensitive and traumatic narratives with the panel members. This therapeutic aspect was particularly crucial, considering that support interventions were more accessible to the participants than to the researcher. This aligns with the fundamental principles of qualitative research, which prioritises the ethical risks faced by research participants. Surprisingly, the same level of consideration is often not extended to the researchers themselves (Berger, 2019; Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018; Rager, 2005). While it is widely recognized that researchers who investigate sensitive subject matter are susceptible to

emotional and psychological distress, there remains a significant knowledge gap concerning effective self care strategies for mitigating these risks (Malacrida, 2007; Rager, 2005; Stahlke, 2018). In the course of their field work, researchers are likely to encounter profound emotional, personal, and distressing reactions and behaviours in the individuals they are studying (Stahlke, 2018; Cowles, 1988). I experienced this vulnerability firsthand. Listening to the most intimate and painful aspects of men's lives left me with physical tension in my back and shoulders. For several days after the interview, I found myself carrying the physical remnants of the emotional toll from listening to painful narratives shared by the men I interviewed. Beyond the physical discomfort, I found it emotionally challenging to confront the stream of sensitive interview material, which persisted during the months of data analysis despite ongoing liaison with research supervisors. As DeMarrais (2004) suggests, 'careful attention to emotions - our own and others,' is essential for ensuring high-quality research (p. 296). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) term this as assuming 'a posture of in-dwelling', which they describe as 'being at one with the persons under investigation, walking a mile in the other person's shoes' (p. 25). Thus, instead of succumbing to my natural inclination to desensitise myself, I chose to immerse myself in the lived experiences of the participants, embracing their distinct perspectives and, at times, delving into the depths of their pain. While this was emotionally demanding, it proved essential in crafting the narratives of these men.

In addition, my research journey was filled with challenges brought on by COVID-19. For example, the pandemic-induced lockdowns resulted in my isolation from my peers, as well as from the typical support and relief mechanisms available on my university campus. Overall, the above emotional challenges underscored the significance of self-care and maintaining consistent communication with my supervisors. This was facilitated through regular debriefing and supervision sessions on Zoom. I found it helpful to compile a reflective research diary and to record my field notes orally through a tape recorder (Rager, 2005; Wengraf, 2001). In those

moments, I not only captured supplementary interview data but also had the opportunity to 'unload' my initial thoughts and my own emotional reactions for the participants. In particular, I noted in my diary that when Will recounted how his partner callously laughed during his moments of pleading and tears, or when George described the sheer gravity of his assault, I deeply empathised with these men, and I struggled to fully fathom the cruelty they endured. These were just a few examples of the many occasions when I was emotionally moved by the participants and challenged by the sensitive subject material I was collecting. In hindsight, I regret not seeking additional formal support outside my circle of supervisors. I believe I would have benefited from personnel counselling, a step that has been recommended by other scholars (Iocolano, 1994; Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018; Rager, 2005). Additionally, considering the physical discomfort I experienced, I would recommend physiotherapy as an additional supportive measure. However, I would caution that these measures (including setting up and paying for appointments) require meticulous planning, financial assistance and effective coordination of various aspects, including the participant's schedule, the interviews, and the duration of the data analysis phase. Looking back, I recognize a missed opportunity to participate in a peer support group designed for doctoral researchers investigating sensitive topics. Although such a group was not available at the time, being part of a network with those able to comprehend the challenges associated with qualitative fieldwork could have provided me with a platform to openly share my experiences and insights. This, in turn, would have assisted in alleviating potential worries and fears. This practice aligns with how 'peer debriefing' is considered 'a critical process for data collectors' (Pickett et al., 1994, p. 25) and serves to "help overcome feelings of isolation" (Wincup, 2001, p. 29). Other self care recommendations for researchers include writing sessions, dancing and yoga (Melius, 2013), maintaining a social network (Rager, 2005) or a balanced diet, engaging in regular exercise, and embracing meditation practices (Cayir et al., 2020). Likewise, I discovered that taking frequent walks and immersing myself in nature was helpful during the most challenging moments of my academic journey.

In summary, while conducting interviews with gay men with IPV experiences was undeniably rewarding, it did come with emotional challenges, particularly when the conversations delved into sensitive and emotionally charged territory. In light of the focus on participant safety, there is currently no universally recognized or standardised list of support and self-care strategies readily accessible to emerging academic researchers (Jones and Whittle, 2020). It is my hope that this account offers valuable insights to future researchers and others within the field. I contend that each researcher should individually develop their own self-care strategies, with this crucial preparation commencing prior to and continuing during the initiation of their research. However, contrary to the notion of a researcher's journey being inherently solitary, it is my belief that this should not be the case. Drawing from my own experience of receiving invaluable support from my supervisors, I underscore the importance of researchers being bolstered by the support of their institution and the wider academic community.

3.6.5 Reflections During The Writing Up

The issue of voice and representation was a key consideration in the process of writing this thesis (Guba and Lincoln, 2008). I found it helpful to consider what 'voice' means in narrative research. Riessman (2008) emphasised the 'plurivocality' of narratives that convey many voices. In the context of this study, BNIM facilitated the plurality of voices of six gay men (Peta, McKenzie, and Wengraf, 2019). The end result was 'my voice' as informed by men's biographical accounts and the interpretive panel analyses (Wolcott, 1994). In other words, the participants' told stories, adding their voices to a growing chorus where I, as the author, represented the primary voice of this thesis. Bowden and Green (2010) describe this as 'filtering' arguing that 'research captures a filtered interpretation of the voice of the researched in the particular time and space in which the data are collected' (p. 124). Throughout this process, I was aware of the dilemma faced by examining politically sensitive topics, in which the parties involved are likely to be impacted by the findings (Becker, 2008). I found it helpful to compile

field notes to document and trace my own decision-making (Wengraf, 2021). I frequently listened to the interview recordings of the men involved to grasp the intricacies of their life stories. I paid careful attention to the tone, inflection, and emotions conveyed which ensured the centering of their voices throughout the research process. On reflection, this centralised men's voices, ensuring a deeper familiarity with their plights during my decision-making process. Overall, I realised that this time spent in careful thought and reflection was not in vain but integral to demonstrating the rigour and sensitivity of this research.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used in this study, shedding light on how principles underlying narrative inquiry were suitable to the aims and objectives of this study. The philosophical foundations of BNIM were examined, highlighting their relevance in comprehensively exploring the evolution of men's narratives as they account for their experiences of IPV. Additionally, an outline of the research process was provided, encompassing the BNIM interview and analytic technique, while also addressing the ethical and practical considerations inherent in this study. Furthermore, a reflective account of the implementation of BNIM was discussed, underscoring the role of my own subjectivity in guiding the research process. The findings of this study are outlined in the next three chapters. Chapter 5 presents the three cases of Will, George and Sam, which underwent the purest application of BNIM analysis. Chapter 6 presents Cole, James and Tom, whose life stories emerged from supplementary narrative analysis. Chapter 7 offers a harmonisation of voices by all six participants. This includes a cross-case analysis of the common themes and patterns within men's lives.

Chapter 4 BNIM Case Accounts

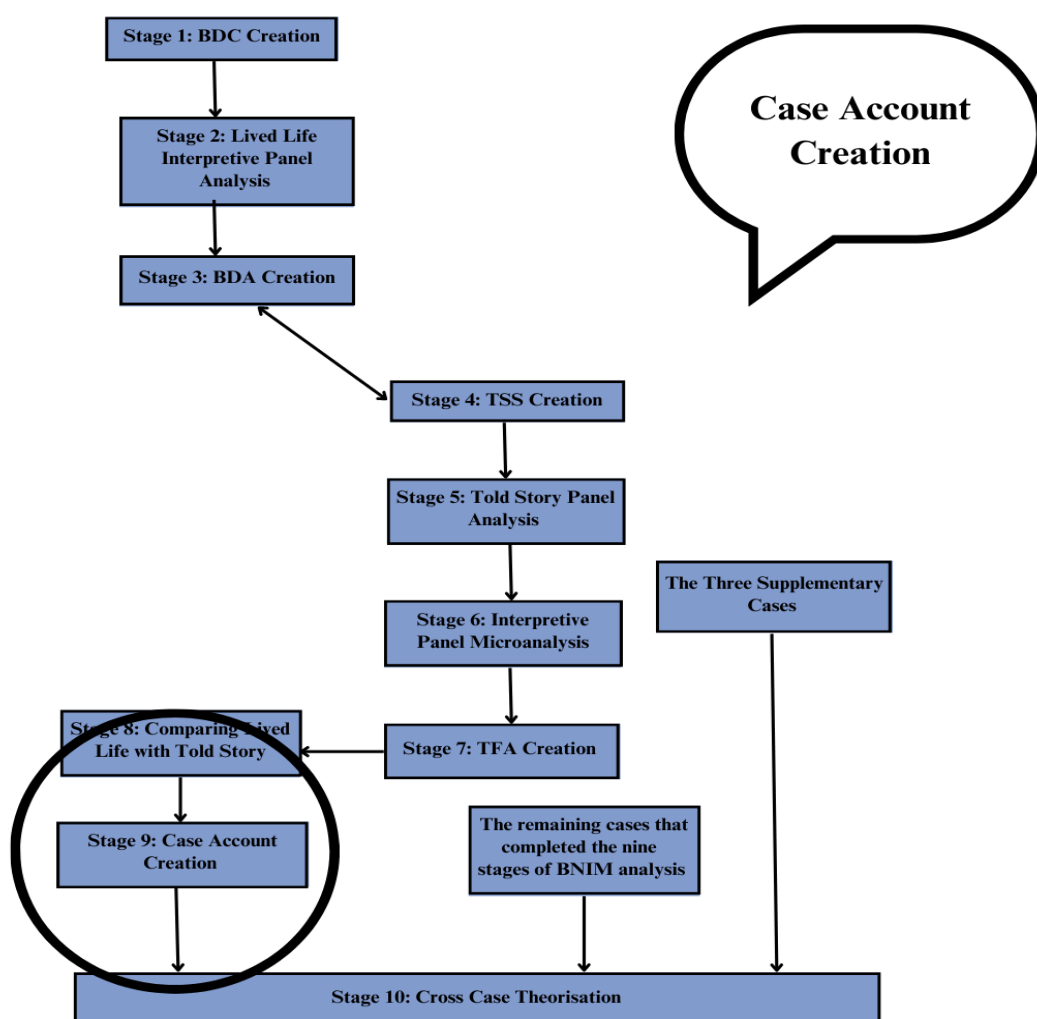


Figure 10: Construction of case account

This chapter details the three interpretive case accounts that have undergone all stages of the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) analysis. Figure 10 above demonstrates a visual representation of this process. It should be noted that although my voice presents the interpretive cases below, this voice is mediated by the voices of the men who took part in this study. This chapter is further refined by the collaboration of interpretive panels. Their valuable insights contributed to the analysis of the three cases. The BNIM case history accounts of Will, George, and Sam will now be presented.

4.1 Will's Story

'This is why I started off about my kind of, my past, my childhood, because I think if you go through stuff like that it leaves you very very vulnerable later on in life'.

Will was a queer man in his early 50s. By occupation, he was a nurse. His empathy and kindness to others was a requirement of his profession but naturally spilled over to his character. Will specified a preference to be interviewed by telephone. His voice echoed confidently through the speaker on my mobile device. Will began his interview by describing, almost as a disclaimer, his tendency to *'kind of waffle and go off on a tangent'*. He credited his *"severe ADHD"* with his inclination to deviate quickly from one topic to another. Will spends eighteen minutes carefully recounting his life history, inserting dates to depict the passage of time, locations and key turning points encapsulating fifty years of his life, ten of which conveyed a troubled relationship. Will was born in the late 1960s in a small rural town in Ireland. His mother was fondly described as a *'movie star'* who lost two children, and experienced severe mental health. By contrast, he shared his indignation of his father, calling him an *'absolute psychopath'*. Will and his mother were recipients of chronic abuse from his father: *'he developed a drink problem'* and *'became more and more violent'*. As a young boy, he articulated how he became the protector of his mother, who he portrayed as powerless in the home. Both of Will's parents were institutionalised in a local mental health hospital. His mother was *'forced'* into electroconvulsive therapy which, according to Will, led to severe mental difficulties. This was a symbolic loss because after *'she came back; she wasn't the...the woman that I knew'*. Will paused, then stated matter of factly: *'I didn't really have any parents'*. He framed his lost childhood as a factor in leaving him more vulnerable to be abused.

'I absolutely hated my father's guts, couldn't stand the sight of him. He was quite verbally abusive to me; he was verbally abusive to my mother. There was times when he was becoming physically abusive and I had to step in. There was one time I actually punched him and knocked him out. I came back and I heard my mum screaming and he was pushing her around the place and that was one thing I wasn't going to tolerate. And I knew the only thing he would understand was to get a slap.'

Will attended secondary school in the mid 1980s, but this was chronicled by a *'paranoia about homosexuality'*. This resonated with social discourses of heteronormativity, where heterosexuality was perceived as the default and socially acceptable sexual orientation. In contrast, any other sexual orientation like Will's, faced public scrutiny, even facing criminalization in Ireland (Rich, 1980).

Will proceeds to illustrate his positioning within the discourse of masculinity and femininity (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). He revealed that boys were 'subordinated' for their femininity (Connell, 2003). They were labelled *'queers and faggots'* if they sang in the school choir, mixed with girls, or did not play football. It became clear that from an early age, Will learned to hide his sexuality as a response to this and to the criminalization of homosexuality in Ireland at the time: *'I would basically get the crap kicked out of me if you were in any way feminine at all'*. When Will's father died in the early 1990s, it marked the moment where he felt that *'now hopefully my mum can have some peace of mind and some freedom'*.

As Will attended university, he continued to conceal his sexuality: *'in the closet'*. The next part of his story reveals his struggle to navigate through heteronormative discourses (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Will appeared to be unable to accept his gay identity in a world where only heterosexuality was socially acceptable. He aptly provided his own definition of internalised homophobia: *'homophobia also exists in gay people themselves, i.e. internalised homophobia where you hate what you are'*. This led him to reflect on his own struggle to accept his sexuality: *'I can't be alive, I can't be this disgusting faggot in this world'*. Will recalled a particular incident, detailing his battle with alcoholism and depression in college: *'I went through hell'*. This led to a turning point when he looked in the mirror and decided: *'it's either, you know, live or die.'* Will's decision to accept his homosexuality led him to embark on the gay dating scene ironically to find: *'safe queer spaces'*.

In recalling his dating experiences, Will recognised a pattern of entering abusive relationships: *'I ended up in relationships with eh...people who were quite abusive'*.

Notably, he positions himself as having a sense of agency, stressing how he was the one to terminate these relationships: *'basically got rid of them. I kicked him out. I got rid of him'*. In the early 2000s, Will emigrated to England, where the next chapter of his life story took place.

Between the years of 2008 and 2009, Will met his bisexual partner over the internet. The relationship signified an important life course transition. To Will, his new partner *'seemed perfectly charming'*. He equates their courtship as *'something from a Disney movie'*. However, this chapter became challenging to talk about. Will began to hedge his words and interrupted himself; *'ugh, it's hard to explain'*. In the next line, he conveyed the unequal nature of his relationship: *'we, we had a casual relationship and em... I really wanted to have a relationship'*. Here we see that finding love and companionship surfaced as Will's biographical action scheme (Schutze, 2005). However, this was at odds with the relationship he ended up in. The paradox of accepting a less than desirable relationship becomes evident as Will remarks:

'So, I think it was a case of, well, it was better off being with somebody than being with nobody, you know. Em... so my guard was down'.

Will's partner grew up in a black Jamaican community, which he described as *'rife'* with homophobia and orthodox beliefs. Will explained that his partner was uncomfortable *'with his sexuality'*, identifying his partner's internalised homophobia through *'derogatory comments about camp gay men, feminine gay men'*. His partner's comments reflected social discourses of masculinity and how gay men were 'subordinated' for appearing feminine in society (Connell, 2003).

Will framed his partner's childhood as mirroring his own experiences of growing up in an abusive home with parental mental illness. As Will articulates his thoughts, it becomes evident that the nursing values he cherished in his professional career, such as sensitivity and compassion, were also extended to his partner. *'I kinda feel sorry for him'*. Subsequently, Will portrayed himself as the 'fixer' who took his boyfriend under his wing (Goffman, 1990). He does this by letting his partner move in and by financing his lifestyle: *'I said to [him] you can come here on the condition that you do something with yourself. You will have to learn how to drive, get a car, get a licence, do some courses or training or something, get a job'*. His demonstrations of autonomy and problem-solving skills align with social discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2003).

Will's description of the moment he realised his partner was abusive is unified by distant and vague narrative details: *'He didn't really show his true colours for probably a few months'*. The depiction of *'true colours'* indicated a purposeful concealment of his partner, portraying Will as someone that was misled into the relationship (Goffman, 1990). Will offered no details but indicated there was more to tell: *'there's so much in what happened'*. He avoids deeper narratives depicting his vulnerability. These strategies allowed him to remain the stoic storyteller throughout.

Taking a significant step in a committed relationship can often trigger the initial occurrence of abuse (Leonard and Senchak, 1996). For Will, this seemed to involve his partner moving into his house, as his boyfriend *'became really, really controlling'*. He likens his deteriorating relationship to the film 'Sleeping with the Enemy', which depicted a woman escaping her husband's spiralling control. The influence of media is evident in shaping his private discourse (Plummer, 2001). Will segues his story to describing a series of 'relationship rules', the first on which required his partner to make all decisions in the household (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

This control included watching television, eating, listening to music and socialising. This reflected aspects of ‘intimate terrorism’ and power loss in his everyday life (Johnson, 2006).

Will's narrative conveys his abuse going from bad to worse: *‘And it just went from bad to worse on a daily basis’*. His second rule in his relationship mandated him to attentively meet his partner's needs and be responsible for their well-being (Donovan and Hester, 2015). He recounts a typical incident to convey his abuse experiences. *‘It was all about him, everything was him’*.

Will's identity gradually became fused with that of his partner, rendering his own individuality invisible. He emphasises that his partner's control permeated every aspect of his life.

‘It actually started quite gradually but I would say it reached its peak after about three months, it was little things like the very controlling behaviour. He started to become quite rude, his manner changed, he started to become quite rude. It was almost like he was becoming somebody else. Yeah, so as I was saying when it kind of got really bad then basically I had no say in anything, everything was about him and what he wanted to do’

Due to witnessing a patient being neglected, Will left his nursing position in England. Now on the brink of homelessness, he moved back to Ireland with his partner in 2016. Will moved closer to his mother who was in a nearby nursing home. Two days afterwards the abuse rekindled. Will was denied all communication by his boyfriend and said: *‘for a peaceful life, it was easier to give into him and what he wanted’*. He articulates that life:

‘The abuse started within 48 hours of him arriving here. A lot of it was stuff like, it was like silent bullying... even something simple like watching a movie like If I said I don't really wanna watch that kind of a movie... Then he wouldn't speak to me for like about five or six hours.... there was almost this game being played, this mind game where you know, there was almost these kinds of rules set up: Well, we're gonna do what I want to do and basically if we don't, I'm not gonna speak to you until you cave in. So, I would say “oh, you know what, let's just watch what you wanna watch” and then he'd start being nice, you know. So long as he was in control’

The atmosphere in the interview became tense, as Will emphasised the gravity of his abuse. His baritone voice echoed through my recording equipment: *‘the silent treatment was a huge, huge thing, and that's something that drives me around the bend’*. The repetition of ‘huge’ drew

attention to his frustration with his partner. As a mechanism to exert coercive control, silence and isolation were weaponised: *'He would just walk off in a huff and I wouldn't see him for a couple of weeks, he wouldn't contact me for a couple of weeks so there was always that threat'*. He interpreted it as *'worst forms of eh... psychological torture'*. This challenges the common myth that epitomises the physicality of abuse as most significant. For Will, psychological abuse and stonewalling unfolded as the most impactful: *'I would rather somebody give me a slap on the head than engage in silent treatment.'* His portrayal as the stoic man who is able to take a beating is benchmarked against social discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2003).

As a more subtle dynamic of psychological abuse, Will conveyed that his partner used coarse language *'intentionally'* in front of him. As a middle class religious man, he emphasised: *'I just don't like bad language'*. According to Will, his reaction to this language was a precursor for when his partner: *'would fly into a rage over the most simple thing'*. This metaphor emphasised the volatility of his relationship. Items of particular significance are acknowledged to go missing or be destroyed by perpetrators in abusive relationships (Lombard and McMillan, 2013). Will explained how several personal items went missing or were damaged, including a watch of sentimental value. He suspected that his partner was behind its destruction. When he raised this with his partner *'he would just giggle at me, he would just laugh at me'*.

Will highlighted how his partner manipulated him: *'when he was living with me, he had this knack of making me feel that I had done something wrong, that I was responsible'*. It is a common pattern for the abuser to blame the victim to avoid being perceived as the problem (Migliaccio, 2001). This aligns with Donovan and Hester (2015)'s practices of love, as the abusive partner often manipulates expressions of love to retain control over the victim, cultivating feelings of guilt and self-blame. A particular incident narrative highlighted this:

'There was one day we had a really, really big argument...what he said to me 'I know my behaviour was really abusive but it is your fault for not stopping it'. I said, 'sorry, come again'. He said, 'you should have put a stop to it, you should have just kicked me out sooner'. I was like, 'okay it is my fault that you were abusive to me?' And he was like, 'yeah, basically yeah.'

The death of Will's mother marked a significant point in his life story. His partner did not attend the funeral.

'And the day of my mum's funeral he said he was feeling sick. When I came back from the funeral he had a massive plate of food in front of him, he was eating all kinds of stuff and I was like 'it is funny how you can be sick but you are eating a big massive dinner'.

Will emphasised the emotional impact of this event: *'I said to him best friends tend to go to their best friend's parent's funeral. I was absolutely devastated, absolutely shattered, broken hearted'.*

It is clear that this incident struck a nerve for Will. This was one of the few occasions in which he strongly emphasised his feelings. His voice became brittle, as he recounted this aspect of his story. He construed his grief as *'indescribable'*, yet he was left without support.

'So even during the funeral service I was there kind of in the knowledge that that bastard is just sitting at home now on the internet just doing what he does, and he couldn't care less about being here with me because it would have meant being around people and being out in the community. So yeah, I was really hurt by that, really hurt by that.'

Will secured a new nursing position while living in Ireland and became the sole provider of the household income. The role of financially supporting his partner is frequently rooted in the social discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Walby, 1989). Will conveyed that his partner had control over his finances (Postmus et al., 2020; Stark, 2007). Even though there was one income, Will felt *'harassed'* into ordering his partner takeaway *'every day, seven nights a week, seven days a week'*. He volunteered a generic incident in which his partner was verbally abusive towards him at mealtimes:

'he would be complaining about [being] "stuck in my room all day long" "I fucking wait for you, for you to come fucking back here" "I'm starving" and that and that. And I was so afraid of him at that stage, em... that I would cave in. I would give in and I would just hand him my credit card or my debit card'.

Will spent almost £3000 on takeaway food during the year and a half of that relationship. He borrowed money to finance his partner's daily orders from 'Just Eat', an online food delivery company. Fear was posited as to why he bankrolled his partner's eating habits. He reiterated its

prominent role in his life: *'That's how bad it got. I was literally terrified of coming back to my own house'*. It was noteworthy how financial abuse translated to Will losing footing in his life:

'I was struggling financially because I was borrowing money to pay for all of this stuff, and I was really in debt. And I was paying my university fees on a monthly basis, and I was really, really struggling.... I kind of thought let me sit down and look at my finances, where the hell has all this money gone to? I looked at my bank statement and my credit card statement as well and everything was Just Eat, Just Eat and I was like sweet Jesus. So I went onto my Just Eat account and I actually added up, I physically added up the total from the time that he moved in until I kicked him out and it came to almost £3,000'.... And yeah when I went onto that account I just felt so stupid, I really felt so stupid'.

When Will found out his partner had a supply of money and could have helped during periods of financial crisis, this caused further upset:

'But his father had actually invested a lot of stocks and shares on his behalf. Em...so that money was actually there waiting to be cashed in. Em...which was like something like thirty to forty thousand pounds, sterling at the time... he was pretending basically that he was broke and that he had no money, and he needed me to kind of, to bankroll him'.

Will remarked that abuse continued to intensify within his relationship: *'the controlling behaviour became more pronounced, he really ramped that up'*. As a reference to the control and jealousy exhibited by his partner, he conveyed this as an *'absolute paranoia'* which led Will to withdraw from social life: *'I basically wasn't allowed to do anything unless it kind of passed through him first'*. The phrase he *'called the shots'* surfaced as a direct expression of control. He inserted: *'there was other things'* to highlight how his partner monitored his movements: *'if I was meeting people, he was really paranoid about who I was meeting. Like who are they? What are they? You know, is this person gay?'*. The monitoring was targeted at Will's sexual identity, preventing him from contacting men from the LGBTQ community. This emerged as a troubling finding, as gay and bisexual men in particular heavily rely on their community (Frost et al. 2016).

'I had a friend. I did have a friend who was gay who I used to meet up with occasionally. Em... he didn't want me seeing him and he would say stuff like, you know it was stuff like "I suppose you're sleeping with him, are you?" And I'm like "no I'm not".

After this time, Will became more reclusive. The home, symbolically a place of belonging and contentment, became one of paradoxical confinement or what Stark (2007) refers to as the 'invisible cage'. His partner obstructed him from leaving his home or securing connections to his outside community: *'I just wouldn't go out anywhere, wouldn't go out anywhere and do anything'*. According to Will, this gradually eroded his sense of self:

'I just lost my whole identity. And it's like as if I died. It was like as if he had stolen (Will sighs) my soul, my, my personality my... I had gone from being, despite my horrible kind of childhood and my struggles with my sexuality. I had gone from being, you know, once I dealt with all that stuff, I had gone from somebody who loved going out and had a zest for life, to somebody who was just constantly depressed, anxious em....no energy, couldn't sleep, all of the symptoms that go along with kind of clinical depression'.

After a year and a half, *'it got so bad. It got really, really so bad where I was just a nervous wreck'*. The iteration of the word *'really'* hones in on Will's inner turmoil. He reached a breaking point and disclosed that his partner was abusive by phoning a friend. This proved to be a key epiphany within his life story. Will emphasised that he only reached out to his friend when the situation was dire or extreme which reflects his stoicism and masculine portrayal (Goffman, 1990). Upon hearing Will's testimony, he said his friend stated: *'he's obviously a psychopath... he'll kill ya, he'll he'll stab ya or beat ya up or something'*. Together they formed a safety plan that included asking his boyfriend to move out, threatening to call the police and phoning his friend to check on him every thirty minutes.

Will shared a particular incident in which he broke up with his partner. This was conveyed through tentative and minimising techniques. *'I was really, like, almost terrified'*. He appeared surprised at himself for following through with ending the relationship *'But em... I did actually then, I actually said to him'*. This signified the beginning of empowerment and recovery, as Will took charge of his biographical trajectory. However, in response Will's partner became physically intimidating:

'So, he started like throwing things around the room. And I said, "ok, I said listen, you need to calm down, you need to calm down now I'm gonna call the police"... It was quite a frightening experience because when I said it to him he got angry, he got very

angry and he started packing his things and kind of throwing things, he put his bag on the bed and he started throwing things at the bag. He was in a temper’.

The breakup marked a key turning point: *‘we basically parted on bad terms’*. Having previously ruminated on his fear and contempt for his partner, emphasising his choice to cut ties, Will contradicts this by echoing a sense of longing for him: *‘I know this is going to sound crazy, but I miss him’*. Similarly, patterns of love are reflected across the breadth of survivor accounts, as those cite care and a sense of loyalty to their abuser (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Often, when abuse and coercive control transpires, there is no clear cut ending. This became one of many chapters intertwined in Will’s 10-year relationship.

In spite of the relationship ending, Will continued to contact his ex-partner. However, during this breakup, Will began to date another man and the ongoing extent of his ex-partner’s control is exhibited: *‘he managed to clock my pin number for my phone, my iPhone. And he managed to ring, he phoned the guy that I was em... dating and said to him “your services are no longer needed. He’s actually going out. I’m his partner. I’m his boyfriend and you can fuck off”*. The extreme level of violation of his privacy and trust was indicative of coercive control (Stark, 2007).

This act effectively ended Will’s brief dating experience. The breakup between Will and his ex-partner lasted three weeks. As the couple reunited, this epitomised the ‘on and off’ nature of their ten-year relationship. Will portrayed his ex-boyfriend as remorseful: *‘he was actually quite apologetic’*. His partner’s repentance was indicative of a honeymoon period (Walker, 1970) in abusive relationships. Will quoted his partner: *‘[he said] Oh, I’m really sorry about, you know the way I treated ya.... blah blah blah’*. However, he did not hide his cynical tone here and positioned himself retrospectively as someone who knew better, as opposed to someone who was hurt and misled. Will suddenly reverted back to recalling flashes of happier moments, when

his ex-partner was conveyed as turning a new leaf *'So, he started em... he started coming around to see me again. We actually started doing things, like start playing tennis and stuff like that'*.

Will reconciled with his ex-partner: *'I said, "ok, let's, let's give it a go"*. However, he was not totally disillusioned by his promises to change. Will spoke in a subdued voice, as highlighted his erroneous judgement saying *'so yeah, but I, unfortunately, I did kind of keep him in my life'*. His insertion of future revelations or hindsight was observed (Kvernbekk, 2013). He described entering into a *'so-called proper relationship'* which was monogamous, but not loving: *'It only lasted about two months and the abuse started again and it was a lot worse'*.

Over the course of Will's 10 year relationship, he reflected on his loss of identity within his abuse story: *'It was like as if he had stolen my soul, my, my personality my... I had gone'*.

According to Will, his identity as a gay man, *'somebody who loved going out and had a zest for life'* was reconfigured to reflect his victimhood *'constantly depressed, anxious, no energy, couldn't sleep'*. This was portrayed as a reason for why his abuse continued:

'I completely lost who I was, and I was just an extension of him. It's important to understand that when you're in an extremely abusive situation, you lose your power. You lose your strength, you lose your self-esteem, you lose everything. You stop being who you were. You stop being the person who you were'.

Will then describes his final breakup with his partner. The narrative depicts a biographical *'chasm'* in which the protagonist is brought to their lowest point (Chamberlayne, 2004). Will described this as *'right on the edge of the cliff edge'*. His narrative style turned frank and sombre as he described his mental and physical deterioration.

'I didn't actually realize that I was actually going through a serious mental breakdown at the time. And it actually got to a point where I couldn't, I almost couldn't get out of bed to go to work. I mean, I stopped having showers, I looked like a tramp. Em... I even got pulled up on it in work about my personal hygiene, about the way I looked. I had gone from being somebody who was always praised for doing a really great job to, you know, started forgetting things, that's really, really dangerous when you're a nurse, you know. You can't afford to make mistakes, you can end up in prison if you do, you know'.

In his darkest hour, Will revealed that he attempted suicide. He begins the sentence with *'I actually tried to...'* but paused and was unable to find the right words. Suicide was a difficult topic to navigate. In the second interview, Will disclosed that he tried to *'starve himself to death and it almost worked'*. He was admitted to a mental health hospital for treatment. He adds the words *'I actually ended up in a mental hospital myself'* as he acknowledges the evident echo in his biography. Thus, Will repeated the history of both of his parents, who were also institutionalised.

Will attributed his mental health relapse directly to his abuse. This turning point in his narrative impelled the final episode of his decade long relationship. While obtaining treatment in hospital, Will blocked his ex-partner on his phone. The iteration of the word *'block'* three times in his story indicated 'ex' or 'former' now seemed like more permanent terms for Will. He emphasised this point: *'If he does show up...I would just call the guards and have him arrested'*. His confident tone is a contrast to his hesitant and troubled words earlier. The ending of abuse marked a pivotal life course transition. There was a sense that Will became empowered and unburdened by his ex-partner, free to now live his life.

The final stage of Will's story is a testimony of survival and recovery. Having been isolated from the world for ten years, Will eventually started to pursue hobbies and registered for a psychotherapy course in university. As part of his psychotherapy training, he underwent personal therapy, and he credited this as helpful to his healing which he claims: *'woke me up to a lot of stuff as well'*. Will's metaphor of being woken up is an acknowledgment that he was once asleep or kept in the dark regarding his abuse: *'I know it sounds crazy, but I wasn't actually aware that this was happening to me until it was too late'*. His biographical metamorphosis marked by self-growth is grounded in typical narratives depicting recovery (Frank 1995). By now, we have talked for three hours and forty minutes, Will closed his story by saying:

'Em... I basically served a function. I was just used for ten years.'

4.1.1 Particularities of Will's Case

Will's story epitomises that IPV had reached extreme levels, even in the absence of physical violence. His narrative descriptions strongly resonated with Stark's coercive control typology, whereby the perpetrator used non-physical tactics and their intimate knowledge of the victim to undermine their freedom (Stark, 2007). Thus, Will's abuse manifested itself in discrete forms, including financial abuse, intimidation, offensive language and a tactic he refers to as 'silent bullying' in which his partner frequently withheld communication and emotional support until he acquiesced.

Will's case exemplified the influence of Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) (see section 2.2.1) and discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity (see section 2.2.1.2) on his life story. As a gay man, Will faced social stigma when he exhibited femininity, a phenomenon consistent with the perception of gay men as possessing 'subordinate masculinity' (Connell, 2005). This foreshadows Will's need to emphasise his masculinity in his narrative portrayal (Goffman, 1990).

Will's experiences of IPV can be interpreted as a manifestation of Donovan and Hester's (2015) relationship rules (as discussed in section 2.2.2.1). Will assumed responsibility and caregiving in his relationship towards his partner (rule two) who paradoxically wielded control over his decision-making (rule one). These rules were also construed as practices of love, serving not only to manipulate Will but also to fortify the bond between the couple.

Will's portrayal of caregiving under rule two appeared to be more rooted in his masculinity, evident through his stoicism, autonomy, and productivity. This solidified his narrative portrayal

as the 'fixer', as a man who believed himself to be responsible for improving his partner's life rather than dwelling on his own abuse. Furthermore, Will's position as the financial provider or breadwinner in the relationship aligns with social discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Pleck, 1981; Walby, 1989). This context frames his susceptibility to financial abuse and control. However, Will's abuse was frequently not the focal point of his narrative; his displays of stoicism and fixing served as a way to divert attention from his vulnerability, abuse, and power loss.

Will's narrative strategy adopted a stoic demeanour, which led to contradictions in his storytelling. Will portrayed himself as angry with his partner, an emotion men are more comfortable with (Jakupcak and Tull, 2005). His tendency to predict events and maintain a sense of control allowed Will to avoid revealing vulnerable moments when he felt betrayed or abused (Goffman, 1990). Most notable was Will's strategy to cloak his abuse in vague descriptions and metaphors over explicit narrative descriptions: *'flying into a rage'* or *'revealing his true colours'*. When probed for additional information in the second interview, Will often answered *'no'* or provided generalised and tentative answers: *'it was little things like the very controlling behaviour'*. Though motivated to tell his story, Will grappled with the challenges of revisiting and articulating the painful memories of his abuse.

Will devoted a significant portion of his narrative to recounting his experiences of intergenerational abuse and homophobia during his formative years. Several pivotal turning points stand out in his biographical trajectory, including his struggle with mental health, internalised homophobia and his journey towards self-acceptance as a gay man. The death of his mother was a significant turning point in his lived life, made more prominent by his partner's absence at her funeral. Overall, Will's story illustrates the toll abuse took on his mental health, reaching a critical juncture where he attempted suicide and required hospitalisation.

4.2 George's Story

'I looked into his eyes and he was in my face shouting at the top of his lungs, that anger in his eyes, his hatred towards me was so shocking. It was worse than the knife.'

I first met George through the camera lens of a computer screen, our meeting took place virtually over Zoom. There was a gentle and thoughtful expression in his eyes. George was a 38-year-old gay man born in South Africa, who had recently travelled to Ireland to study. By profession, he was an architect. He first began by warning that a tradesperson could arrive at any moment due to an unexpected leak in his ceiling. Even as I interviewed George, his life continued to unfold. Yet in the hustle and bustle he was willing to share his story with the hope that it would help somebody else in the future. George's empathy and kindness for others framed the story he went on to tell about abuse. George was born in the mid 1980s, one of South African history's most destructive and violent periods (Hamber, 2000). He framed his '*strange story*' as an '*inevitable situation*', suggesting his childhood led to an unavoidable path to be victimised in adulthood.

'My mother unfortunately, she has been married to my father now for 40 years, believe it not, I don't know why so long, but I mean he has beaten her into, well not physically but mentally into an unrecognisable shell of a person.'

George positioned himself as a '*very sensitive child*' in contrast to his portrayal of his father as the embodiment of a battle-hardened figure. George's father served in the South African Border War. As a military man, his control over family life served as a backdrop to George's youth. He used generalising language to describe his father: '*I grew up with a father who was very controlling and very aggressive person and violent sometimes*'. However, the term '*sometimes*' minimised his abuse. George credited his father's '*strange mental behaviour*' to his military background. This mirrored the high prevalence of violence among veterans and military personnel (Kwan et al., 2020; Cronin, 1995).

The first incident depicting George's abuse emanated from his childhood. He relived the moment his father discovered that his mother purchased items without his permission. This erupted into a scene of anger and violence, in which his father exerted his weight, forcibly breaking the car door to get to George. This was one of the few detailed scenes depicting his abuse as a child.

'So, he, almost in his eye he wanted to fucking kill me but he would rather take out his physicality on something else and in that case it was the car door that he attempted to break off. Which obviously damaged the car and he had to fix it'.

George's formative years were characterised by a turbulent relationship with his father. He insisted that this was not attributed to his sexuality, although the next remark contradicted this:

'I try not to poison the water too much. I wouldn't say that he is against my sexuality, I think he just sees it as a weakness, and he looks at me almost like there is something wrong with me'.

It seems subconsciously, George positioned his sexuality as the 'poison' in the water, which may reflect internalised homophobia. This perspective was reinforced when he positioned himself as having a 'weird complex'. George's persistent feeling that something was wrong with him: 'I was different' evokes a deeper reflection of the pervasive discourses of heteronormativity (Rich, 1980).

George turned eighteen early in the millennium. Attending university marked a transitional period to adulthood. As the son of a wealthy businessman, he moved into an apartment purchased for him near his university. This became a 'safe haven' to retreat from the violence and oppression in his home life. This period was also characterised as an 'exploratory phase' for him to embrace his identity as a gay man: 'I was a bit more comfortable just being different and being open about going on dates with men'.

'So, I grew up with, as a very sensitive child actually, with a very dominating father. But thankfully I went to university when I was 18 and I sort of led my own life separate from that environment'.

Eight years later, George returned home after university to follow in his father's footsteps. This marked a period in which violence seeped back into his life. He began working for his father and recalled distantly that he was launched through a window in his office and, on a separate occasion, down a staircase. Sometime later, George set up his own company. By launching his own business, he stepped out of his father's shadow.

In November 2018, George met his partner through an online dating app. This marked an important life course transition. He was immediately smitten by his boyfriend's youth and physical appearance: *'I was just so flattered that someone so young and so incredibly handsome and beautiful like he is... was interested in me and wanted to date me...unfortunately I was 34 at the time, and he was 21'*. George noted that this thirteen-year age gap was not problematic: *'I didn't say I had an issue about [the age gap]; gays don't seem to care about it, so I didn't really care'* Although his earlier iteration of *'unfortunately'* contradicts this.

Nevertheless, George set a fast trajectory in his courtship: *'So we started seeing each other right away'*. After one month, he invited his boyfriend to house sit while he was away travelling. He asserts that his boyfriend's plight contributed to this decision: *'he was in a very desperate situation at the time'*. Consequently, George embraces rule two in his relationship wherein he holds himself responsible for his abusive partner's well-being (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

Travelling left George unable to form a deep connection: *'we were talking every day, but we didn't have any direct connection I guess, which was maybe the big mistake, but anyway'*. The foreshadowing of *'the big mistake'* is a possible reference to future abuse. However, he soon glossed over this remark by deviating to a new topic: *'but anyway'*. Two months into the relationship his partner *'started revealing quite more aggressive and violent tendencies'*.

In spite of this, George outlined his reasons to continue his relationship. He continued to emphasise his partner's aesthetic qualities in this decision making. *'At that time, I kind of felt that this is as good as it is going to get, this guy is absolutely beautiful, he helps me so much around the house and I thought we had such a good life together that I thought I was just going to accept it'*. Notably, George positions himself within discourses of masculinity, shouldering the responsibility for his circumstances (Connell, 2005).

George continued to incorporate the plight of his younger partner into his narrative. He suspected his partner's abusive behaviour was closely related to his obsessive and compulsive tendencies: *'he had this OCD thing about cleaning things'*. He conveyed a generic incident depicting when his partner *'explosively'* disclosed that his childhood included prostitution, addiction and homelessness:

'He came out to his father who then kicked him out of the house at 12. He kind of fell in with the wrong crowd I guess, got involved with drugs and then, unfortunately prostitution as a child.'

George compared his 'coming out' story with his partner's. In doing so, he minimised his own plight: *'I did not have a similar unprotected life as his'*. He positions his boyfriend as the one who is 'wounded' to minimise and explain their abusiveness: *'he has had a hard card dealt to him in life or a bad hand.'* It became clear that George was highly sensitive to the suffering of others and directed this energy towards his boyfriend: *'I felt really, really bad for him'*.

George appeared more comfortable exposing his partner's vulnerability as opposed to his own. Perhaps his partner's problems proved to be a helpful distraction from his own problems. This stoic presentation laid the foundation to becoming the 'fixer' marked by a desire to not only support but mend his boyfriend: *'I can fix this person'*. Under rule two of his relationship, George takes charge of managing his younger partner's life, he emphasises his ability to rescue and problem-solve (Donovan and Hester, 2015): *'I convinced him to go and start seeing a*

therapist... and eventually persuaded him to leave his job'. This portrayal stands out as distinctly masculine (Connell, 2005).

Until this point, George minimised his own abuse experiences by focusing on his desire to help his partner. Less than half way into his narrative, he referred to '*one of his first unfortunate acts*' and so began the lengthy process of sequencing the violence he endured. However, a conciliatory intention is embedded in his story. The term '*unfortunate act*' reflected how George talked about abuse. It seemingly mitigated his partner's behaviour to a list of unfortunate accidents or mistakes. Within the first five months of his relationship, George struggled to maintain male friendships within the restrictive parameters of his boyfriend's jealousy, a phenomenon identified by Migliaccio (2002). This was the first detailed example of abuse and controlling behaviour exhibited by his partner:

'He called my friends, and he would tell them that they are not allowed to talk to me or contact me and if they do that, he will kill them. And he did this to most of them. So, I lost contact with most of my friends'.

George promptly terminated contact with his friends hoping that the '*situation can be remedied at some point*'. However, '*months*' went by without any resolution. This underscored rule one in his relationship in which his boyfriend took charge of his decision-making. In response, George yielded to the controlling behaviour, demonstrating love and a sense of duty (Donovan and Hester, 2015). For example, he neutralises his abuse where possible, by rationalising his partner's jealousy: '*I don't think this was an unusual situation, I think this was just very frightening to him because he felt I am safe but other people might tell me about him*'. George for the first time moved beyond generalised descriptions, recounting a particular incident when he was on the phone to a friend:

'So, he didn't like this guy, wanted me to put the phone down. He obviously grabbed the phone and broke the phone screaming and screaming and I remember thinking the neighbours will hear this. I am so embarrassed; I couldn't believe that he was acting this way. I mean if it was in a cave somewhere underground, I would be fine with it because he can just go at it and vomit all his emotions all over me but in this case now

people were hearing it and people would know this was happening and that was quite horrifying just knowing that people would know.'

This was a poignant scene where the intimate nature of abuse had bled into George's public life: 'people were hearing it'. The metaphor of an underground cave conveyed the insular nature of 'intimate terrorism' and how it can prompt feelings of extreme isolation (Johnson, 2006). On other occasions, his partner would blame George for his own plight stating, 'that I had destroyed his life and I had done all these horrible things to him'. He then verged into narrating how his partner would abuse him psychologically:

'He would say I am such a pathetic person and no wonder I am alone and no wonder my ex-boyfriend didn't want to get back with me. Or no wonder I have such problems with certain things or my father or whatever. It would always be things that he obviously knew was a bit tough for me emotionally to have in my life... he would use that as ammunition in that space.'

George conveyed a sense of ordinariness within the extraordinary presentation of his abuse, for example referring to abuse as a means for his partner to 'get it all out' so George could 'go on with my day'. George's use of the pronoun 'they' acknowledged the echo in his life story that both his father and his boyfriend had been abusive to him. It is clear that George cultivated this tolerance from a young age.

George described how his boyfriend's tactics escalated from psychological to physical. He deviated from minimising his abuse by stating: 'the physicality of it was boisterous at times'. This was reinforced by a typical incident narrative depicting his injuries after a violent episode. In doing so, the extremity of his abuse is highlighted:

'Every time we had these fights or he would attack me like that and I was bleeding from either him, in that case it was his nails that tore the skin, but if it was a knife or his nails or his mouth from biting. And it wasn't like I was disorientated about the whole situation; I mean where the fuck is that coming from? I have never understood, I think I was overwhelmed by being in this weird fucking situation that I found myself and that I rarely felt the actual pain of the injuries. Obviously I was bruised afterwards, quite severely, or cut severely, but that was the only memory I had of it was having to deal

with it afterwards. I never realised that I was being hurt in such a way while it was happening and if there was blood on my clothes or blood on the floor I was always confused, where the hell was that coming from?'

Rather than try to defend himself, George portrays himself as enduring pain. He described numerous weapons that had been used against him: *"his nails", "his mouth", and "a knife"*. Although these implements appeared incidental as George focused on why his abuse was happening, rather than what was happening to him: *'I was always confused, where the hell was that coming from?'*. In his pursuit of why, George was unable to recognise his abuse: *'I never realised that I was being hurt'*.

After six months into the relationship George vaguely conveys how *'it started becoming quite violent'*. He used the term 'phases' to depict this. This is typified when his boyfriend's tearfulness and screaming signalled *'going into phase number three'*, which was similar to Walker's (1979) 'explosive' stage. This coincided with his partner's job loss and engagement in therapy for his childhood trauma. These incidents were embedded in graphic explanations:

'It started becoming quite violent, where he started hitting me or holding a knife to my throat or, I wouldn't say stab but more cutting me with the knife. Breaking things, threatening to kill me'.

George presented himself as paradoxically stoic. His lack of emotion and tentative language was an expression of his masculinity (Connell, 2005). The phrasing *'I wouldn't say stab but more cutting me with the knife'* took the edge off his abuse. He directed his story to himself, exposing a vulnerable moment when he dissociated from the trauma he had endured (Eubanks Fleming and Resick, 2016): *'It was weird. I felt like I was outside my body, I don't know how to deal with the situation'*. Now seemingly conscious of his vulnerability, he changed the topic. Almost as a countermeasure to fragility, he played up his masculinity by asserting his potential potency when the violence occurred stating: *'I could kick him out at any point, I could have him arrested'*. This underscores the influence of social discourses of masculinity. There was a paradox to George's gesture *'I could kick him out'* as his story is built on the many reasons that kept his partner there:

'this is as good as it is going to get'. As a result, George's portrayal as the 'fixer' characterised by his empathy of his boyfriend was instrumental to why he remained:

'I felt so bad for him, I could just see the hurt in his eyes every time he would be standing over me while I was on the floor hysterical that this was happening again. I don't know if I saw the anger, I just saw the sadness and the desperation'.

George's prioritisation of his partner's needs over his own: *'I could just see the hurt in his eyes'* serves as an illustration of how practices of love were manipulated by the abusive partner to evade accountability within their volatile relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

After this the couple were no longer intimate: *'our sex lives stopped the first time he had the outburst, his first outburst'*. This continued for the remainder of the relationship: *'for probably ten months we didn't really have a sex life or touched each other'*. Although George asserted his agency in this choice: *'I found it a bit off putting if he wanted to come near me, maybe I was a bit frightened of him to be honest'*, he then minimised his fear *'maybe I was a bit'*. In the next line, he contradicts himself by portraying that his partner was the one to put an end to their intimacy.

'He said that because of what happened to him in his past anyway with a lot of violating instances when he was younger, which sounds that it was quite unpleasant, he wanted to take a break from any physical interaction while he was undergoing his therapy. And then decided after a while that he was asexual'.

Publicly, George thrived as a business owner, although privately his abuse continued. Nevertheless, he prided himself on being a provider of stability for his younger partner, a likely reflection of social discourses of masculinity and his upper class background (Connell, 2005). While financially supporting his boyfriend, George never construed his experiences as financial exploitation. He did, however, appear aware to some degree he was being exploited: *'I was being manipulated quite severely and being lied to about everything and taken advantage of on numerous different levels'*.

'He spent quite a bit of money; he had his own card that was linked to my account so he would go out and buy whatever he wanted or go grocery shopping or buy stuff for the house or for me. He enjoyed spending quite a bit of money'.

Although this could be interpreted as financial abuse, George used empowering and assertive language to highlight his ability to financially support his partner: *'I would support him in any way that I could'*. It is possible that his masculine self prevents him from recognising his victimisation. Although George highlighted consent in this process, his narrative gestalt contradicts this:

'I was just a tool for him to manage whatever he was going through at the time and I don't know if he really cared at all about me, which is a bit sad'.

George changed topics to highlight that he attended a birthday party with his partner in December 2019. The pattern of George's storytelling changed here, and he begins to reveal in-depth experiences. George described how his partner found him talking to a friend. This scene flickers between moments of frustration and guilt: *'he obviously lost his shit at the event which is... because I was speaking to someone that he didn't want me to speak to'*. The term *'obviously'* might suggest he expected an incident to occur, although he contradicts this by stating: *'I didn't see it coming at all'*. In the next sentence George subtly steered responsibility to himself: *'because I was speaking to someone'* epitomising his portrayal as the 'fixer' and his obligation to internalise blame as to protect the reputation of his partner (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

After George's partner departed from the party, he chose to remain in the company of his friends. *'So, I said to him to just get in the car and go home, I will see you at home, if you don't want to be here you don't have to be here. And he left'*. His demonstration of self-agency was perceived to have *'triggered a landslide of chaos'* when he returned home. A tense atmosphere in the room now lingered.

'I went home later, and he confronted me at home quite viciously. I was locked in a room and beaten all night and it was not great'.

It was striking that George minimised a night of assault into one single line. The details of his abuse were shrouded in the ambiguity of his words. While his phrasing '*quite viciously*' alluded to the gravity of his abuse, the phrase '*it was not great*' may paradoxically minimise this. Later in the interview, George revisited these memories and appeared more expressive of his emotions and experiences from that night.

'I was downstairs, I think, having a cigarette in the lounge. And he came back down the stairs and just started shouting and screaming and going crazy and I thought geezers it is so late at night, and I don't have the energy for this. And it escalated and escalated and escalated and I think I tried to go to my bedroom, and he took my phone and he wanted to call the people who were at the party, and I followed him into a different room in the house. By this time, we had been brawling for quite a bit now and he has been hitting me. He tore open the skin here on my shoulder and my shirt was full of blood and I was just so exhausted, and I couldn't deal with it anymore and I just sat down in this room and grabbed the phone and said, 'please don't do this, please don't do this'. And he just got up and locked the door and here I was inside this little room, and I couldn't believe it'.

The abuse George described had breached his human rights. This was also illustrative of Johnson's (2005) typology of 'intimate terrorism'. The descriptions of his blood and wounds: '*he tore open the skin here on my shoulder*' '*my shirt was full of blood*' underscored the extremities of his abuse. In the next sentence, George portrayed his position as the wounded (Frank, 1995) by framing his partner's eyes as angry and abusive: '*And then looking into his eyes and seeing there was just these crazy eyes, these demonic eyes*'. George accounted for the remainder of the night by emphasising that he was '*recurringly*' assaulted and restrained by his partner. His assault lasted '*hours*'.

'At first, I thought, what is happening? This is so weird, I can't get out. And then he just recurringly came into the room and just would stand right in my face and scream at the top of his lungs at me about how awful I am and how awful his life was. And he hit me over the head with whatever he could get his hands on. And I would just lie there, and he would just go off and lock the door and be gone for I don't know how long and then

just come back and it just went on like that for hours. I just wanted to sleep to be honest, it was fucking awful.'

The next day, George was found locked in a room by his maid: *'she found me, and I just told her to call the police'*. This event signalled how the private nature of his abuse invaded his public life. This impelled his biographical trajectory to end his relationship. George called a private security service and disclosed his situation. His narrative unfolded during the expansion of the private security industry in South Africa (Berg, 2003). This disclosure represented a significant turning point and coincided with an intense momentum in his narrative. When the private security arrived, they were threatened by George's partner who was forcibly removed from his home.

'Security came into the house with quite large guns and he was shouting at them saying he was going to stab them and it was fucking crazy, I couldn't believe it, this poor guy, I don't know why he would make it worse for himself. I left the house at that point and he was forced to remove his things from my house by armed men. Shit, that was hard because I think it was essentially, I was so ashamed that something like that happened to me and I allowed it to get to that point'

George's empathy for his partner: *'this poor guy'* continued to overshadow his abuse. He articulated his shame for the first time: *'I was so ashamed that something like that happened to me and I allowed it to get to that point'*. His engendering of blame and responsibility was compounded by social discourses of masculinity that assume men were in charge as opposed to powerless and vulnerable (Connell, 2005). George signified the end of his relationship by stating: *'he was forced to remove his things from my house'* rather than use terminology that acknowledged this as a breakup. Soon after his separation, George was contacted by his now former partner. He lists the *'incredibly strange things'* that occurred during this period. His ex-partner continued to harass him and his friends: *'he broke into my online account and was trying to do the weirdest stuff, still calling my friends'*. While his phrasing *'weirdest stuff'* and *'this childish game'* reflected his minimisation.

Echoing his role as the 'fixer', George chose to remain passive. He responds to his ex-partner's harassment by continuing to help him: *'It was a bit hard shaking the situation and I felt like I wasn't going to get rid of him, I needed to in some way help him'*. George's expressions of care toward his former partner illustrate how his relationship rules continue beyond the confines of his intimate relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

There was an evident contradiction between George wanting to 'get rid' of his partner and finding ways to incorporate him back in his life: *'I said to him I would still pay for his psychiatry, and he needs to continue with it'*.

In the weeks following his break-up, George visited a coastal resort over the Christmas period and re-immersed himself in online dating. When broaching this topic, he smiled nervously, stating self-deprecatingly that *'I, like so many useless men actually, thought that if I spoke to someone, a chatting app, that I might feel better about myself. I could maybe just get my mind off things'*. It appears that George's partner was aware of this tendency. He exploited George by forging a dating profile under a false identity in a bid to stalk him.

'So, one of the people that I was talking to was actually him, like he catfished, he faked a profile and somehow I had been chatting to him on this profile even though he was not even in the same (region). And that was quite unusual, that was not a nice experience. And this fuelled his anger'.

While George minimised being deceived by his partner's fake profile: *'that was not a nice experience'*. It is clear that following his separation, he became susceptible to a range of stalking behaviours consummated by his former partner (Spearman et al. 2022). Proceeding with the interview, George begins to unknowingly catalogue intersecting examples of coercive control and stalking. He recalled suddenly: *'I only remembered it now'* that his ex-partner had broken into his home. He does not specify when this occurred.

So, he did break into the house. I can't remember why or what he was doing there or what it was for. When I realised it happened, like he didn't burn down my house or

anything, so I was a bit irritated about the situation, I reacted to it I guess by trying to get the security to act on it. Which didn't really work'.

George minimised the flagrant illegality of the break-in by his former partner: *'he didn't burn down my house or anything'*. He was seemingly unaware or unperturbed by the danger he was in, given how his separation increased his risk of serious harm (Stark and Hester, 2019). George's reaction, *'I was a bit irritated'* minimised the emotionality of this incident. This reflects a pattern in his storytelling as his masculine portrayal of tolerance and stoicism seemingly distanced him from his abuse. George also stated that his ex-partner contacted his mother in a bid to gain back control. He minimised this as an *'unsettling interaction'*.

'What else did he do? He tried to contact my mother. I think they had a bit more of an interaction than I am aware of, I think she thinks she is protecting me by not sharing these things with me but I think he tried to contact her and they had some unsettling interaction'.

While George initiated the breakup, he stated that his former partner *'started falling apart quite severely and I felt very bad about it'*. Such struggles aligned to his guilt for not helping: *'I thought that I didn't keep to my promise that I was going to help him'*. George struggled to free himself from relationship rule two, wherein he was dedicated to caring for his partner (Donovan and Hester, 2015). It appears challenging for him to suddenly no longer have a sense of duty and higher purpose in his life story. This set the foreseeable scene, when George proceeded to befriend his ex-partner, representing another key turning point in his life story: *'I said to him that I still want to be his friend'*.

George's olive branch of friendship may signify a difficulty with letting go of the codependent relationship he found himself in (Mcgrath and Oakley, 2012). A mosaic of narrative expressions underscored by the need to 'fix' his partner recurred throughout George's story. This retracted light away from the abuse he endured and the choices that defined his life story (Goffman, 1990).

Soon after, George attempted to establish boundaries in this relationship: *'I said to him if he ever acts out like that again that he wouldn't see me again'*. However, even though his partner *'said he would try to keep himself contained'*, this was not to be. Two months later, he invited his ex-partner to his holiday home.

'A safari house, it is in the African bush... we loved going there, especially with the dog. So I said to him does he want to go with me, to go there with the dog and we can just relax, obviously not as a couple, but he will be in his side of the house.'

On the day the couple arrived at their holiday home, violence immediately ensued. Although George initially said *'I don't remember'*, he later recalled a particular incident when mould had grown on the fridge, which provoked a *'huge tantrum'* in his ex-partner: *'he became very anxious about it and screaming and quite angry'*. This was illustrative of the extremities of his ex-partner's coercive control which ensured George's complicity (Stark, 2007).

George used repetitive and generalised language to convey that his partner: *'just lost his shit, like he lost his shit'* and *'grabbed a knife quite quickly'*, which prompted George to *'remove myself from the situation'*. At that moment, George became aware that his life was in danger: *'I had to fight for my life'*. Although he immediately minimises this: *'I don't know if it was legitimate fear'*. In the next scene, George *'sneaked out the door'* and fled from his ex-partner: *'I tried to escape'*.

'I was so scared of him, I left the house and went into the bush and hid there for, I would say, a few hours hoping that he would calm down. He didn't calm down. I could hear him, it was so fucking scary, I could hear him shout from the house, screaming my name at the top of his lungs in complete insane anger, I could just hear him looking for me. And he was carrying this huge knife in his hand looking for me everywhere'.

George emphasised his seclusion in this particular incident, marking it as the pinnacle of his fear:

'And I haven't been that scared ever before because there was no one to help me, the closest town or people would have been at least a half an hour's drive. There was no other way of getting to me, it really was in the middle of nowhere, it was in the middle of the bush, just dirt roads and no one for miles and miles and miles'.

George hid for three hours while his ex-partner was *'screaming my name in pure aggression so loud that it would echo down this valley'*. He described his ex-partner searching for him while armed with a knife: *'he was carrying this huge knife in his hand looking for me everywhere'*. His iteration of *'scared'* reflected a change in his narration, as emotions outpaced his tendency to minimise his experiences. For the second time, George framed his narrative from the perspective of being held captive. This time he was trapped in his holiday home, once filled with happy memories.

'I find myself in a prison, I am in a place that I have loved my whole life and enjoyed going to for such a long time and all of a sudden it has become my worst nightmare. It was just so scary, just hearing that voice, hearing that anger, hearing that pain in his voice calling out and saying, 'where the fuck are you, I will kill you'. It is something I won't forget I guess'.

George intended to convey the severity of his abuse by using extreme language. His words expressed his turmoil at having his partner cause him fear and anguish. In terms of validating and recognising his abuse, this incident was crucial. For George, it became hazardous to hide in the secluded wilderness, given the unknown threat of wildlife: *'any animal could eat me at any moment.'* He seemingly realised he could not *'just hide anymore'* and felt he had to *'confront the situation'*. At this point, he returned back to his holiday home, where his ex-partner was waiting. George was unable to fully recollect the events of that night but recalls that his partner attacked him with a knife.

'I think he bent me onto the bed and kept the knife on my throat and said that he was going to kill me and that I had destroyed his life and I had done all these horrible things to him'.

'I had no choice about what was happening to me, I was trapped, he was overpowering me. He had a non-logical way of using the knife to try and control me to keep me to the

ground and saying that if I moved, he was going to stab me and I had to listen to him shouting at me and punching me.'

George's distorted memories and hesitance were featured when he stated *'I think he bent me onto the bed'*. Due to being overwhelmed by fear and helplessness, he likely dissociated from the traumatising memories at the time (Van Der Kolk, 1998). His portrayal of entrapment that seemingly ensued echoed a hostage situation, without parole and reprieve (Ludwig-Barron et al., 2015). Comparisons can be made to Johnson's (2006) typology of 'intimate terrorism' given his lack of agency, as control was unilaterally imposed by force from his ex-partner: *'using the knife to try and control me'*. He continued to underline the depth of his abuse, by revealing that his partner forcibly held him on a bed with a knife to his throat. He equates this to sexual assault:

'I was like oh Christ he has got the knife again and he is going to threaten to kill me and hit me with it and do whatever he wants and just use me as some bag. And kind of in a way rape me. It was awful'.

In the next sentence, he elaborated on this metaphor: *'It wasn't a sexual penetration, but I felt like it was an emotional penetration'*. This expression highlighted how psychological acts of abuse were perceived as most harmful (Coker et al., 2000). George appeared to disassociate from his own actions. Instead, he focused on what his partner was doing, connecting his partner's attack to his traumatic past: *'he was just doing what other people did to him, making him powerless in that situation'*. His portrayal of the 'fixer' continued to permeate his narrative.

'Even though it wasn't as severe as the situation where I was locked in the room, it was much worse for me because I was completely powerless at that time. Like I said no one could help me, I couldn't even scream or do anything, he could kill me right there and no one was there. And that was a bit insane'.

The remoteness of the location deepened George's sense of powerlessness. This corresponded to how abusers leveraged a victim's social isolation to exercise control (Johnson, 2008). The undertones of homicide, as reiterated by George: *'he could kill me right there'* highlight his

internal recognition of the lethality of his situation. The next day, George's partner '*eventually obviously calmed down*'. This represented yet another turning point in the relationship as George ended his holiday early and immediately cut all ties with his ex-partner. He stated: '*I said to him, that is it, he has to leave*' suggesting a greater level of agency in his words compared to previously.

The final phase in George's story is marked by a journey of recovery, but also one of grief. George reflected on the ways he continued to reminisce about his former partner: '*but I think about him, unfortunately, my ex, on a daily basis, more than once a day even though he provided me with the worst years of my life and the worst memories that will always keep with me*'. His expression illuminated the lingering impact for survivors to recuperate from a loss of love, when intermingled with the paradoxical experiences of abuse (Dutton and Painter, 1993).

Donovan and Hester (2015) argue that 'practices of love' can confound the victim, making the process of letting go of the abusive partner more difficult. This may also be conceptualised as 'trauma bonding' in which George formed a strong attachment towards his ex-partner driven not only by turmoil but also by loyalty and care (Carnes, 1997).

After one year of separation, George initiated contact with his former boyfriend: '*I still try to contact him and find out if he is still doing okay and he wasn't sleeping on the streets and trying to not feel too guilty about walking away from the situation*'. George was unaware of the visible contradiction embedded here, as even now, one year later, he did not '*walk away from the situation*'. His expressions were a testament to his portrayal as the 'fixer' and the presence of trauma bonding (Carnes, 1997). In contrast, his ex-partner went on to meet someone new: '*strangely he met a person*'. George construed this as a '*turning point*' where his former boyfriend '*grabbed onto the next individual*'. Although George appeared cynical, there was also sadness to his words. This symbolised a more indelible loss to him.

Despite his separation, George continued to assist his former partner financially. He received an email in the beginning of 2021, the year of his interview: *'he owed them thousands and thousands, and I said okay, and I just paid the money and I thought, you know, I will just help him in one small way and be on my way. And then nothing, not a word afterwards'*. George's support and care persisted even after the termination of their relationship, highlighting the constraints of 'relationship rules' in fully capturing his behaviour (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

As the 'fixer', George portrayed himself as taking the moral ground by choosing to come to the financial aid of his former partner. This portrayal continues to be shaped by discourses of masculinity, particularly evident in displays of autonomy and breadwinning (Connell, 2005; Walby, 1989). This paradoxically deflected away from how he was abused (Goffman, 1990). George defended his choice to pay his ex-partner the money: *'money is very little to me'*. This minimisation and his apparent wealth served to shield him from recognising his choices and experiences as financial exploitation.

In the next line, George gave a glimpse into his happier moments. It is clear these memories revolve around George not needing to 'fix' but being loved and supported by his partner. These displays of love were entwined with trauma, and served to deepen his attachment (Carnes, 1997; Donovan and Hester, 2015).

'I kind of miss the, in the mornings he would get up quite early and go out and buy groceries, go walk the dog, he would wash my car, he would go to Crispy Cream and buy me some doughnuts for my morning coffee. By the time I woke up everything would be perfect'.

As George brought his story to a close, he conveyed a sense of solace beyond his abuse. He describes the next chapter of his life, his move to Ireland. He attends university here and plans to return to his college assignments after the interview. While living in Ireland, he has immersed himself into online dating and is currently dating a new man, whom he characterised as a

'wonderful person'. The final sentence of George's story was his opportunity to leave a lasting impression. At this point he drew a line under his relationship. His final sentence reflects defiance and a determination to no longer be abused:

'I wish him the best; I do not wish him any ill will but I do think he is going to kill someone one day unfortunately. But that is not going to be me.'

4.2.1 Particularities of George's Case

The nature of George's abuse was exceptionally severe involving physical, financial, psychological violence and technology related abuse. George's narrative descriptions were reminiscent of scenes narrated by victims of war crimes. His partner's use of unilateral abuse resonates with intimate terrorism described within Johnson's typology of abuse (2006) usually associated with heterosexual female victims.

George's narrative illustrates Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) (see section 2.2.1), underscored by his positioning within social discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity (see section 2.2.1.2). His struggle to reconcile with his sexual identity, encapsulated in the terms 'weird complex' and 'poison', is entwined with heteronormative discourses. This illustrates the challenges gay men encounter as they navigate their lives, burdened by societal expectations and gender norms that normalise heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). Furthermore, George positioned himself as the 'fixer' or the financial breadwinner and rescuer of his younger boyfriend. This exemplified an assertive and stoic portrayal, contrasting with depictions of victimhood and vulnerability. It served as an effective narrative resource for George to articulate his experiences of abuse while aligning himself with social discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Walby, 1989).

George's articulation of his abusive experiences illustrates the manifestation of 'relationship rules' (Donovan and Hester, 2015), as discussed in Section 2.2.2.1 of the literature review. The interdependence of these rules is demonstrated when George's prioritisation to care for his partner (referred to as rule two) resulted in him gaining control over George's decision-making (referred to as rule one). While relationship rules regularly surfaced in George's narrative, it became evident that his portrayal of these experiences showcased a dominant narrative identity,

conceptualised as the 'fixer'. The assertive language, displays of control, and problem-solving featured within the fixer identity was rooted in social constructions of masculinity (Connell, 2005).

There was a striking contrast between the severity of George's abuse and how he chose to narrate these incidents. George used dramatised language, usually in the form of one-line remarks. This resulted in a noticeable contrast between the raw reality of his abuse and the clear minimisation in his narrative. The lapses in George's memory concerning his victimisation were attributed to his dissociation from the trauma he endured (Van Der Kolk, 1998).

In a tragic irony, George's formative years revolve around his efforts to break free from his abusive father, such as his pursuit of higher education, entry into the gay dating scene, and setting up his own business. However, the turning points in his biographical trajectory illustrate periods when George was unable to break free, but held captive and abused by his abusive boyfriend. The prolonged captivity and assault George endured in his holiday home served as a significant turning point at which he realised that his life was in imminent jeopardy.

Despite initiating the breakup, George found it difficult to let go of his responsibility to improve his younger partner's life. His enduring attachment to him was likely explained by trauma bonding (Carnes, 1997). This can be interpreted as practices of love, where victims are driven by notions of care, duty and affection for their abusive partner (Donovan and Hester, 2015). In the end, the embedding of his boyfriend as a key carrier in his narrative led to the final gestalt of his life story: *'I was just a tool for him to manage'*.

4.3 Sam's Story

'It was very lonely, I felt trapped, and I could see loads of windows but no doors'

Sam was twenty-eight but did not look it. His bright eyes matched his youthful exuberance. In spite of the encouragement he received from his friends, he was unsure if his experiences '*wholly qualifies as 'domestic abuse'*'. I chatted to him before our interview to clarify the inclusion criteria for the study and by the end of the phone call, he agreed to talk with me. The next time I talked to Sam was virtually over Zoom. He began to talk as I pressed my recording equipment; his voice flowed swiftly, fused with descriptions and musical intonations. Sam's story is one of self-discovery and abuse. These are woven together into a seamless web.

Sam was born in the early 90s; when homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland (Higgins et al., 2016). The fruits of this legislative change is reflected in how he was openly gay to his family and peers: '*I think it was probably fairly clear I wasn't straight very early on so I don't think it was a massive shock to anybody's system'*'. Sam orientated his life story at the beginning of his relationship when he was 17. There is a sense that he came to the interview focused on conveying his experiences of abuse and was determined to stay on topic. '*I just don't want to give you a heap of information'* In turn, he sidestepped memories of his childhood, showing discomfort in revealing personal details.

Sam met his boyfriend through a mutual friend: '*I thought he was really cool, wonderful, funny'*. At the time, his new partner had already begun university. Sam explains: '*So I was with this guy for about two years'*. He begins by dividing this relationship into two, as it began long-distance given that a two-hour drive geographically separated them. As Sam was still in secondary school, he would '*only see him maybe every now and then*' or '*speak on the phone*'. His relationship began on a positive note: '*it was all wonderful*' '*You know, there was no alarm*

bells at any stage'. Sam presented himself as initially deceived by the notion that everything seemed *'wonderful'* foreshadowing that his reality was likely a stark contrast (Goffman, 1990).

Sam stated that cracks began to form in his relationship just after his eighteenth birthday party. Initially he had trouble recalling this memory: *'I think I had buried this'*. He places himself amidst the discourses of heteronormativity, revealing how his boyfriend became unaccepting of their gay relationship: *'he went, 'no we are not gay, we just like boys, there is a difference'*.

Sam's partner continued to display internalised homophobic behaviour: *'he would pass comment on how other queer people would dress and say, 'I would never wear that'*. This highlights the influence of masculine discourses, revealing how gay men were *'subordinated'* for appearing feminine (Connell, 2003). Sam felt that his partner's internalised homophobia foreshadowed: *'why he might have been so aggressive'*. This emerged as one of the few times he embedded his partner into his story.

'I feel very sorry for him and I feel very sorry for the stage he was at to actually think that because that shows such a clear discomfort in your own life to have that sort of statement, to say that you are not gay, you just like boys.'

Sam's relationship weaved from distant to intensely close. He *'ended up going to college in the same place he was going to college'*. In doing so, he entwined a significant life event with his partner. Sam stated that *'we didn't discuss living together or anything like that because I was only 19 at the time'*. In the next sentence he deviated back to the *'wonderful'* moments when he got to know his boyfriend: *'for the first week or two it was really nice to be able to spend loads of time with someone you loved who you hadn't seen properly ever really.'* The additional detail of dates drew us to a point in time when the abuse was not visible. The skilful control of his storytelling is dedicated to setting the scene of his abuse.

Sam relocated from a small rural town to the city. However, this move left him isolated from his family and friends at home. At this particular juncture, Sam shaped his narrative around

specific dates and observations. To signify his abuse materialising, he documented a sudden change in his boyfriend's demeanour. This alluded to the *'alarm bells'* mentioned earlier and likely coincided with an escalation of tension and pressure between the couple (Walker, 1979): *'I suppose for the September when college started everything was fine and then towards the October/November/December part I noticed his behaviour towards me changed'*. Sam narrated these abusive events with a generalised incident narrative explaining a typical trend towards his partner's controlling behaviours:

'I noticed he was becoming more controlling over how I was spending my time and who I was spending my time with, and he would have lots of comments about the people I would have around me.'

Sam revealed that his boyfriend became jealous and controlling over his friendship with other gay men. He explained how he was prevented from communicating with a college friend over social media.

'he would flat out refuse, like did not allow me to be friends with at all. He made me remove him on Snapchat and delete his number and was like, 'he is bad news, I am telling you'. And I was like, 'I don't know, he seems really sweet'. And he was like, 'no he is bad news, I can tell, delete him on Snapchat there'. And then watched me do it'.

Although these suggestions appear helpful: *'he is bad news'*, Sam's boyfriend exercised subtle yet effective coercive control which ensured his compliance: *"and then watched me do it"* (Stark, 2007). Sam chronicled a period where he prioritised his boyfriend over his new friendships in university. As the fixer, his portrayal underscores a sense of autonomy and problem-solving: *'I did put him first in that situation... I suppose I felt that was my fault at the time, I just wanted everyone to get along and be friendly'*. These qualities are associated with discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2005).

However, Sam begins to divulge evident instances of the covert control tactics employed by his boyfriend. The choice to spend time together was originally phrased by his partner as optional: *'I don't mind what you do'*, yet over time it became enforced: *'I had to spend every single*

evening with him'. This was conceptualised as the first relationship rule in which Sam's partner made all the key decisions within his relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

Sam segues to the natural projection for his two year relationship. He described how his partner engaged in 'silent treatment'. He interprets that his partner withdrew communication and affection: *'any evening I had decided [to not see his partner]. He would say, 'that is fine no problem'. But then he would ignore me until the following day, if not two or three days, he would just completely ice me out'*. This would last until Sam complied with his demands: *'I would do everything I could to appease that for him'*. This proved to be covert and effective, as Sam delivered the following sentence with cutting self-deprecation: *'oh no I have hurt this person or I did this wrong, oh no'*.

Sam's practices of love hindered him from recognizing his abuse. It appeared that his affection was manipulated by his boyfriend, evoking guilt and blame in return (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Sam categorised this as going down a *'shame spiral'*. This translated into Sam empathising and attempting to 'fix' his partner: *'make him feel better'*. At this point, Sam portrayed his experiences of social isolation, as he felt no longer free to leave his partner's home.

'So, it wasn't a case where he kind of locked me in his house and wouldn't let me leave but any time I would even begin to form the word no in my mouth it was shot down immediately. And at the time it felt like we both decided I was spending the night in his house but on reflection it was not, that was not the case.'

Evidently, the fear and ramifications of his partner's silent treatment had influenced Sam's decision making: *'I was staying in the house with him because I was afraid of what would happen if I didn't and how he would react if I didn't'*. Sam described such coercive control translated to a feeling of entrapment or what Stark (2007) refers to as the 'invisible cage'. His sudden realisation formed the gestalt that painted a vivid picture of his life story: *'It was very lonely, I felt trapped, and I could see loads of windows but no doors'*.

Sam disclosed that he struggled with bulimia as a teenager, but emphasised this was a separate issue to his relationship: *'I count that as a completely separate issue to my relationship with him, I had that long before I met him'*. It is clear that he interpreted his abuse to occur in a vacuum, but this was contradicted when he recognised that his eating disorder became ensnared with his abuse.

'This is mainly what would happen when I would go into a shame spiral with him, bulimia would rear its head again and that made it harder for me to make clear judgements and better choices.'

Sam's *'shame spiral'* referred to his inability to control negative thoughts that arose from his eating disorder and his experiences of abuse. This was a term he was likely familiar with through therapy. His words posed something of a paradox, as Sam argued that his eating disorder was a way for him to *'take control'* but ultimately left him more vulnerable. His emphasis on control may be a nod to discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Sam revealed how his plight with bulimia became interwoven with psychological abuse. This is consistent with those with ongoing mental health issues being more susceptible to violence (Watson and Parsons, 2005).

'He would cop on very quickly if I was overeating or undereating or something and just tell me that I had severe self-esteem issues and that I would really want to go and talk to someone about that and there was something clearly not right with me'.

Sam's abuse was not immediately apparent. He portrayed his partner as worried *'I would really want to go and talk to someone'*. While it was possible to interpret this as helping or caring, Sam recognized that his life struggles were weaponized by his partner: *'But in the same breath could turn around and say, 'there is something seriously wrong with you if you are doing this'*. This was underscored by how abusers used intimate knowledge of the victim to enact control and abuse, often drawing on perceived negative attributes (Stark, 2007). Sam stresses the emotional impact, stating that this partner's words were *'really, really hurtful and it made it a lot worse in the long run'*. The subtlety of these experiences explained why he previously quelled these

experiences as a *'separate issue'* to his abuse. In the next sentence, Sam more confidently acknowledged this was *'mental abuse'*.

'Like the only time I ever felt, retrospectively even, the only time I ever thought was that mental abuse when he would comment on my eating habits and tell me there was something wrong with me. That was the only kind of time I have ever really felt that he mentally abused me.'

Over the course of his biographical trajectory, Sam's dual struggle with IPV and bulimia rendered him into a *'biographical chasm'* or the lowest point in his life story (Chamberlayne, 2004). He expresses his fragility: *'broken'* and paradoxically deems this as a reason to remain in his relationship.

'I remember thinking that he had seen me at my lowest point and I remember thinking that he had brought me down to my lowest point and that if he saw how broken I was everyone else could see how broken I was and nobody else could ever think of being as close to me as he was.'

Sam's portrayal of himself changed. He recognised that he no longer controlled aspects of his life as his interests in reading, television and music were pieces of himself that were slowly whittled away by his partner's control: *'I listen to music every single day of the week for hours and I stopped doing all of that'* (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). His narrative identity began to morph into a version of his partner *'I spent all my time with him, to try and keep him happy and I completely lost my sense of self then'*. As Sam related his victimisation through compliance, self-loss and sacrifice, this is consistent with identity work for abuse victims (Leisenring, 2006; Loseke, 2003).

Sam finished his first semester at university in December 2012 and returned home for three weeks. He sought advice from some friends which marked the first time his private experiences of controlling behaviours were publicly disclosed:

'I remember I had kind of said to a few friends I have at home what was happening between himself and me in regard to how I was spending my time and all my friends were like that is not right you should be able to do whatever you want. You have to make

time for him of course but you have to make time for your own friends and your own life. And I was like that is a fair point'.

By January 2013, Sam returned to university with the intention of confronting his partner. Despite wanting things to be different, *'things took a swan dive personally for both of us'*. In response to his earlier advice, he told his partner he wanted to spend more time with friends: *'I was like some things need to change, I don't mind spending a few nights a week with you or whatever, but I do actually want to spend other times with my friends'*. Sam chronicled more subtle forms of manipulation. While his partner appeared cooperative on the surface about Sam seeing his friends: *'I am not stopping you'* his words elicited sympathy and guilt: *'okay so you are just going to come over to leave me on my own for the night'*. This led to Sam complying to his partner by *'staying with him for the night'*. This scene captured how survivors were empathetically inclined to help their 'fragile-minded' abusers, and how such practices of love are exploited. This marks the second rule in Sam's relationship, as he portrays himself as accountable for the care and well-being of his abusive boyfriend (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

The intensification of abuse marked the second stage of Sam's narrative. Five months after the abuse began, he recounted an incident in which his partner assaulted him the night he stayed over. This emerged as a pivotal turning point in his story.

'It was after we had dinner that evening, we were kind of washing the dishes and I kind of stepped outside the back of his house for a cigarette and he was like, 'are you going to dry the dishes?' And I said, *'yeah, I am just having a smoke first and I will dry the dishes for you then'*. And then he came outside and said, *'look there are loads of dishes, will you just dry them?'* And I was like, *'there are two plates and a pot, I will get to it in a second'*. And then he struck me to my face, and I was really taken aback and I was like, *'what the hell was that about?'* And he was like, *'I was only messing'*. And I didn't know what possessed me at the time to minimise it immediately, but I went, *'oh it wasn't even sore anyway, I get you, very funny'*. It is a big joke we are all in on. He looked at me really funny and he was like, *'that didn't hurt?'* And I was like, *'no it didn't'*. And then he hit me far harder and said, *'you won't forget that one'*. And I was like, *'no I won't.'*

Sam's experiences of unprovoked physical violence encapsulated the 'explosive stage' of the cycle of abuse (Walker, 1979). His perception of the incident was immediately altered by his

partner, who masterfully redefined and minimised his assault (Hennessy, 2012): 'he was like, 'I was only messing'. In this instance, Sam's emotional response and language mirrored his partner's: 'I went, 'oh it wasn't even sore anyway, I get you, very funny'. The demonstrations of composure and strength by both men mirror discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2005). Sam's pledge to never forget his boyfriend's attack foreshadowed a new level of compliance:

'What was going through my mind at the time was you had better just do what he says now for the rest of the evening, whatever he suggests that you do, just do because this could happen again. Don't let this happen again, this is your fault it happened. You have put yourself into this position. I took on every single ounce of the blame that was going. Any blame going around I took on at that time. I didn't even think, in my head I didn't blame him even slightly'.

He recounts the aftermath of his assault. Eventually, Sam took shelter in the bathroom and assessed the damage that was done.

'And then my face was like burning, I was so embarrassed but also, I was terrified because I had never felt unsafe around him before. And I went to the bathroom, and I was just splashing water across my face, and I noticed my nose was a teeny bit bleeding and I was like that is not right, no, this is not good.'

At that moment, Sam's natural reaction was to pretend his assault had never happened. Retrospectively some years later, he emphasised the significance of this event. It became clear that Sam archived this as a reference point for his abuse and evidence to validate his story in the future.

'I sat down on the toilet seat, and I went, no, no, not me, this isn't happening to me. This can't be happening to me, no. So at the time I was like let's pretend to yourself that this didn't happen. And it actually took a lot of years for me to actually say to anyone, you know, when this happened this was some of the aftermath of it. It took a long time for me to admit it out loud, but it took two to three years afterwards for me to even be able to admit it to myself to be like, that did happen, you didn't make that up. You didn't dream it up that it actually happened. You have that moment with yourself in the bathroom when you are like, oh no.'

Sam slumped into his chair and leaned forward with his eyes gazing intently. His emotional and tonal shifts conveyed that physical abuse had intensified in his relationship. No longer speaking retrospectively, Sam reflected on the emotional impact of these experiences.

'Trepidation and fear, mostly trepidation, because the violent streak was very rare but how erratic his moods could be towards me was the trepidation, it was like any teeny tiny thing could set him off and he would be in a bad mood for the day with me. And then when he was in a bad mood, I would be then fearful that he would hit me so I would try my best to keep him in a good mood.'

Sam syphoned his abuse into generalised descriptions: *'there was a few other instances of that where something really minor we would disagree on and he would hit me and immediately I would minimise it completely, oh he didn't mean it, he was having a bad day'*. Having prefaced the physical violence, he segues into moments of sexual intimacy with his boyfriend. Fear, abuse and intimacy were understandably incompatible. This led him to disclose his first account of sexual violence.

'And it only really got serious in my head when he, okay I don't know how to word this right, once I began to be afraid of my own safety with him, I wasn't really in the mood to engage in intercourse anymore and he took that very personally. And then there were situations where I was pressured into having intimate relations with him and like it was consensual at the time, I didn't speak up, it wasn't consensual, but I did give consent verbally for fear of what would happen if I were to actually put my foot down and say no.'

Sam articulated the risky space of navigating sexual intimacy in his abusive relationship. Although he initially stated that *'it was consensual at the time'*, he immediately contradicted this by stating: *'I didn't speak up, it wasn't consensual, but I did give consent verbally for fear of what would happen if I were to actually put my foot down and say no.'* His experiences of sexual coercion aligned to how gay men can be pressured into engaging in unwanted sexual intercourse (Braun et al., 2009).

'I would stay in his bed all night but I wouldn't sleep. I used to literally lie like this and I would have his arm around me and I remember he would put it over and my body would go rigid'

Sam's expression of his muscles tensing up: *'rigid'* was a reflection of his turmoil and difficulty with sleeping next to his partner, but he did not elaborate on why. The subject lingers in the air and is only addressed at a later stage when he draws on a new memory, stating that: *'not sleeping*

at night will make a lot more sense in a second'. Sam described a *'few nights'* when he awoke to find that his boyfriend *'would have cut himself in the bed'*.

Although Sam implied it was traumatic, he hesitated to categorise this as abuse: *'I don't even know if this counts as violence because he didn't hit me'*. In spite of this, he stressed the emotional impact of witnessing his partner's self-inflicted injuries:

'I woke up and I was absolutely terrified, and I didn't know what to do.... That is what made me fearful of sleeping... for me it felt very aggressive, and I know it wasn't something directly aimed at me, and I know those were his own issues that he was going through at the time but I felt very unsafe in the environment at that time.'

Arguably, Sam's trouble sleeping and fear compounded his abuse. This led to him recounting a particular incident in late January when he discovered his partner's self-inflicted injuries. His narration became fused with sensory and emotive details:

'he'd cut himself a lot and I woke up and I was absolutely terrified, and I didn't know what to do. It was to the point where there wasn't a lot of blood on me but there was some of his blood down my leg and along my midriff here to my left.'

Sam portrayed his powerlessness in the situation and the confusion that came with it. He described this as a *'blur'*. His argumentation is narrowly focused on his perspective, suggesting that even now he is unable to make sense of his partner's behaviour.

'I woke up at about 7:00 and I remember thinking something is not right. You know when you wake up and you are awake straight away like you never slept, it was like that. I just looked down and I said, oh no, oh no, oh no. And I felt a bit sick and I felt very weak then once I had seen the blood because I don't do well looking at blood anyway and I hopped in the shower. I didn't wash myself, I just literally rinsed everything I could off me.'

That morning, Sam returned back to his own home. Like other abusive events in his two year relationship, it was minimised and left unresolved.

'And then texted me later that day and said, 'do you want to come over for dinner?' As if nothing had happened.'

Sam recalled a particular incident when the couple were on a night out. His partner became unhappy and impatient that he was talking to other friends: *'he was like, 'are you done? I am waiting'.* Sam's biographical action scheme revolved around the vibrant nightlife, as his partner was positioned backstage in his story (Riemann and Schutze 1991). At this point, he stepped outside the pub to have a cigarette. He was then publicly accosted by his partner.

'He met me outside and like I am not a tall person, I am 5' 8" and he was about 6' 1" and he kind of leered over me and was like, 'never leave me waiting again, all right?' And he was very intense with his communication.... For some reason in my head I was like if it happens at home it is much better but if it happens in public that is the big no no. And I remember I was like, 'I was just talking to someone blah, blah, blah'. And he grabbed me by my shirt collar and was like, 'I told you never leave me waiting again, if you are going to be 20 minutes be 20 minutes, don't be 30, all right?' And I was like, 'okay fine.'

Sam appeared poised while narrating the emotional aspects of his story. This was in stark contrast to the intensity and suspense that mounts and ebbs throughout most of his story. His stoic portrayal appeared distinctively masculine (Connell, 2005). The additional details of his partner's stature: *'he was about 6' 1" 'he kind of leered over me'* suggests he relived this moment. While he initially described being grabbed by his partner, he contradicts this later in the interview with a new detail: *'minor thing of him giving me a small smack'*. The phrase *'minor thing'* and *'small smack'* reflects his tendency to minimise his abuse.

At this point, he described how the bouncer came to his aid: *'but one of the bouncers came over and was like, 'yo buddy, what is going on here? behave yourself or you are out on your ass'.* Sam positions himself in social discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2005). He appears more assertive and in control, by removing himself from the situation: *'I am not being treated like that so I kind of left the pub'*. After Sam left the bar, he received a series of text messages from his partner:

'I started getting the texts and it was, 'I hope you are happy, I am going home to kill myself, I hope you got what you wanted, I hope this is what you wanted, have a great

life'. And then the last one was, 'I will always love you'. And at the time I felt angry and deathly afraid he would do something to seriously harm himself.'

The messages deepened Sam's need to comply with his partner, who was presented as 'fragile minded' and a danger to himself (Donovan and Hester, 2015). At this point in telling his story, Sam began to look down and fidget in his chair, a sign of his turmoil and inner conflict. He interpreted himself as responsible for his partner's life, while at the same time being attuned to how his boyfriend's suicidal threats served to abuse and manipulate him:

'All I can say is it is a very strange feeling that you are responsible for someone else's personal safety but also while you are in their company being afraid for your own personal safety. It is a huge catch-22. It was like, I was like, okay I stay with him and I worry about myself constantly and I am going to sink into a further low point or I can break up with him and be a bit better for myself but be worried constantly that he is going to harm himself irreparably. It was an enormous burden on my mind and it ate away at me for weeks'

Sam's perception of his abuse shifted to managing the 'emotional temperature' of the relationship and his partner's wellbeing (Hennessy, 2012). In the next lines, he positions his love for his partner to support his decision to stay in his abusive relationship:

'at the time I had half convinced myself I loved him and half convinced myself I didn't love him. Because it had been so long since I had seen the person I had fallen in love with, I was more so in love with the memory of that than the person I saw day to day. There was no resemblance in how he carried himself.'

Sam's reflection demonstrates how love plays a crucial role in abusive relationships. His love, or the recollection thereof, for his partner solidifies his commitment to his volatile relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

As Sam reflected on his two year relationship, he portrayed the absence of happiness in his life. He evaluated his partner's suicidal threats by splitting him into two beings. The first concerned the plight of the man he fell in love with: *'I was really sad for the person I thought I knew who said they were going to end their life'*. This was juxtaposed with the character who entrapped

and abused him: *'I was really angry that the person he had become was literally just doing this to get back at me because I didn't do what he wanted'.*

Sam interpreted his partner's coercive suicide messages as the final straw. This epiphany marked a turning point in which he overcame his guilt and relinquished his responsibility to 'fix' his partner.

'I had said to myself I am not doing this now, this is not my job, I should not have to do this, this is not my fault. I literally for once, and this is what I said to myself, I remember as clear as day, for once I didn't do this, this wasn't my doing.'

Soon after this, Sam broke up with his partner through a text message. The use of a first-person singular *'I broke up with him'* expressed a beginning of his expression of self-agency. However, after one week, his ex-partner began to pursue him: *'he rang me a load of times in a row'* and convinced Sam to meet up: *'can I just meet you; I just want to see you, I just want to apologise'*. Sam recognised the danger of this meeting. This is reinforced by the increased risk victims face during the separation period (Stark and Hester, 2019). He solicited advice from a friend prior to seeing his ex-partner in person. He presents a summary of this advice:

'So, I told one of my good friends that this was going to happen and she said, 'meet him in a public place'. Because I had told her what was going on and she was like, 'get out, do not go back'. And I was like, 'okay I promise I won't'. She said, 'where are you meeting him and at what time?' I said, 'here and at this time'. And she said, 'all right that is a busy time and it is a busy spot you are safe, make sure you go in alone and you come out alone, don't leave with him'. And I said, 'okay, I promise I won't.'

Soon after Sam met his ex-partner at a local café. He deviated his story immediately to the moment he reconciled with his ex-partner. His words exuded regret and guilt. Sam's portrayal as powerless: *'someone else took control'* was a deliberate attempt to distance himself from his own actions (Goffman, 1990).

'We were having coffee for about 20 minutes and I don't know how to this day I ended up saying, 'yeah I definitely think you are right we should get back together'. I do not know. It was like someone else took control for 20 minutes. I couldn't tell you how it happened'

Sam's interpretation that *'someone else'* took control implied absolution for his actions, which seemingly ignored his friend's advice. He recalls that his partner persuaded him to reconcile.

'Well, there was the promise, it was like let's get back together and I was like, I don't think that is wise. But by the end of the conversation, we had both agreed that that was the best decision for us and he had promised me that it was going to be so great and we are a really great team together and don't we have loads of fun. He just fed me absolute horse shit for 20 minutes and I swallowed every drop. For the love of God'

Sam narrated his partner's apology through a lens of scepticism. His stream of colourful language and metaphors: *'He just fed me absolute horse shit'* *'For the love of God'* emphasised his frustration. This was both directed at his situation and himself. The couple exited the café but ran into Sam's friend. It became clear that his friend was there to check in on him. Sam was unprepared for this and dismissed it as *'strange'*.

'The friend who I told I was meeting him at this time was sitting at a table and said, 'oh hi, how are you, I didn't know you were going to be here today'. And I was like, 'what are you doing here?' And she was like, 'oh I am just getting through my college notes, sick of being at home. Are you two going somewhere together? What is going on here?' And he put his arm around me and said, 'yeah we decided to give things another go, haven't we?' And I was like, 'yeah we are just going to see how it goes'. And then he tightened, he had his arm around my shoulders and he kind of tightened his grip around my shoulder where his hand was and said, 'aren't we giving it another go?' And I was like, 'yeah we are'.'

Sam's forensic description of his partner's movements: *'he kind of tightened his grip around my shoulder where his hand was'* conjured a vivid scene of how he was subtly coerced into reigniting his relationship. On the way home, his partner remarked that Sam's friends *'don't know me as well as you know me'*. Sam seemed unaware that this strongly implied that only he could understand and by extension be responsible for his partner. At this point, Sam expressed his remorse. He directs this to his own actions. He recognised that this set a trajectory for abuse to continue.

'And before I had even got back to his house that evening, I was like how in the name of God have you done this again? Knowing what is going to happen and what is going to meet you, you have literally put yourself in a dangerous position yet again.'

For the next period of time, Sam's relationship remained unstable. He documented several (unsuccessful) attempts to leave his boyfriend. He recalled that one of these breakups was prompted by a phone call from his boyfriend's mother who said *'that he was going to kill himself if he didn't get back together with me'*. The absence of a first-person singular or assertive language reflected how Sam went along with the reconciliation and the lengths his partner was willing to go: *'And by the end of that conversation I was back together with him again'*. The mother's intrusion constituted second wave abuse, demonstrating how others assisted the abuser by participating in abusive behaviour (Corbally, 2011).

At this point, Sam was presented with an ultimatum to choose his boyfriend or his friends: *'my friend sat me down and said, 'you are going to lose your friends if you choose him, your friends cannot watch you continuously go back to someone who is treating you like this'*. Sam interpreted this ultimatum by viewing his friends as unreasonable and judgmental of his plight: *'in my head at that time I was like that is so unfair, why are they so mean?'*. However, his next reflection came with hindsight and wisdom. This showcased his personal growth:

'But with the maturity and clarity that I have now they were right to say something like that because even when you love someone there comes a point where you know if they are going down a path you can't follow you have to step away for your own sake and for your own mental health.'

Sam's wisdom was retrospective, as he stated that he *'didn't get that at the time'* and was not ready to *'step away for your own sake'* from his partner. However, he portrayed his friends as propelling forces towards his decision to even consider ending his relationship. Their message *'to ask for help'* continued to linger in his story, underscoring the importance of friends to intervene and support victims.

'What she said to me, and I will never forget it, she said, 'it is always okay to ask for help and it is always okay to bounce something off someone you can trust and say this is going on, is it okay or am I overreacting. Never ever be afraid to ask someone you trust for help in any situation, it is the strongest thing anyone can do'. And I have always carried that with me since.'

Sam completed his last semester of university and returned to his hometown to secure work in a local restaurant. Here, he opened up to his work colleague. Although Sam did not realise it, he had asked for help. This led to a permanent turning point in his life story. From memory, he recited this conversation:

'I remember I was just sitting down in the restaurant where I was working and I was talking to one of the girls and she asked how he [partner's name] was. And I was like, 'you know what, I think I am actually done, I think I might break up with him'. And she was like, 'why?' And I was like, 'I am just not really feeling it'. Because I didn't want to get into a whole rigmarole with this person I worked with, but the validation I got just from a professional colleague going if you are not happy break up with him, that is more than enough reason to, you don't need reasons. And in my head I was like I have about 50 reasons to break up with him ... So, I got home that evening and I rang him on the phone.'

While seemingly a superficial encounter with a work colleague, this 'validation' prompted him to break up with his partner. Given his previous attempts, Sam knew to do this over the phone as opposed to face to face, so that his boyfriend would not sway (or coerce) him again: *'I rang him on the phone, because he was about a 4-5 hour drive away and he had no car so there was no way he could arrive on my doorstep before the morning is done anyway'*. At this point, he shared the particular incident of depicting the breakup of his two-year relationship:

'So, I rang him when I got home and I said, 'hi I need to talk to you'. And he said, 'oh are you about to dump me?' And I said, 'yeah I am, you have called my bluff, that is what is going to happen'. And then he went, 'oh right okay, I think I understand'. And I said, 'all right, okay cool'. And then he said some very hurtful nasty things which there is no need to repeat now and said, 'have a nice fucking life', and hung up the phone. And that was the last time I spoke to him for many, many years.'

There was surprisingly no emotion to be read on Sam's expression at this time. Whilst he intentionally censored his words, he then chose to share the rest of the conversation.

'And he said, 'just let me tell you a few things first'. And I said, 'okay'. And then he said, 'I hope you have a nice fucking life asshole. I hope you know that nobody is ever going to love a sexually frigid little bastard like you'. And then hung up the phone'

That evening, his ex-partner posted abusive content online: *'then for the rest of the evening proceeded to put up pictures on Facebook of him burning pictures of me'*. Sam's intimate relationship was made available to the public eye. This highlights the prevalence of online and

technology-based abuse which invites further risk and complications for victims (Brown et al., 2018). In response, Sam blocked his ex-boyfriend online: *'I have already blocked him'* and acknowledged that he was no longer responsible for his partner: *'I cannot be in this relationship to keep him alive'* (Donovan and Hester, 2015). As Sam approached the end of his twenties, one door closed and another opened. The next chapter marked his journey to recovery.

Sam was determined to do things differently in his second year of university highlighting how his first year served as a roadmap of what not to do. He returned to campus to focus on his original biographical action scheme of obtaining his college degree (Riemann and Schutze, 2005). Sam embraced student life, as rekindling friendships and socialising became key elements to this experience.

'To preface this story after I had broken up with him properly, forever, finito, I was like okay well you absolutely fucked your first year in college for yourself, didn't you? You made absolutely no friends bar two, great job. So I did my best to try and mend all the relationships that I started building and then did not put any effort into.'

Sam's narrative style was unusual. When coming to the end of his life story, without warning, he recollected that his partner assaulted him months after they had broken up. In a rush, he stumbled out: *'No, actually I say a lie, I met him in a nightclub the following October and he hit me there for no reason'*. Despite broaching this new subject, Sam quickly signalled for his interview to end: *'And that is it, that is my story.'* The abrupt ending only deepened the lingering questions and loose ends that remained.

Sam recalled a particular incident detailing this encounter. The scene harshly flickered from ease to trepidation, as he foreshadowed his assault: *'I enjoyed the night until this moment.'*

'I turned around and he was there, and I just went, 'oh hi'. And he said, 'you didn't think you were going to get away this easy, did you?' And I was like, 'what are you on?' I literally looked at him and said, 'what are you on?' And I said I am here with my friends having a great night, why don't you go back over to your friends and have a great night for yourself I don't think we need to do this here. I don't think there is any need for it.'

'And then I went to move and he grabbed me by the wrist and as I was trying to dart away as quick as I could he grabbed my wrist and I ended up dropping the tequilas and I was like, oh shit. Then I kind of looked up and he let go of me and I was about to move and then I just got a clock right here.'

The unprovoked attack served as a final impression of Sam's ex-partner, who chillingly put control and entrapment into words stating: *'you didn't think you were going to get away this easy, did you?'* Sam signalled for help from the bouncer working in the nightclub but was let down and not believed: *'And the bouncer told me to stop making up lies'*. This encounter made his abuse invisible.

Sam demonstrated his personal growth and recovery. He portrayed himself as determined to stay the course of his new trajectory, one that was far from his abuse. He no longer expressed fear for his ex-partner but quite the opposite: *'I wasn't afraid of him' 'the feeling I had first was anger, then pity'*. Sam articulated the narrative gestalt of his life story. He now recognized that he was a separate person to his partner.

In his closing statements, Sam related his recovery to a metaphor: *'The change mentally I went through between the June and the September is like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, honestly, that is the only way I could describe it'*. This metamorphosis of a caterpillar to a butterfly symbolised how he reclaimed his life after his abuse (Frank, 1995).

Sam's intuitive commentary merged into idle small talk. In doing so, he casually described the latest chapter of his life. At the time of the interview, Sam was twenty-seven and had been married for two years to his new partner. Later they planned to go out for ice cream. The dry, sunny conditions were perfect for this excursion. Although Sam did not intend for this, it became a symbolic epilogue to his story. One of hope and happiness.

'I am actually going out to get ice-cream with my husband in about an hour.'

4.3.1 Particularities of Sam's Case

The covert nature of Sam's abuse stood out in his story. The abuse he endured remained hidden beneath the surface, proving challenging for him to recognise and articulate. This was most apparent when his boyfriend appeared accommodating while subtly exerting a range of coercive control behaviours (Stark, 2007). Sam's narrative descriptions also conformed to the typology of 'intimate terrorism', which included unprovoked physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual coercion (Johnson, 2006). Like Will, Sam's partner used 'silent treatment' by withholding communication and emotional support to ensure Sam's compliance.

Similar to Will and George, Sam's narrative shows resonance with Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) (see section 2.2.1), echoing the impact of discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity (see section 2.2.1.2). This was evident when his abusive partner displayed homophobia not only towards their intimate relationship but also towards gay men he perceived as flamboyant or feminine. Connell's (2003) concept of 'subordinated masculinity' underscores the marginalisation experienced by gay men due to their alignment with femininity, diverging from heteronormative masculine norms. For Sam, it became evident that his partner attempted to counteract this feminization by adopting dominating and abusive behaviour, commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2003).

The documentation of 'relationship rules' and practices of love was evident throughout Sam's narrative, as previously expounded upon in section 2.2.2.1 of the literature review (Donovan and Hester, 2015). In particular, his abusive relationship stipulated that Sam cared for his partner (rule two) who in return, exerted complete control over his decisions and lifestyle (rule one). Sam's sense of duty towards his partner prevented him recognising and disclosing his abuse.

This underscores the coexistence of practices of love, abuse and coercive control in his relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Stark, 2007).

In particular, Sam's narrative style centred on a portrayal of 'fixing' his fragile partner, although his naivety and lack of resources often hindered the extent of the assistance he could provide. Subsequently Sam's portrayal was more subtly masculine than the others. This was best illustrated through his personal sacrifices and efforts to monitor his partner's suicidal ideation. His displays of devotion and rescuing were rooted in social constructions of masculinity (Connell, 2003).

Sam's narration was concise, focused on selective topics, as he strived to prevent his narrative from being diluted by '*a heap of information*'. This resulted in a highly rendered recovery story that encompassed generalised and typical incident narratives (Plummer, 1995; Wengraf, 2008). Sam's retrospective insights he gained from therapy influenced his own narrative style including his choice of language (Kvernbekk, 2013). This was best illustrated when he recognised and classified his tendency to minimise his abuse.

When recounting his life story, it was usual for Sam to skip over his childhood. This tendency emerged from his perception that his abuse was a distinct, separate element from the rest of his life, leading him to avoid sharing personal details. Nevertheless, the pivotal moments that shaped Sam's life revolved around his decision to leave his childhood home and pursue higher education in the city. The turning points that propelled his life trajectory were anchored in the unprovoked physical violence inflicted upon him by his partner. There was a striking contrast between the first turning point, where Sam endured physical abuse and responded with compliance: '*you had better just do what he says now for the rest of the evening*' and the final

incident, where he displayed defiance, boldly declaring, "*I wasn't afraid of him*". This showcases the creative biographical metamorphoses, wherein a life was initially altered by trauma and subsequently reconfigured through the process of recovery (Schutze, 1992).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the interpretive narratives of Will, George, and Sam, which represented the outcome of the nine stages of the BNIM framework (Wengraf, 2006). While the participants' accounts of abuse were highly individualised, they did share common narrative patterns, including generalising, minimising and emphasising to convey abuse in their life stories. The participants struggled to make sense of and articulate their experiences of abuse, which further contributed to their invisibility within society.

This chapter revealed how discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity collectively shaped how gay men accounted for their IPV narratives. This sheds light on the marginalisation that gay men face based on their perceived sense of masculinity and association with femininity. For example, all three participants experienced homophobia targeting their gender and sexual identity. This manifested during their youth and continued in adulthood by their abusive partners. In particular, the impact of heteronormative discourses on the accounts of abuse by gay men underscores the importance of approaching their narratives with individualised attention. Due to heteronormativity, their interpretations of experiences and narrative portrayals may differ in terms of socio-cultural context, dynamics, and challenges related to being a sexual minority, compared to those of heterosexual abuse survivors (Meyer, 2003).

As a key component of the conceptual framework, Donovan and Hester's (2015) 'relationship rules' and 'practices of love' were featured in the biographical accounts of these gay men. The relationship rules encompass elements of coercive control (rule one) and caretaking (rule two), both well documented in IPV literature. The persistent presence of these rules in participants' narratives suggests that the dynamics of abuse and power observed in gay men parallel what has been identified in both LGBTQ and heterosexual relationships. Victims, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation, may perceive adult relationships based on heteronormative socially constructed scripts about adult intimacy. By recognising this, Donovan and Hester's 'relationship rules' and 'practices of love' have proven instrumental in understanding how these gay men made sense of their abuse, underscoring the significance of this theory for future scholars in the field.

A key finding of this chapter highlights how gay men's displays of care and fixing their partners (also classified as relationship rule two) are grounded in their masculinity. Specifically, it is suggested that these displays are better understood through the lens of a 'fixer' identity. Men's assertiveness and productivity, manifested in acts of rescuing, supporting, and managing their partners' lives, accentuate socially accepted masculine identities (Connell, 2005). These hypermasculine displays divert attention away from their experience of abuse, vulnerability, and power loss. The fixer identity is conceptualised here as a means of navigating the conflict between victimhood and social discourses of masculinity. Thus, the men in this study strategically portrayed their abusive partners as victims, positioning themselves as the 'fixers' of their life stories.

This chapter illustrated that men account for their abuse distinctively. For instance, Will's tangent-like storytelling was harmonious to the unrestricted nature of BNIM, proving useful to capture fifty years of his lived life. His account illustrated how men position themselves as stoic

and hide their abuse and vulnerability. Both Will and George referred to their childhood IPV as a precursor to their victimisation as adults, highlighting the importance of meaningful biographical work for victims. The extreme nature of George's experiences was a testament to the lethality of this phenomenon. His narration style stood out as he offered one-liners featuring graphic descriptions of abuse followed by small or minimising remarks. As the youngest participant, Sam's account interweaved a story of abuse and personal transformation. He conveyed direct dialogue between him and his partner, which encapsulated the covert nature of his abuse. Given that Sam is now happily married, his recovery and tenacity were a testament to how gay men can overcome hardship and prosper. The forthcoming chapter will explore the remaining three pending cases of Tom, James and Cole.

Chapter 5 Supplementary Case Accounts

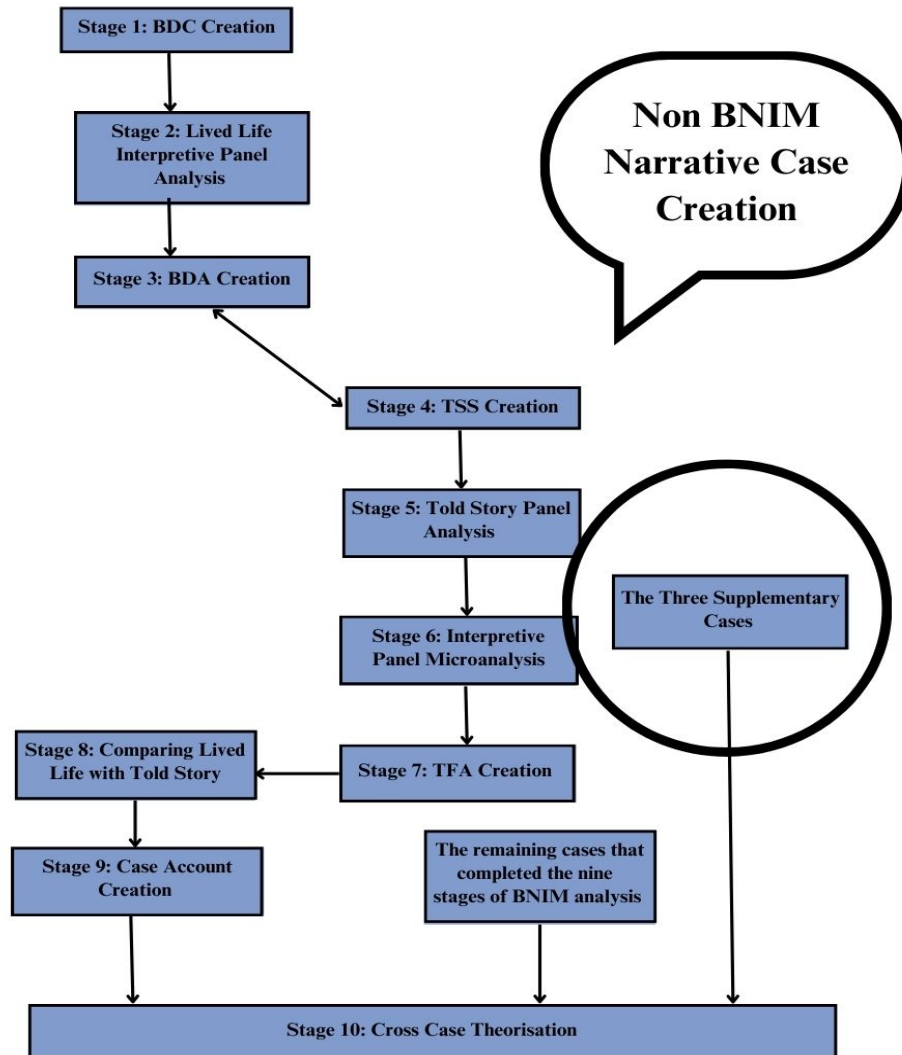


Figure 11: Construction of three supplementary case accounts

This chapter details the three supplementary case accounts. While the three participants were interviewed using the BNIM interview technique, their stories were not subjected to the BNIM analytic procedure but gathered as "field texts" which underwent a more streamlined narrative analysis process (Polkinghorne, 1995; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This chapter focuses on the abuse in men experienced by **Tom, James and Cole**. The culmination of narrative analysis

showcases the distinct characteristics of each participant's case, by which a more comprehensive understanding of IPV (as the bounded system) is obtained (Polkinghorne, 1995).

5.1 Tom's Story

Tom was an openly gay man in his mid-twenties, dedicated to his work as an outreach worker supporting individuals within the LGBTQ community. As a reflection of the progressive times in Ireland, his family were supportive of his sexuality: *'my family are very good about me being out and gay, my older brother is also gay'*. The denouement of Tom's life story centres on his emotionally abusive six-month relationship with his former gay partner (Polkinghorne, 1995): *'I wouldn't know what else to call it other than domestic abuse or intimate partner violence'*. However, prior to his abuse, Tom recounted an incident of sexual assault that occurred during a house party in 2014. Although Tom decided not to disclose this incident to the authorities or his family, the weight of that experience on his life was evident in his words.

'I had gotten extremely drunk, which one is want to do on a summer evening, and we were all back at one of the lad's houses. I had to be put to bed and when I woke up the next day, I had no clothes on and he was in bed beside me. I was like, 'what happened?' And he was like, 'you wanted it, this was your idea, blah, blah, blah'. And I had had a full blackout, so I didn't really know.'

Documenting the pivotal events leading to Tom's abuse proved crucial in unravelling his life story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Following his sexual assault, Tom terminated his ongoing relationship, stating: *'I suppose at the time I broke up with him rather than disclose that story'*. Six months later, he met his new partner online, an older gay man whom he refrains from mentioning by name: *'we had just been messaging back and forth and then decided we would go for lunch one day, had a great time. He seemed really lovely, he was really charming, really nice, very well to do about town businessman kind of energy'*. Tom asserted that his partner's

maturity helped distance himself from the party lifestyle he had previously embraced (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973).

It becomes evident that Tom's biographical trajectory was shaped by his '*undealt with sexual assault trauma*' (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riemann and Schutze, 1991). It was here that Tom describes his biographical action scheme was to '*find someone who was willing to occupy a lot of my time quite happily, make me feel better and be like a little safe haven in all of what was happening*' (Riemann and Schutze 2005). There was a certain irony to be found in Tom's pursuit of a '*safe haven*'.

The early stages of the courtship were marked by the couple '*getting on well, things were lovely*'. In 2014, Tom's new partner provided invaluable support during a challenging period when his grandfather's health declined which eventually resulted in his passing.

Tom subtly alludes to his partner's '*huge amount of baggage*' but refrains from disclosing any details. Nevertheless, he expresses a strong desire to assist his partner in overcoming his personal issues. This underscored his role as the 'fixer' in the relationship, where his portrayal of agency, rescuing and problem-solving aligned with social discourses surrounding masculinity and relationship rule two (Connell, 2005; Donovan and Hester, 2015).

'He arrived with a huge amount of baggage into our relationship and I was like, that is no problem, we will get through that when you are good and ready to get through that'

In the next line, Tom positioned himself within discourses of heteronormativity, wherein the social and cultural bias that assumes heterosexuality as the norm led to different levels of

openness among gay men: *'He had been married to a woman before, you know; he is not as out as I would be.'* Consequently, Tom helped his partner be more open and find his place within the LGBTQ community. For instance, in the months leading up to May 2015, Tom assisted his older boyfriend in campaigning for the same-sex marriage referendum in Ireland:

'He really wanted to get involved in marriage equality but didn't know how. So I went out to his area and we canvassed together and that was like a big moment for him in terms of outness and stuff. And I think then with the whole emotional roller coaster of the marriage equality referendum everything just felt heightened at the time.'

It is likely Tom's desire to support his partner emanates from a place of love. However, his sense of duty and care foreshadows the gradual emergence of his partner's needs as taking centre stage in his relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

Paradoxically whilst the couple celebrated the landslide victory of the Irish same-sex marriage referendum in May 2015, Tom's new relationship began to deteriorate in his private life:

'We had two or three fights on the day of the marriage equality referendum. A lot of my brain space that day was occupied by him and that fight and everything that was going on with me and him. It should have been a day for me to freely celebrate the hard work that I had put in.'

It appeared that Tom's choice to pursue monogamy with his partner triggered feelings of jealousy and distrust. This marked the initial disclosure of psychological abuse in his life narrative.

'I had never cheated, had absolutely no issue around monogamy, but he just didn't trust me and I didn't really understand why. Then further down the line we had had a fight about something and he essentially was like, 'I don't believe that you were sexually assaulted at that party, I think you cheated on your then boyfriend and this is a cover up.... He was one of the first people I had disclosed that story to'.

Tom retrospectively classifies his partner's behaviour: *'there was actively gaslighting happening there'*. These descriptions appear to contradict his previous assertion that his partner provided him with a sense of stability following the sexual trauma he experienced.

'I was just really hurt. I was gutted by the conversation; I was completely sidelined... It also just truthfully made me wonder actually did it really happen and maybe he is right and maybe I am making myself a victim of this for nothing'.

Tom continues to be influenced by heteronormative discourses. He thinks that the jealousy displayed by his boyfriend was tied to his affiliation to the LGBTQ community: *'I think my outness and my being rooted in the community was something that he saw, somewhat weaponised as me being allegedly potentially out looking for more hook ups or looking for the next best thing'*. This observation raised concerns, given that gay men rely heavily on their community for support and connection (Frost et al., 2016).

During *'those few months'* other issues began to *'surface'*. Tom retrospectively finds himself confronted with the emotional abuse that marred his six month relationship: *'quite obvious emotional stuff going on there'*. However, the term *'obvious'* is retrospective. At the time, Tom was unable to recognise the signs of abuse that were subtly present: *'when I was in and experiencing it and going through it, I never had the time to really see the wood from the trees in it'*.

As his relationship progressed, Tom began to *'distance myself from my friends'* to hide the abuse taking place in his private life: *'I didn't really want to tell any of them what was truly going on because they already didn't like him'*. His boyfriend had also urged him to seclude himself. This paralleled the subtle tactics employed by abusive partners who intentionally isolate their victims from their social networks (Stark, 2007).

Tom reveals the rules that had gradually embedded in his relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2015). His partner's fragile and volatile nature led to him taking control in the relationship (rule one). This dynamic resulted in Tom's compliance and dedicated attention to his partner's needs (rule two): *'There was a screw loose kind of energy about him that I was like I am going to have to play ball whatever way this happens because I am the voice of reason between the two of us'*.

In a bid to alleviate his partner's jealousy, Tom began *'self-documenting my life for fear of a retrospective backlash'*. This occurred *'quite early on'* in his relationship and involved taking photographs of himself as a means to verify his whereabouts and activities to his partner: *'So I randomly would have started taking pictures and selfies in the house with a timestamp so I could at least prove that I was there if it was to come up after the fact'*. Tom cited an example of being electronically surveilled by his partner, highlighting that coercive control had engulfed every part of his life (Stark, 2007).

'It just left me in a permanent state of checking my phone. He would message me and be like, 'why would you be online on WhatsApp at 3:42am'. And I'd be like, 'I don't know I must have checked my phone when I woke up'. And he would be like, 'you were out last night, weren't you?' ' There was a lot of just like, like I am following your timeline on various social media and either this doesn't add up or I am not happy with it.'

Tom stressed the emotional impact of his partner's surveillance which was coupled with his attempts to hide this abusive behaviour from his friends and family: *'it was really embarrassing and quite degrading, but at the time it had just become a commonplace thing but I definitely found myself trying to not make it visible to other people what I was doing'*.

Tom retrospectively contemplates his reasons for concealing his abuse. In doing so, he draws parallels with the metaphor of the frog in the boiling water, which vividly illustrates his gradual immersion into an abusive relationship:

'When I look back on it, it was very internal and very isolating and I think it was a perfect weave of the two together that each little step where I was like, you know what, I am just not going to tell someone this story because it sounds shitty and maybe it wasn't as dramatic as I remember it to be. So I will just say nothing. And then the next thing would happen. It is fully like the frog in the water, if you turn it up by a degree each time you don't notice you are boiling kind of thing'.

In the next line, Tom discusses the difficulties he faced in trying to appease his partner, who exhibited unpredictable and turbulent mood swings:

'If anything ever came up in it it was his sword and his shield, I am in a bad mood don't come near me. And then it was like, I told you I am in a bad mood and you won't help me. So, there was no winning formula there to be like this is the correct thing to do because minute to minute or hour to hour that could change'.

Christmas 2015 marked the couple being together for half a year which he summarised as *'months of mental abuse'*. The couple accompanied their friends to a nearby gay bar on the 20th of December. However, during the outing, Tom's partner grew jealous when he observed Tom engaged in conversation with a male friend. This reflected the escalation of tension and pressure between the couple (Walker, 1979). That night, Tom was publicly accosted by his boyfriend.

'I was like, 'look I am just going to go and get us drinks'. Then I turned around and went to go up to the bar and he caught me by the back of the neck of my t-shirt and he was like, 'you are nothing but a fucking cunt'. And then pushed me into a pile of people in the bar and I was just like, I am going. And I just walked out the door and didn't turn back.'

His use of present tense suggests Tom relives this moment. He proceeded to walk home from the bar, clearly distressed: *'I was bawling the whole way home'*. Tom *'took a selfie in front of the information box thing on Sky so it was like the date and the time, and I was like I have literally come directly home'*. This incident became a turning point. It provided the *'proof'* that *'was tacit, it was physical, and it happened in public'*. This aligns to the *'public story'* of IPV which emphasises the significance of physical violence as an indicator (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

The next morning, Tom received a slew of verbally abusive messages from his partner: *'you are nothing but a cunt, I can't believe you abandoned me, you made a show of me in front of my friends'*. This served as a catalyst, prompting him to end his relationship:

'There was a clarity to it for sure. I was bawling the next day at work, I was absolutely in an emotional state. But there was like a breaking of a dam kind of energy about it, I have done it, I am away from him, it is done, I have a real reason to walk away now, I am not making it up'.

On the 22nd of December 2015, two days after the incident, Tom's ex-partner arrived unannounced at his place of employment: *'he made a weird big show of me'*. In the following days, Tom portrayed his partner as remorseful and suicidal over his actions. This was indicative of a honeymoon period in abusive relationships (Walker, 1970).

'He was like, 'I am really embarrassed about what happened, please don't tell anyone I did that to you, I couldn't live with myself if you told people. He was like, 'if you don't meet up with me I am not going to live to see Christmas'. So I did meet up with him and he was like, 'I can solve this, I can make it better, I am going to go to therapy, I am going to go to counselling'.

Despite his boyfriend's repentance, Tom remained resolute in his decision to end their six-month relationship: *'I am done, we are done, this is over'*. Recognizing that it is not up to him to 'fix' his partner was key to this decision:

'It is not on me to solve this, he is the one that brought this into the room, he is the one that has to take it out of it... I think he had never seen me actually just be neutral about it. I wasn't actively compassionately trying to solve the problem for him or trying to save him' (Tom).

Speaking about his present life, Tom positioned himself as *'a number of years away from his story'* and as a result, in a *'much better place'*. As a part of his work as an outreach worker, Tom continues to aid men in the LGBTQ community. He does this by encouraging other men to tell their stories.

'I find a lot of strength in hearing and seeing other people being able to talk about it'

5.2 James' Story

James was a gay man born in Ireland in 1987. Despite his reservations about categorising his experiences as *'domestic violence'* the denouement of his life story centres on the emotional abuse he endured for three years by his former transgender partner. Documenting the pivotal events leading up to his abuse proved useful in unravelling the intricate layers of James' life story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Between 2012 and 2013, James was a university student pursuing a doctorate. It was during this time that he serendipitously crossed paths with his boyfriend, who was on a similar academic journey. In the early stages of his relationship, James noticed his partner was *'not great at giving emotional support or comfort or anything of the kind'*. His inability to engage in simple acts of affection highlighted the subtle abusive dynamics embedded in his relationship.

'I mean to the degree that if he wanted to be hugged, he would just kind of stand there and turn his back to me and expect me to give him a hug from behind. Whereas he was, you know, pretty much incapable of actively giving me comfort in that way, just very closed off in a certain way'.

Over time, the relationship between James and his partner evolved into a deeper level of commitment: *'we had a pretty established relationship at that point. I certainly saw the potential for a future with him'*. The decline in James' partner's mental health was crucial to shaping the trajectory of his relationship and, ultimately, his life story: *'in the past he had used drugs, he engaged in sex work, self-harmed, attempted suicide. He definitely kept up with the self-harm a bit while we were dating'*. In response to his partner's vulnerability, James casts himself as the 'fixer' in his relationship: *'I was playing a role, the supportive boyfriend' 'I was basically trying to help'*. This portrayal aligns with discourses of hegemonic masculinity, where men are expected to manage problems, take decisive action and protect their partners (Connell, 2005), and also with relationship rule two whereby the victim takes responsibility for the wellbeing of the abuser (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

Contrary to his previous assertions, James condensed the two years they spent pursuing their degrees as *'mostly stable'*. He draws a distinction between this period as free from abusive behaviour:

'Whatever about being emotionally closed off and requiring a lot of emotional work I wouldn't describe the relationship as either abusive or domestically violent in that time frame. Maybe not a great relationship in retrospect, maybe lacking things that I needed but not abusive in the way I consider it abusive.'

It is clear that James did not connect his partner's emotional detachment as an indicator of emotional abuse (Stark, 2007). In 2016, James and his partner successfully obtained their doctorates. By April of that year, James joined his partner, who was offered a job in England. In his reflection, James drew connections between events in his life, acknowledging how certain experiences propelled this decision to move to England with his partner (Polkinghorne, 1995):

'I was completely burned out and felt like shit and dead inside because I had just finished up a doctorate and I was working three jobs while writing up at the end as well. And like in a very bad place mental health wise, I mean I was teaching and working half time in a call centre and I still couldn't make my rent. I was borrowing money from my friend to pay my rent the last couple of months. So I really needed an escape'

The use of *'escape'* as a descriptor was paradoxical, when James framed his immigration as rendering him more dependent on his boyfriend.

'And I was like I just want to be clear [to him]; you know I don't have any money; I don't have a job; I will try and rectify these things but at least initially I am going to be dependent on you. And he was like that, oh that was fine.'

James then hints that there are significant revelations to come when *'everything changed when I got there, incrementally'*. Upon arriving, James experienced a sense of isolation as his partner opted to settle in a rural area:

'Where we were pretty isolated and that bothered me because there were a lot of places he could have gone...he kind of put us in the middle of nowhere... I had no support, no family support, no social support'

Expressing his frustration, James revealed that he had no input in decision-making: *I didn't really feel like I could say anything because it wasn't my money'*. This was indicative of the first

rule in his relationship, as control over decision making was held primarily by his partner (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

The signs of James' emotional neglect manifested in tangible and physical ways. The spare room he was promised to store his belongings was filled with his partner's possessions and his bed was in disrepair: *'the slats on the bed we used were broken, only on my side... so the mattress is sagging and jaggging into me the whole time'*. This observation suggests a lack of concern for James' comfort and well-being within their shared living space. It was during this time that James noticed a decline in his partner's mental health:

'He mentally shut down pretty much from when I arrived I would say. He just fell into this horrible depressive fugue. I mean in the evenings he wouldn't do anything except watch TV and sit there'.

His partner's vulnerability signalled the second relationship rule, stipulating that James was responsible for the well-being of his vulnerable partner (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This involved a new level of compliance: *'I can't bring anything up... If I pressured them on it one of two things would happen: a depressive spiral or angry explosion followed by a depressive spiral'*. James found himself torn between empathising with his partner's mental health struggles and acknowledging his own abusive experiences.

After two weeks living in England, James was unable to find employment. His partner ordered takeaway *'every single meal rather than cooking'* and expected him to *'contribute to the cost of ordering food'*. This in turn made James more financially reliant on his partner:

'By the end of two weeks I had run out of even the small amount of money I had brought with me, meaning I had no money at all. Like having to ask him for money for a bus fare level of no money. It did put me in a very dependent position again'.

James secured a new job in the tourism industry. It was shortly after that his partner disclosed: *'he had some gender identity issues, body dysmorphia basically, that he thought he might be transgender'*. When confronted with his partner's disclosure, James initially grappled with

concerns over his own sexual orientation: *'I am gay, I am not bisexual, I really am only attracted to men'*. James' adherence to the rules in his relationship left him feeling responsible for his abusive partner's happiness (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This commitment extends to the point where, despite not being bisexual, James assists and supports his partner's desire to transition.

James' portrayal as the 'fixer' allowed him to project a heightened sense of masculinity and assert control over his relationship. This included seeking solutions, providing support, and making concerted efforts to address the challenges arising from his partner's transition.

'I guess mentally I was like let's focus on supporting you right now and then I can check back in terms of how I feel in a bit. So I pushed him to make an appointment with a therapist for gender dysphoria which he eventually did. I think I wrote the email for him in the end... she started embracing her new identity more, with my support. I was basically trying to help her adjust and try these things out and feel more comfortable'.

James' portrayal aligned with social discourses of hegemonic masculinity, encompassing attributes such as assertiveness, rationality, and self-determination (Connell, 1995; Migliaccio, 2001).

As James continued speaking, he shared a troubling aspect of his life. He interjects that *'we are kind of moving to vignettes at this point'* which emphasised the significance of the upcoming segment of his story (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). James explained that he had kept his abuse a secret, not for his own sake, but to protect the secrecy of his partner's new gender identity. Donovan and Hester (2015) refer to this as "identity abuse", which involves the use of a person's sexuality or gender identity to isolate and control their partner.

'She was very insistent that nobody could know that they were trans and that I wasn't allowed to tell my friends. As a gay man and a queer activist, I have very strong opinions on outing people which meant I couldn't seek support from any of my friends for what I was going through, the difficulties that I personally was having'.

James acknowledged that supporting his partner through a gender identity transition was a complex and emotionally intensive process. He emphasised the toll of 'fixing' his relationship,

underscoring how care and support were his responsibility, but paradoxically absent in his own life:

'I have to manage her emotions all of the time.... The problem is now over this whole period, imagine a situation where I can't bring anything up, where I can't have needs'.

James' commitment to prioritising his partner's well-being over his own (relationship rule two), eventually leads him to seek medical assistance in addressing his own diminishing mental health (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

'At that point by the way I was seeing a local GP trying to get help for my own fucking stress and depression, I was not doing well because of the toll of that environment and providing that much emotional support and not receiving any from anybody'.

Despite James' efforts to 'fix', his partner's mental health continued to deteriorate: *'she got a diagnosis of major depression, generalised anxiety disorder, bipolar type 2 I think. She started self-harming again and that was obviously quite scary to be around.'* Due to his partner's suicidal behaviour, he felt no choice but to acquiesce to her demands:

'I was afraid that anything I do or say will involve her either being angry with me or hurting herself or trying to kill herself'.

James revealed a particular incident narrative in which his girlfriend *'had a suicide attempt'*. He found her *'locked in the bathroom cutting'*. Although James called the ambulance that night, he insinuated that the emergency crew suspected that he was the abuser as opposed to a victim.

'The ambulance crew arrives and there is a woman in the bathroom crying and cutting themselves and a stressed out man calling the ambulance they presume that he is the reason she is doing this. And so, they were very cold and distant to me, who was trying to get my ex who was still cutting herself in the bathroom to leave the bathroom and stop cutting herself. And kept me away from her and spoke to her privately, which I understand is protocol. And she told me later that they said I had seemed very controlling of her and yeah, she had to go through some significant lengths to assure them of her safety'.

James' story demonstrates how discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity influenced the support he received from professionals. Notably, his perceived masculinity became associated with the label of being *'controlling'*.

The next day, James *'took the day off work'* to ensure that his partner *'wouldn't kill herself'* reflecting the extent of his role as the *'fixer'*. At one stage *'she read out the suicide note out to me that she had been planning to leave. As you might expect that was emotionally traumatising'*.

James suddenly moves to a cheerful tone while announcing *'the good news starts around now'*.

He then explains that he began *'talking to one of my closest friends'*. He was given resources: *'abuse checklists'* that assisted him in understanding the dynamics of his abusive situation:

'She discreetly sent me a check list of, hey are any of these true of your relationship, abuse check lists. And she was willing to say to me, look it is not for me to say whether your relationship is abusive, but if I were in it I think I could say it was abusive'. I kind of realised she was right'.

This marked a turning point for James, as he realised that *'it was not my job'* to fix his partner and that ignoring his own needs was *'emotionally destructive'*. James also came to terms with his own sexual identity and acknowledged his attraction to men: *'I don't love her as a woman, and I got to that point where I realised that'*. This affirmed his resolve to end his three-year relationship.

However, James was conflicted about breaking up with his partner due to her severe mental illness: *'how do you break up with an emotionally enmeshed abusive self-harming suicidal person without triggering their suicide?'* He candidly described these fears, particularly about the possibility of his partner engaging in self-harm:

'That was probably the worst night of my life to date because I knew she was going to be cutting herself. So this is a little embarrassing but I do remember literally going into the kitchen and blessing the knives in the hope that they wouldn't be conducive to her killing herself with them, I guess. I was also counting them; I was practical in that sense'.

With the support of his friend, James packed his belongings and took the ferry back to Ireland.

James stresses that when his ex-partner calls him, he directs her to professional help. This signifies his detachment from his portrayal as the *'fixer'*.

'She would call me a couple of times, she was like, 'I am thinking of killing myself, can we meet up?' And I was like, 'I am very sorry but no, remember I am not your boyfriend anymore, here are some helplines'.

Despite blocking his ex-partner, James has since discovered that his ex-partner had de-transitioned and no longer identifies as a transgender woman: *'Two years ago she seems to have decided that she wasn't trans after all... he has become quite vocal in some anti-trans gender communities'.*

James' story was intertwined with the challenges faced by his transgender partner, who had significant mental health needs. Concurrently, James grappled with his own plight in which he struggled to liberate himself from an emotionally abusive relationship. As the interview ended, James began to question the credibility of his story. His doubt and need for validation were put into the following words: *'well you wonder sometimes does it count though, is she [the interviewer] just being very polite right, delete, very nice guy, unrelated'.* James' final comment, *'does it count though'* spoke to the intricate journey upon which survivors embark as they account for and attempt to find legitimacy for their abuse.

5.3 Cole's Story

Cole was an openly gay public figure approaching his early thirties. As a testament to his meticulous nature, he arrived at the online interview equipped with notes. Cole described growing up in a *'very typical Irish family'* as being *'out since I was about 23'*. He characterises coming out as gay as *'bumpy [but] thankfully it was all very accepting family wise'*. The denouement of Cole's life story centers on the psychological and sexual violence he endured during his nine month relationship with his former gay partner.

In the summer of 2015, Cole was studying for his Masters when he met his boyfriend. He describes their meeting as a *'hook up on the Grindr dating app'*. Cole was struck by how much the pair had in common: *'we were professionals, fairly both educated people and having educated chat'*. Cole reveals his biographical action scheme in which *'fate'* including his shared interests and availability played a significant role in his decision to date his partner (Riemann and Schutze 2005).

'I genuinely believe there was a fate to that, it was meant to be... Because you are looking for something to believe in, you are looking for stuff to believe in, even in the current relationship you believe that stuff was meant to be.'

Cole remarked that there was *'something very strange'* about his first sexual experience with his partner. His next recital of the power, control, and dominance in his relationship reflects discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). For instance, he vividly depicts his boyfriend's demeanour as *'very sexually dominant and very powerful.'* Additionally, his use of the phrase *'it was part of the control and dominance'* suggests that his partner's sexual dominance was an extension of his overall need for power and control (Stark, 2007).

Retrospectively, Cole made connections between events in his life, acknowledging how certain stressful experiences influenced his decision to continue his nine month relationship with his new partner:

'At the time I was in a very, very stressful time of my life, I was doing my master's, I was buying a house, just a lot going on for me at the time. And yeah, work was particularly stressful. A lot of stuff going on'.

Cole described his difficulty asserting personal boundaries during sexual encounters with his boyfriend. The inclusion of the phrase "it was all *masked in a cover of that being a more pleasurable thing*" suggests that Cole's dominant partner disguised his control as something pleasurable, potentially blurring the lines between consent and manipulation. The use of phrases "all his interactions" and "at the time I bought into that" conveys a power imbalance and Cole's own acknowledgement of his vulnerability.

'But again, any of our meetings were all very sexually dominant, there was a lot of him being sexually dominant in all his interactions... the sexual encounters were kind of on his terms and him dictating what would be the course of it. But it was all masked in a cover of that being a more pleasurable thing. And at the time I bought into that'.

Cole articulated the challenging terrain of navigating sexual intimacy within the confines of an unequal abusive relationship. He highlighted the presence of sexual coercion as the initial indicator of the abuse he experienced:

'The minute he would come into the bedroom I would almost feel obliged or something like that. Obviously in some senses sex was some form of currency in some ways, you know, in the relationship. Or it was some currency in the transaction of attention that was fundamental to the abusive dominance submission dynamic of the relationship as a whole. I suppose there was always an element of he would do anything to talk you into anything, sexually or otherwise'.

Cole's use of phrases like 'obliged' and 'some form of currency' suggests a sense of obligation and transactional nature to the sexual interactions with his boyfriend. The phrase 'transaction of attention' indicates that the exchange of his partner's attention was important to Cole but indicates a clear pattern of coercion and abuse within his relationship. In hindsight, Cole came to reflect on this aspect himself: 'clearly there was in me, there was a craving for whatever attention he was giving me or whatever it was'.

Over the next few weeks, the couple were '*seeing each other every weekend*'. However, Cole's partner expressed dissatisfaction with their causal relationship status which led him to acquiesce to a more traditional monogamous relationship.

Despite describing the positives of his nine month relationship, Cole admits to the '*small niggly things*' that his partner did to upset him '*four months*' into his relationship. Bypassing his earlier minimisation of '*small*' and '*niggly*', he pieces together examples of psychological abuse:

'He had an authority in anything. If I made dinner, he would say things like, 'ah yeah it was gorgeous, but I could have made it better, I would be better at making that dish now'... there was always a comment, there was always a comment to be made... It knocked my confidence in the cooking that I then would almost seek his consent on every single step of a recipe... He could chip away at you all day and all night and his way of chipping away at you was building himself up, how great he was, but that was directly saying how shit you were?'

Cole's examples illustrated the covert yet effective dynamics of psychological abuse in his relationship. The contrasting statements of his partner building himself up while directly undermining Cole exemplified coercive control (Stark, 2007). The use of the phrase '*there was always a comment to be made*' highlighted the constant need for his boyfriend to assert his superiority over him: '*a whole range of socioeconomic things, jobs, salary, academic qualifications, car, house, suddenly he was the superior across all*'. Notably, the remarks made by his boyfriend were influenced by social discourses of masculinity, where men are expected to be successful breadwinners (Walby, 1989). This pattern of belittling Cole's efforts created a dependency on his partner's validation.

Cole reached a final turning point when he '*spoke to a friend*' which led him to break up with his partner: '*it wasn't sitting with me, I was flat out with my master's and eventually I was just like, I am going to break up with this fellow, this is not working. And anyway, I broke up with him*'.

Two days following their breakup, Cole's ex-boyfriend reaches out to express remorse for his past behaviour. Cole received an apology letter that encapsulates the essence of what is known as the "honeymoon stage" of abuse (Walker, 1979).

'And then came a bit of a love bomb then.... I still have a file on this and have a seven paged typed letter from him, you know, I am so sorry for everything, I am so sorry for everything I said for making you feel bad, so, so sorry about everything. And for me that was overwhelming in a good way because I was like this is amazing, somebody actually wrote me a letter professing their undying love for me'.

Cole conveys appreciation upon receiving the letter. However, his earlier mention of exchange of attention hints at a pattern where validation and affirmation from his former partner were used as a means of control (Stark, 2007). The letter prompted Cole to reconcile with his ex-partner, resulting in the reestablishment of their nine-month relationship. His earlier use of the term 'love bomb' reflects how the abusive partner's practices of love prompted renewed commitment and compliance (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

Denial and rationalisation are common responses for victims within abusive relationships (Migliaccio, 2002). Cole stated *'again you kind of fool yourself into things and you believe things'*. It was not long before *'cracks again started appearing'* in Cole's relationship where his partner was *'chipping away at everything I said, contradicting me on stuff'*. Once again, his boyfriend's demeaning remarks were not limited to his personal life but extended into Cole's professional life including his ability to provide (Connell, 2003).

'He actually said to me the comment of, 'of all my boyfriends you earn the least'... Yeah, that was a real put down moment'.

At a separate stage, Cole's partner unexpectedly appeared during a night out. This incident served as another demonstration of his partner's covert tactics of coercive control and stalking (Stark, 2007)

'I remember the night my master's finished. I was out in town with the class, and I had been with him earlier in the day and then I went back out to meet the class. And people

were texting, you were out, and you were texting, and then he arrived in the nightclub that I was in. Oh, I just wanted to surprise you, I just wanted to surprise you. Okay. That was the first big alarm bells kicking off for me'.

In the Summer of 2016, Cole sought advice from a counsellor but was told he was *'over stressed with everything that has happened, relax into this relationship, it will be fine, you need to let it happen'* This experience exemplified the invisibility surrounding his abuse. By the end of Summer, Cole began to exhibit external signs of the abuse he was experiencing:

'I was probably displaying a lot of physical sides of strange stress, I had strange rashes on the back of my neck, I was gnashing me teeth at night. And funny, I kind of found my confidence had taken a huge knock'.

Cole's doubts lingered after a vacation with his boyfriend, leading him to end his nine-month relationship: *'I have all these doubts still there and on a weighing scale. I just need to end it with him'*. Replicating his previous breakup, his ex-partner presented a second apology letter to express his remorse: *'six pages this time again full of words, just words, words, words, everything was just words'*. However, this time, Cole remained resolute in his decision to end his relationship.

Even after separating from his partner, Cole displayed a sense of foreboding, signifying further instances of abuse to come.

'It was only the end of the beginning. There then followed a roller coaster that lasted... So, all and all that was just under a year, the relationship itself of actually being a proper relationship was only nine months. There then followed a roller coaster that lasted the guts of two years and potentially even to the present day'.

Cole began a friendship with his ex-partner: *'we might try and be friends'* in which he *'restarted the relationship sexually'*. After six to eight weeks following his breakup, Cole describes experiencing an incident of sexual violence from his former partner.

It was mid-morning on a Saturday actually... that morning, I didn't really want anything to happen. We were both sober at the time, where I went to his house and we ultimately proceeded to, we proceeded to have sex where ultimately my consent wasn't 100% there....I had hesitations about having sex and he kind of again would have used persuasion, kind of pinned me down and said, 'I know you want it, it isn't the first time,

it isn't the last time either'. And we proceeded to have sex. Ultimately the consent probably wasn't there. Did I kick and scream about it? No, I didn't, I acquiesced. But straight afterwards I had that horrible feeling of I suppose being taken advantage of'.

Cole was torn between minimising his experience of sexual violence: *'I don't want to over dramatise other people's extreme cases of having suffered serious sexual assault, in this case it would be very much mild and minor'* but emphasising the subsequent impact on his life: *'destroying my sense of self'*.

In May 2018, Cole met up with his ex-partner to discuss his sexual assault. This took place *'around the time of the Belfast rugby trial'* which examined the alleged rape and sexual assault of an Irish women. According to Cole, his ex-partner was unable to empathise, take accountability, and proceeded to minimise the severity of his actions as *'role playing'*.

In February 2017, Cole made the decision to cut off contact with his former partner again. However, severing ties in this digital age was challenging. His ex-partner insisted on staying connected through social media, which raised suspicions for Cole that his ex-partner was *'keeping tabs'* on him.

During their separation, Cole learned that his ex-partner had pursued the same sexual partners as Cole: *'I heard back from somebody who did go and sleep with him, that he was all questions to them after they had slept together, who was I, how did they know me'*. Cole experienced a strong sense of being monitored; that his former partner was closely following his life. This would last two years, paradoxically longer than his nine month relationship.

Cole met up for a coffee with his ex-partner, who revealed intimate details about his personal life. After this meeting, Cole blocked his ex-partner, in a final bid to *'remove any sense that he could find me'*.

In the two years following his breakup, Cole began to grieve and heal, stating *'you are grieving the person you went out with first of all but then you have to realise you have to grieve the person you didn't know existed in the relationship which was the abusive side'*. Although occasionally he thinks about his ex-partner, he remains determined to move forward with a new chapter in his life, one entwined to a peaceful life with his new partner.

'There are still always partial unresolved feelings in a relationship, and you never know to what degree they will ever be resolved. So all you can do is continue on and to be in the present as much as possible with new relationships, as I am, and it is a relationship that is going very well for us and we moved in before Covid, we are very settled'.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the interpretive narratives of Tom, James, and Cole, illustrating the streamlined narrative analysis process (Polkinghorne, 1995; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The denouement or outcome of the men's life stories centred on their abusive relationships, which began from a place of love and tranquillity but gradually evolved into emotional abuse, control, and violence (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Stark, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995).

The accounts featured in this chapter illustrate how gay men navigate social discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity, underscoring their invisibility and the difficulty of fitting into a heteronormative society. Tom's story illustrated how coming out for gay men is a lifelong journey intertwined with the support and sense of belonging within the LGBTQ

community. Notably, his partner directs his control and jealousy toward this aspect of Tom's life. James' story illustrates his struggle to reconcile his sexuality and abusive experiences, compounded by the invisible nature of the violence inflicted by his transgender partner. His perceptions of him by professionals as the perpetrator as opposed to the victim underscores the dual marginalisation experienced by gay men, who must contend with gender prejudice and a lack of societal understanding when it comes to gay male IPV.

Cole's partner's display of dominance and control, along with remarks about his salary and ability to provide, mirror social discourse surrounding masculinity. Collectively, the men in these accounts depicted a masculine portrayal of being the fixer, as they endeavour to mend their partners who are portrayed as more vulnerable (Goffman, 1990). This encompassed attributes such as assertiveness, rationality, and self-determination which are linked to constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Migliaccio, 2001).

As a key component of the conceptual framework for this study, Donovan and Hester's (2015) 'relationship rules' and 'practices of love' took centre stage in the biographical accounts of these men. This underlined how the abusive partner enacted the role of the decision-maker, as the victim responded through their portrayal as the caretaker. The oscillation between these rules by both parties is depicted until the victim decides to end the relationship, realising they are not responsible for their partner's emotional well-being. The forthcoming chapter will explore the themes raised above in greater depth, as well as conduct a cross-case analysis of all six cases (Will, George, Sam, Tom, James, Cole) in accordance with the BNIM process (Wengraf, 2008).

Chapter 6: Cross Case Analysis

The present chapter represents the completion of the tenth and final stage of the BNIM analytic process (Wengraf, 2001). This entails a cross-case analysis of all six cases: Will, George, and Sam, whose transcripts underwent the full BNIM analytic process, as well as Tom, James, and Cole, whose transcripts underwent supplementary narrative analysis. Findings are presented interpretively in conjunction with relevant literature. Overall, social discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity served as overarching frameworks for how gay men constructed their life stories. Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) provided a valuable lens for understanding how gay men's perception of their masculinity shaped the framing of their IPV victimisation. This chapter explores these themes with greater depth below (section 6.1). Building on this discussion, the subsequent section will explore the overarching influence of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity discourses concerning how gay men talked about the nature of their abuse (section 6.2) and how these men presented themselves in their IPV narratives (section 6.3). This entails the use of dominant narrative strategies by the participants in making sense of their life experiences, including the 'fixer narrative,' the 'invisibility narrative,' and the 'vulnerability narrative,' as expounded upon in more detail in the later part of this chapter.

6.1 Situating Gay Victimisation: The Overarching Influence of Discourses of Masculinity, Femininity, and Heteronormativity on Gay Men's IPV Narratives

As indicated earlier, social discourse of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity informed how gay men crafted their life stories. Each of these meta-narratives are examined in detail below. This section links the theoretical work of Connell (1995, 2005) to elucidate how gay men

interpret their victimisation (as previously discussed in the literature review in section 2.2.1). Across all six cases, gay men collectively drew upon public and private narratives of masculinity to talk about all aspects of their IPV life story. These narratives encompass pervasive stories about male identity and manhood, encapsulating values, expressions, and norms (Butter, 1999; Connell, 2005; Plummer, 2001). In particular, the men drew upon public attributes associated with masculinity, namely heterosexuality, physical strength, and aggression. This consciousness of their positioning included awareness of what ‘a real man’ was and how they deviated from this: *‘a real man doesn't have sex with men, and a real man has a deep voice’* (Will). Men’s accounts were interspersed with expressions reflective of the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), detailing how they were positioned in conjunction with displays of male strength and stature: *‘I bought gay magazines. They were full of images of men with gym built bodies and everything was about muscle’* (Will).

George’s account of the *‘typical toxic masculine bullshit, it's about size and aggression’* and Sam’s assertion that: *‘societally speaking men are seen as more aggressive and dominant’* highlights a consciousness of how public discourses influenced their private narratives. What was notable was that even though men voiced their distance from *‘typical’* heteronormative masculine ideology, their life stories showcased distinct hypermasculine performances (as explored later in this chapter). In essence, IPV life stories reflected gay male intimate citizenship (Plummer, 2001), through hegemonic masculinity structures but also through their deviation from this and struggle to account for their individual agency and ‘subordinate masculine position’ within these narratives (Connell, 2005). This finding was encapsulated when George stated: *‘I have a very complicated relationship with masculinity’*.

Men used dominant discourses of masculinity as a frame of reference to highlight their personal struggles with adhering to traditional masculine ideals and articulating their experiences of feminisation (Katz-Wise et al., 2016). This included early consciousness of masculine

positioning as evidenced through men's feminization and homophobia in life situations. For example, IPV hegemonic masculine norms invariably framed George's experiences in his workplace.

'The contractors on site became very angry with me because unfortunately it is very much a toxic masculine environment.... they obviously said some more unpleasant things like their distaste of my sexuality or how I was presenting to them' (George).

The cross-case analysis illustrated Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005), with several participants being designated a 'subordinate masculinity,' highlighting heterosexuality as the key principle of hegemonic masculinity (Messner, 1994). This encompasses the expectations and perceptions of gay men to embody qualities and behaviours traditionally associated with women or femininity. This was showcased by Will's own generalisations about other gay men: *'I mean I wouldn't assume that if a man is feminine that they are gay, but the chances are they are'*. Similarly, George and James employed terms such as *'flamboyant'* and *'quite camp'* throughout their narratives to emphasise the feminization of themselves and other gay men in their life stories: *'my father would be embarrassed that I might turn up wearing something flamboyant'* (George). This implies a consciousness of feminization and its relationship to masculinisation as the men portray themselves in their life stories.

Participants in this study largely shaped their masculine identities through voicing familial expectations; however, family tension, homophobia and hostility also featured in their life stories (Addelston, 1999). George recounts the pressure exerted by his mother to conform to traditional feminine roles, illustrating his experiences of feminisation: *'she has very strange ideas of the place of the woman, so I think she puts unnecessary pressure on me to perform to them'*. Strikingly, these descriptions resonate with observations of several panellists from the interpretive panels who perceived gay men to be 'feminine' and assumed they enacted traditional feminine roles in their relationships (see section 3.6.3). This would suggest that dominant discourses surrounding gay men's effeminacy are widely shared societal norms.

In essence, the imposition of femininity onto gay men reflects the rigidity of gender norms and pervasive influence of heteronormativity relating to masculinity in society (and its subordinating influence on gay men's life stories). **In this study, participants drew on heteronormativity, masculinity and femininity social discourses in their biographical stories to strategically emphasise moments in which they did not fit into such social discourses, but also utilised heteronormative performances to offset their stigmatisation.** Heteronormative discourses refer to stories, beliefs, or societal norms that reinforce heterosexuality as the standard expression of sexuality resulting in the marginalisation of gay men (Van der Toorn et al., 2020). Gay men who find themselves outside the heterosexual spectrum are perceived as "outsiders within" (McKenna-Buchanan, 2017, p. 13) and encounter a 'sense of otherness' (Halkitis, 2019, p. 110). This is typified when Will states: *'I was just feeling like a complete freak'*, illustrating his alienation amidst the prevalence of traditional masculinity ideals and the criminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland (Baker et al., 2013; Janes, 2021).

Gay men employed heteronormativity narratives to emphasise their struggles to navigate their sexual identity and masculinity within societal, religious, and familial contexts (Wengraf, 2001). This sheds light on their hypermasculine performances in their life stories. For example, Will's portrayal of *'loneliness'* revolves around his perceived inability to fulfil hegemonic masculine expectations (Connell, 2005): *'I am never going to be able to get married, I am never going to be able to have children'*. These heteronormative differences were framed as having *'devastated'* his mother. On the other hand, George's account of a conversation with a priest *'he came to talk to me about my sexuality'* sheds light on the clash between his public and public life (Plummer, 2001). George expressed the pressure he was felt to lead a dual life, by concealing his sexuality and projecting more heteronormative presentations in his public life:

'The church acknowledges that people have these ideas that they are gay or they want to explore their sexuality. But the church's opinion is that I must keep it on the side and then just present a normative life in my mainstream, in my public life' (George)

Cole's narrative illustrates that being 'out' as a gay man was not a singular event but an ongoing performance (Goffman, 1990; Butler, 1999), *'every day was a coming out day, you never stopped coming out'* (Cole). His account coincides with the shift in discourse as gay men experience ongoing invisibility and marginality long past their coming out experiences (Halkitis, 2019; McKenna-Buchanan, 2017).

'Nine years later you know somebody on a Zoom call from finance assumes your partner is female. Even now you are still going, do I bother correcting them or do I not, or do I just let it slide?' (Cole)

Social discourses of masculinity shaped how men understood the expectations about their behaviour, dictating how they replicated masculine traits in their public lives and internalised these traits in their private lives (Connell, 2005; Plummer, 2001). For example, Cole's suggestion to let his colleague's comment 'slide' speaks to how gay men leverage masculinity and heteronormativity narratives to assimilate into society. It is theorised that gay men may strategically manage their visibility of their 'outsider status' by maintaining a 'normal insider status' enabling them to blend in with a heteronormative society (McKenna-Buchanan, 2017). For participants, these adaptive performances were habitual in their daily lives but were also central to how they articulated their abusive experiences without further exacerbating their feminisation. In particular, 'doing gay masculinity', the counterbalancing of societal feminisation, required participants to perform traditionally masculine presentations (Butler, 1999). For example, Will's performance of masculinity is guided by the public narrative of being a 'hard man' (Connell, 2005). *'I remember trying to act like a hard man a lot, being so paranoid that people would find out, making sure I wasn't feminine in any way, that I wasn't being girly'* (Will). This was translated in his life story when he spoke in a stoic demeanour as opposed to expressing the impact of his IPV experiences.

Furthermore, men showcased their enactment of masculinity and heteronormativity as a survival tactic: *'I would basically get the crap kicked out of me if you were in any way feminine at all'* (Will). Will's quote reflects a double irony wherein men, particularly those identifying as gay, are not allowed to appear vulnerable or be a victim (which are perceived as feminine traits) because in doing so, they risk being assaulted or victimised. This informs how these men talked about IPV as they found it difficult to openly discuss their vulnerability and victimisation. This performance was also illustrated when George aligned himself with a more traditionally masculine business partner to set up his new business: *'I purposefully went into a partnership with a very masculine man to be able to run my business without having those insecurities about how I would be perceived'*. It seemed that any portrayal of femininity in George's life story triggered *'insecurities'* for him, underscoring his inclination to conceal or repress feminine expressions while accentuating masculine performances in his life story.

Men's private narration of IPV in this study emerged as a side in which men collectively emphasised traditional masculine norms, including the need to defend themselves and project composure and stoicism. Notably, similar portrayals were endorsed by abused heterosexual men (Migliaccio, 2001) and gay men (Cruz, 2000; Dunn, 2012). These performances marked a moment when participants ceased to highlight their deviations as gay men from the 'typical' masculine ideology but rather expressed a desire to embody such attributes. *'a man would be expected to be able to defend himself. If someone just randomly mistreats or starts smacking me, I think I would be smacking back'* (George). Connell (1992) referred to the adoption of traditional masculine characteristics by gay men as the 'very straight gay,' while Seidman (2005) labelled it the 'normal gay,' and Dryer (2002) termed it 'straight masculinity' (p. 132).

Beneath gay men's masculine performances lies a challenge to confront their vulnerability and abuse in their IPV narratives. As George notes, *'It's harder for a man to realise that he might not be as invincible as you might think.'* Tom further reinforces this perspective, expressing a

reluctance to be perceived as fragile or a victim, highlighting societal pressure to conform to ideals of hegemonic masculinity where men are expected to embody invulnerability (Connell, 2005): *'I don't want to be seen as fragile or a victim. So, I tend not to be extremely public about it [the abuse] for that reason that I don't want people to look at me that way'* (Tom). These themes are further examined in the 'vulnerability narrative,' which is located later within this chapter. Tom's assertion that *'masculinity is a prison'* emphasises that his negotiation of his masculinity was restrictive and confining. This would suggest that social discourse of masculinity denies men the space for emotional and vulnerable depth, simultaneously dissuading them from expressing vulnerability or openly acknowledging their experiences of IPV. As will be explored in this chapter, the 'fixer narrative' and the 'invisibility narrative' were a means through which men could mask their vulnerabilities while projecting more hyper-masculine identities.

In relation to their IPV narratives, men navigated societal expectations related to hegemonic masculinity which is most frequently equated with control and power (Connell, 2005). The vernacular used reflects their efforts to assert agency and reclaim control: *'I was trying to manage it'* (Will); *'It became a bit more difficult for me to manage... every time a knife was at my throat, you know, I have to manage this. I felt that I was in control, although that is quite foolish, but that I could in some way manage the situation'* (George); *'I was trying to take control'* (Sam) *'I am embarrassed... this is out of my control'* (Tom); *'I want to see how I can manage this'* (James); *'It was the feeling, the lack of control'* (Cole). A similar portrayal of control was echoed in a study involving abused heterosexual men (Durfee, 2011). Kimmel (1997) characterises this as maintaining 'a manly front cover' (p. 148). Given men's positioning as gay victims, this portrayal was often challenging to maintain throughout their storytelling with George indicating *'I wasn't man enough to be able to control the situation'* (George).

Both Will and Sam emphasised that their abusive partners also struggled with their masculinity which was marked by deliberate attempts to appear more masculine in their intimate relationships. For instance, Will observed changes in his partner's behaviour when his abuse initially commenced: *'he would always try to act a lot more masculine, and when he seemed to be himself, he seemed to be a lot more feminine. He started swearing a lot, making sexual comments about people, especially women, and became more demanding.'* Sam also speculated about a similar internal struggle of masculinity within his abusive partner: *'In his head, I truly think there was a struggle between wanting to be happy and wanting to appear less gay, even if it was just with me. I feel like, in his head, it may have given him the upper hand if he was the more dominant one'*. Although the focus of this study was not on perpetrators, their observations suggest that gay men engage in abusive behaviours as a way to conform to hegemonic masculinity (Brown, 2008; Cruz, 2000; Island and Letellier, 1991; Kay and Jeffies, 2010; Parent, Johnson and Taylor, 2023). This may suggest that the abusive partner embodies 'gay masculinity' differently by emphasising physical dominance and control. The variations in how men do 'gay masculinity' may help explain the power dynamics within their abusive relationships.

Notably for men to be perceived as masculine, they first convinced others they do not exhibit femininity (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 1996; Migliaccio, 2001). Thus, participants integrated social discourses of femininity into their biographical accounts, to underscore their divergence from and alliance with traditional masculine norms. For example, Sam stated *'females are seen as the softer, warmer, more nurturing type of human being,'* and according to Tom, *'women in particular are very good at having face-to-face, full, serious kind of conversations'*. However, men were associated with contrasting attributes: *'more aggressive and dominant'* (Sam) *'men don't really talk'* (Tom). In doing so, these men imply that qualities such as vulnerability, communication and openness belong inherently to women as opposed to themselves. This aligns

with how in most societies, the concept of "masculinity" is frequently defined in contrast to "femininity" (Connell, 1995).

A notable aspect of the femininity narrative was how participant's portrayed IPV as a feminine experience. In this study, women were the primary reference for abuse narratives. This resonates with existing literature, highlighting that in contemporary society, a man facing IPV victimisation is frequently subjected to 'feminisation' (Doyle, 1995; Howard and Hollander, 1997; Kimmel, 1996). This is because vulnerability and victimisation are considered components of femininity, but not masculinity (Hollander, 2001). Tom exemplified responses along this line: *'when it comes to intimate partner violence and domestic violence, that is something that people perceive as weakness, you know, femininity'*. George echoed this sentiment when describing his abuse: *'in this situation, I was completely paralyzed; it was almost like I became a vulnerable person, which you would maybe associate with a feminine situation'*. For Tom, the *'downtrodden housewife and the alcoholic husband'* provides the template for understanding IPV. This illustrates how gay men, along with society, adhere to the public (heteronormative) story of IPV which typically portrays passive heterosexual women as victims, enduring abuse from their aggressive and stronger male counterparts (Donovan and Hester, 2015). It is therefore noteworthy that, when gay men reflected upon their own lives and experiences of IPV, they relied on gendered and heteronormative discourse that excluded them as victims. However, in the absence of their own formula depicting abused gay men, their reliance on feminine IPV narratives is not surprising.

'I knew women here who left abusive husbands... I remember thinking when I was younger how women put up, how can they stay in these relationships? Where there literally, their lives are in danger on a daily basis and there being beaten' (Will).

'I wouldn't have thought of myself as a person who would end up in a potentially domestic violent or volatile relationship.... It is often small angry men who are abusive to tall beautiful wonderful women' (Tom).

George suggested that his experiences of IPV undermined his sense of masculinity: *'it was a bit de-masculating, it felt that I did not have any power in the situation that a 35 year old man was supposed to have'*. The socially constructed connection between victimisation and femininity (Hollander, 2001) has resulted in male victims describing their victimhood as a departure from being perceived as a 'real man' (Migliaccio, 2001; Morgan and Wells, 2016). This is because IPV experiences involving vulnerability, powerlessness, or humiliation do not conform with ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Durfee, 2011; Hogan, 2016). This was illustrated by George who suggested that the public criticism as a victim was connected to his sense of masculinity: *'I mean a lot of people would tell me you are a 35 year old man, how did that happen?'*. Similar descriptions shared by abused heterosexual men underscore the challenge faced by male victims, who frequently encounter disbelief and criticism (Corbally, 2011; Douglas and Hines, 2011; Hogan, 2016; Morgan and Wells, 2016).

Furthermore, George articulated a sense of unease in acknowledging his experiences of IPV within the cultural norms surrounding hegemonic masculinity, where men are expected to embody dominance as opposed to vulnerability (Connell, 2005). George attributed his abuse to surrendering to the vision his father had for him as a gay man, characterised by weakness and submissiveness. His experiences of homophobia and feminisation from his father were evident and added an additional layer of pain to his story: *'Men have this weird masculine obsession with dominance and that woman has to stay at home and take their shit I guess. But it kind of felt that I was playing into whatever my father was insinuating my life would end up being, I was just going to be this weak person that he always thought I was going to end up being'*. Overall, exploring men's narratives demonstrates they experienced a complex interplay of feminization due to their positioning as gay men (Connell, 2005), being abused and their positioning as male victims (Migliaccio, 2001).

In summary, the overarching influence of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity discourses informed how men in this study accounted for their abuse experiences as well as how

they positioned themselves through their biographical narratives. This encompassed the challenge men faced in expressing victimisation or vulnerability, traits commonly associated with femininity as opposed to masculinity. Overall, embodying 'gay masculinity' involved men presenting with more masculine traits to offset their prior feminisation and subordinated masculinity to achieve a more socially accepted 'gendered self' (Hart, 1996; Connell, 2005). The intentional adoption of masculine traits by gay men served two distinct purposes: firstly, presenting as more masculine allowed gay men to integrate into heteronormative environments, and secondly, it provided them with a means to articulate their experiences of IPV in a manner that emphasised their masculine identities while downplaying their identities as victims.

6.2 The Nature of Gay Men's Abuse

This section presents findings related to the nature of abuse and violence that gay men experienced in this study. Two categories were identified: 'traditional abuse' which demonstrated congruences with traditional heterosexually constructed IPV and 'sexual minority abuse' which consisted of men's portrayal of abuse specific to their sexuality and marginalisation. These categories will be discussed in greater depth below.

6.2.1 Traditional Abuse

Across all six cases, gay men described modes of abuse including psychological, sexual, and physical, financial abuse, controlling behaviours and technology-related abuse all of which are traditionally associated with abuse of heterosexual women. Men articulated multiple exemplars of coercive control to explain persistent patterns of IPV in their life stories. As outlined in section 2.2.3 in the literature review, Stark's (2007) theory of coercive control was evident, particularly in Will's account: *'I had no say in anything, everything was about him and what he wanted to do'*. This phenomenon can be found in both heterosexual male and female abuse narratives (Crossman, and Hardesty, 2018; Park, Bang, and Jeon, 2021; Stark, 2007; Walby and Towers, 2018). According to Donovan and Hester (2015), the abusive partner establishes dominance

over decision-making within the relationship, a concept delineated as "rule one". This rule was found woven within the life stories of all six men in this study, as their persistent efforts to accommodate their partners' demands was recurrent: *'it was what he wanted to do, literally from the food we ate, to the music we listened to, to the movies we watched. There were almost these kinds of rules set up'* (Will) *'I had to abide by the rules'* (George) *'if I was to go to his house it would be like let's watch a movie or let's play a game or let's turn on the PlayStation or let's do this'* (Sam) *'the word no wasn't even coming into your brain because you almost had to be subservient to him'* (Cole). Table 3 presents the breadth of narrative expressions of traditional abuse voiced by men in this study.

Type of abuse	Examples of men's narrative expressions
Physical abuse	'He would punch, not like a fun punch, he would punch me that I would want to pass out. I was being thrown around. He was hitting me or kicking me or smacking me. He would bite me. He would try and actually injure me by scratching. He would slap me over the head with his palm really hard. I was bleeding from him. It was his nails that tore the skin, but if it was a knife or his nails or his mouth from biting' (George)
Psychological abuse	'He obviously grabbed the phone and broke the phone screaming. He said I am such a pathetic person and no wonder I am alone. I'm unattractive, that I was quite pathetic in his eyes and that I was quite useless and that I would be nothing without my family's finances. I was worse off than him and I was lucky to have someone like him in my life. He said that I had destroyed his life and I had done all these horrible things. He said that he was going to kill me' (George)
Sexual abuse	'I did give consent verbally for fear of what would happen if I were to actually put my foot down and say no. He would touch me or like to try and undress me or something and I'd be like maybe, 'no, I am not in the mood'. And then he would continue, and he would go, 'yeah but you are my boyfriend so we should be having sex' (Sam). The minute he would come into the bedroom I would almost feel obliged or something like that. He kind of again would have used persuasion, kind of pinned me down and said, 'I know you want it, it isn't the first time, it isn't the last time either'. We proceeded to have sex. Ultimately the consent probably wasn't there' (Cole)
Financial abuse	'He was basically living off me. He was pretending basically that he was broke and that he had no money, and he needed me to kind of, to bankroll him. I was so afraid of him at that stage... em... that I would cave in. I would give in and I would just hand him my credit card or my debit card. I actually started borrowing money' (Will)
Coercive control	'Everything was about him. I basically wasn't allowed to do anything unless it kind of passed through him first. I wouldn't go out anywhere, wouldn't go out anywhere and do anything. He was really

	<p>paranoid about who I was meeting. like who are they? What are they? you know, is this person gay?' (Will)</p> <p>'I had to abide by the rules. He called my friends, and he would tell them that they are not allowed to talk to me or contact me and if they did that he would kill them or he would slit their children's throats and he would go and murder their parents and drown their pets in the pool. He did break into the house (George)</p> <p>'He was becoming more controlling over how I was spending my time and who I was spending my time with. It became a case of I had to spend every single evening with him. I had a string of texts from him saying that he was going to kill himself if I didn't go and meet him. I went from being very reclusive and staying inside his house' (Sam)</p>
Technology-based Abuse	<p>'He managed to get into my phone. He phoned the guy that I was em... dating (Will)</p> <p>'He could grab my phone and obviously just put in the pin. Or he could access my contacts on my Google account on his computer. He broke into my online account. He called my friends. He catfished me, he faked a profile and somehow, I had been chatting to him on this profile even though he was not even in the same province' (George)</p> <p>At some point he opened my laptop and checked my browser history. He would message me and be like, 'why would you be online on WhatsApp at 3:42am'. I randomly would have started taking pictures and selfies in the house with a timestamp so I could at least prove that I was there if it was to come up after the fact' (Tom)</p>

Table 3: Participants' narrative expressions of traditional abuse.

As illustrated in table 3, the men presented technology-related abuse including social media monitoring, catfishing, and having their online accounts, mobile devices and laptops hacked by their abusive partners. Subsequently, online contact with ex-partners led to post separation abuse. Despite the clear gender binary and notions of "compulsory heterosexuality" embedded in traditional IPV paradigms, these modes were experienced by gay men in this study (Krug et al. 2002; Rich, 1980). For example, George's account portrayed hallmarks of Johnson's (2008) theoretical distinction of 'intimate terrorism' despite its association with heterosexual female abuse as outlined in section 2.2.3. This was underscored by his narrative descriptions of unilateral captivity, psychological and physical abuse:

'We had been brawling for quite a bit now and he has been hitting me. He tore open the skin here on my shoulder and my shirt was full of blood and I was just so exhausted, and I couldn't deal with it anymore. He just got up and locked the door and here I was inside this little room, and I couldn't believe it.... He just recurringly came into the room

and just would stand right in my face and scream at the top of his lungs at me about how awful I am and how awful his life was.’ (George)

There were analogies between Walker ‘s (1979) cycle of violence and the cyclical nature of abuse described by men in this study. Its applicability was most transparent when George configured his abuse in phases: *‘he was screaming, and I would realise we are going into phase number three’*. Sam’s narrative account demonstrated the ‘tension building’ phase *‘any teeny tiny thing could set him off’* and the ‘explosive’ stage: *‘he struck me to my face’*. According to men’s narrative accounts, moments of rupture were followed by remorse and reconnection: *‘He said ‘oh, I’m really sorry about, you know the way I treated ya’ (Will) ‘he would start crying and I think it was almost like the shame of what happened’(George) ‘he had promised me that it was going to be so great’ (Sam) ‘I have a seven paged typed letter from him, you know, I am so sorry for everything’ (Cole)*. Given the symmetry to the nature of abuse in narrative accounts of gay men to heterosexual female victims, it would suggest the existence of gender and sexuality neutral elements of IPV that go beyond traditional feminine and masculine perspectives. However, alternatively, abuse mediated by men’s sexuality and marginalisation is outlined in the subsequent section.

6.2.2 Sexual Minority Abuse

Sexual minority abuse was a category of abuse classified in this thesis to account for the distinct modes of IPV expressed by participants which did not align with ‘traditional abuse’ as defined in the literature. Sexual minority abuse emerged as an individualised experience enacted not just through an abusive partner but also from society, due to heteronormativity. This included outing, encountering heterosexist and homophobic attitudes from family members, and restrictions from the LGBTQ community. Heteronormativity describes the societal norms that uphold heterosexuality as the conventional or default sexuality, serving to marginalise any other sexualities (Rich, 1980). By utilising an ecological perspective and examining both individual and societal factors, this study demonstrated the impact of heteronormativity on the IPV

experiences of gay men. In particular, it was found that abusive partners and society (knowingly or unknowingly) capitalised on heteronormativity, homophobia, and men's marginalisation, contributing to how these men described their abuse. These findings underscore the validity of Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress theory, as the accounts shared by the participants were distinctive to their sexual minority identity, reflecting their experiences with 'minority stress' that are not commonly seen in heterosexual abusive relationships.

Across cases, men articulated IPV in relation to social constructions of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005). This differs from traditional constructions of IPV which reinforce a fixed binary perspective of sexuality and gender, in which the abuser or survivor's sexuality or gender identity is typically not questioned (Donovan and Barnes, 2019). Within the current study, participants emphasised the importance of the sexual identity and gender identity of their partners and how these portrayals had transitioned during the course of their relationships: '*He claimed to be bisexual*' (Will). '*He then decided after a while that he was asexual*' (George) '*We are not gay, we just like boys, there is a difference*' (Sam). '*I was dating a gay man who ended up coming out as a trans woman*' (James). The fact that men in this study experienced abuse in casual, open, and polyamorous relationships challenges the notion of abuse solely occurring within conventional monogamous relationships and intersects with the sexual liberation of gay men who embrace diverse non-monogamous relationships (Coelho, 2011; Turel et al., 2018; Weinberg et al., 1994).

A key feature of sexual minority abuse was that the participants were hesitant to formally recognise these experiences or categorise these as IPV. Consequently, accounts of sexual minority abuse were much less prevalent in the findings compared to traditional abuse accounts, with participants largely prioritising narration of the latter. The experiences detailed below

illustrate how gay men encountered outing, faced heterosexist and hostile attitudes from family members, and were restricted from the LGBTQ community.

The literature has demonstrated that outing is typically portrayed as an abusive partner choosing to reveal (or threatening to reveal) the victim's sexuality or gender identity without their consent or knowledge (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Ristock, 2002; Yu et al., 2012). Donovan and Hester's (2015) work sheds light on 'identity abuse,' emphasising that abusive dynamics in LGBTQ relationships extend beyond outing the victim or threatening to do so, to also encompassing a range of controlling behaviours grounded in the victim's gender identity and sexuality. In the current study, James' narrative illustrates these features of 'identity abuse', highlighting how his abusive partner's gender identity became a barrier, preventing him from disclosing his experiences of IPV. As an openly gay man, James described his experiences of control and isolation due to keeping his transgender partner's secret.

'It became very difficult for me as well because I had no support, no family support, no social support. I had friends, I had friends in Dublin, and this was kind of weaponised against me I think because obviously as a gay man and a queer activist I have very strong opinions on outing people. And my partner was very insistent that nobody could know that they were trans and that I wasn't allowed to tell my friends, which meant I couldn't seek support from any of my friends for what I was going through, the difficulties that I personally was having'.

Notably, James' experiences align with findings from focus groups among gay men (N=64), suggesting that contrasts in 'outness' in the victim and perpetrator's sexuality can create tension and unequal abusive dynamics (Goldenberg et al., 2016). However, in this case, it was James' partner's gender transition which led to variations in how open the couple were about their relationship. While manifestations of 'outing' or 'identity abuse' differ depending on whether the victim or the abuser conceals their sexuality or gender identity, it collectively serves as a strategy for abusive partners to exploit heteronormativity and homophobia in society.

Scholars suggest that the social contexts in which LGBTQ victims position themselves is crucial to understand the abuse that occurs in their interpersonal relationships (Cahill, 2019; Barnes, 2013; Donovan and Hester, 2015; Renzetti, 1992; Woulfe and Goodman, 2020). This ensures that IPV in sexual minority relationships are not treated interchangeably with abusive heterosexual relationships and that the role of the victim's sexual identity, and their experiences of social marginalisation are fully considered. Within the current study, the social context woven into gay men's life stories underscored the interplay of heterosexism and homophobia. This has engendered a sense of invisibility around these men and the abuse they experience (as explored later in section 6.3.2).

The cross case analysis revealed how gay men described additional vulnerability, isolation and inability to receive support due to their sexual identity, contrasting with heteronormative values in society. In particular, participants positioned family members as mirroring heterosexist and homophobic attitudes contributing to the experience of feeling 'abused'. Rather than receiving support from their family, participants were met with criticism and homophobia regarding their gay sexual identity. For example, George depicted how his disclosure of being in an abusive relationship had fuelled his family's anger over his sexuality:

'My family was absolutely furious with me and it was not a pleasant situation having to deal with that kind of criticism. I mean it is already bad enough that my family kind of feels that I am already on a complicated path and then to choose to be in a relationship with such a complicated individual didn't go down well'.

Findings of this study align with the understanding that IPV can be described by victims as an individualised (i.e. by the abuser inside the relationship) or a collective experience (i.e., involving those outside the relationship) (Corbally, 2011). For example, the men portrayed their family members as having limited knowledge of gay relationships and were unable to provide support in their IPV stories. For instance, Cole explained that gay abusive relationships were

more difficult to talk about with his family: *'telling your parents about a relationship is a bit like coming out again and again and again rather than I think if you were straight'*. Similarly, James stated that his *'parents would not be great on queer issues in general'*, emphasising how his sexual identity and exposure to minority stress played a role in concealing his experiences of abuse: *'I was not able to talk to my parents... they have always been very, very weird about LGBTQ stuff'*. Notably, George's partner utilised the homophobia displayed by his family due to his sexual identity to exert psychological abuse: *'He would say I am such a pathetic person and no wonder I am alone... or no wonder I have such problems with my father or whatever'*. Thus, gay men described abuse as occurring not only within their intimate relationships but also as a collective experience from others stemming from societal heteronormativity and homophobia (Meyer, 2003).

The impact of family dynamics on IPV victimisation is not a new phenomenon (Corbally, 2011) and resonates with previous research studies undertaken with LGBTQ victims (Donovan et al., 2023; Walters, 2011). It underscores the importance of exploring both interpersonal and structural factors in how gay men articulate IPV, as well as highlighting the need to examine the social support systems available for these victims (Krug et al., 2002).

Across cases, participants conveyed that due to their sexual identity as gay men, their partner's displays of IPV were directly targeted at other gay men, which in turn prevented them from maintaining gay male friendships and being restricted from accessing the LGBTQ community: *'he was really paranoid about who I was meeting. like who are they? What are they? you know, is this person gay?'* (Will) *'It was mostly just men or my male friends was the receiver of his wrath'* (George) *'I think my outness and my being rooted in the community was something that he saw, somewhat weaponised as me being allegedly potentially out looking for more hook ups*

or looking for the next best thing' (Tom). This phenomenon has been recognised previously (Taylor and Chandler 1995; Duke and Davidson 2009). The men in this study described difficulties in disclosing IPV or terminating contact with abusive partners given their membership to their insular and close knit LGBTQ community in Ireland. As Cole explained:

'Because the community is small, everyone knows each other... It is a very small gay scene and I think there would be a little bit of a sense of even where you do have ex's and it doesn't work out don't go too hard on a backlash after breaking up because you are going to see them out. Don't shit on your own doorstep basically'.

It is important to explore the relationship between 'sexual minority abuse' and the existing literature base. 'Sexual minority abuse' is not considered a novel concept within this research field. Previous studies have identified LGBTQ-specific expressions of IPV (Bourne et al., 2023; Donovan and Hester 2015; Merrill and Wolfe, 2000; Ristock, 2002). The choice to use 'sexual minority abuse' as a distinguishing category in this thesis reflects how gay men narrated traditional alongside non-traditional abuse in their life stories. These findings illuminate on the role of men's sexually marginalised positions, heteronormativity, homophobia and the potentiation of individualised and collective harm arising from others (knowingly or unknowingly) grounded in men's sexual minority status (Meyer, 2003).

Identity abuse was evident in this study, where the sexual identity of participants were exploited by their partners to exert control, undermine, and isolate them. However, additional aspects of IPV emerged in this study that did not fit neatly within this classification. For example, some participants faced challenges in receiving support from their families due to heterosexist and homophobic beliefs and were restricted by their partners from accessing the LGBTQ community. Previous scholars, such as Woulfe and Goodman (2020), have expanded the definition of identity abuse to include tactics of violence that leverage systemic oppression to harm individuals, such as heterosexism and cissexism. This includes outing, undermining, attacking, or denying a partner's LGBTQ identity, using slurs or derogatory language, and threatening to isolate the survivor from the LGBTQ community. However, categorising these

distinct features under the classification of identity abuse potentially obscures their underlying mechanisms and variations. It is suggested that the term 'sexual minority abuse', although a form of identity abuse, better reflects these experiences, as this form of abuse explicitly draws on societal norms, attitudes, and prejudices related to the victim's sexual minority status and exposure to minority stress. Sexual minority abuse encompasses both individual (perpetrated by the partner) and collective abuse (perpetrated by others) grounded in gay men's affiliation with the sexual minority community (Meyer, 2003). Arguably, these subtleties necessitated a distinct subcategory, enabling a more comprehensive examination of the intersectionality of abuse and minority stress within the context of gay men's relationships (Meyer, 2003).

Evidence suggests that LGBTQ victims struggle to recognize LGBTQ-specific features of IPV (Bourne et al., 2023). In this study, Tom conveyed how his abusive partner '*weaponized*' his openness about his sexual identity and involvement in the LGBTQ community, indicating some awareness of the connection between his abuse and sexual orientation. Yet notably, Tom was the only participant to make this connection, as the remaining participants struggled to formally label their experiences of sexual minority abuse as abusive or violent. Frequently, men's narrative expressions featured minimising language and vague descriptions, often limited to one-line sentences or emerged from topics where they felt they accidentally went '*off topic*'. This underscores their prioritisation of narrating 'traditional abuse' over 'sexual minority abuse'.

The reasons why participants in this study struggled to formally recognize or elaborate on 'sexual minority abuse' may be multifaceted. Firstly, pervasive frameworks and social norms, highlighted by Donovan and Hester (2015) as the public story of IPV, inform how abuse is understood in society. Notably, this does not acknowledge non-traditional expressions of abuse, especially from male victims who by virtue of their victimhood struggle with conforming to

social norms surrounding their masculinity and sexuality. The portrayal of physical violence in IPV discourse perpetuates the perception that abuse is confined to heterosexual 'passive' 'small' women physically victimised by 'dominant' and 'strong' heterosexual 'masculine' men. Consequently, this perspective obscures the identification and seriousness of nuanced forms of IPV, particularly those found within sexual minority relationships.

The relative lack of data in this study (compared with 'traditional abuse' accounts) may result from internalised stigma surrounding men's sexuality which possibly obscured men's perceptions and subsequent narrations of sexual minority abuse experiences. Being gay and negotiating difficult relationship circumstances can be hard to identify for gay men from their ongoing experiences of familial tension, rejection or mistreatment (Katz-Wise et al., 2016). Normalisation of negative experiences within LGBTQ communities has been shown to result in a delayed recognition among gay men in naming instances of abuse (Bourne et al., 2023). The fact that violence is a common facet in gay men's lives, may lead to rationalisation of these experiences (Skeggs and Moran, 2004). George illustrates the normalization of negative experiences as being central to gay men's identities: *'gay men are just designed to fucking have a mess of their lives. In some ways that is what I felt... gay men are always struggling with a lot of problems'*. This normalisation process (Browne, Bakshi and Lim 2011) perhaps sheds light on why 'sexual minority abuse' (among other abuse experiences) was frequently concealed or less explored by men in this study.

In summary, while traditional representations of IPV were more prominent in men's narratives, the 'local context' of heteronormativity and homophobia contributed to expressions of non-traditional IPV (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Cannon et al., 2015). The findings of this study offered compelling evidence of 'identity abuse' which involved the control and conflict related

to men's sexual identities. However, sexual minority abuse was proposed as a distinct sub-category of 'identity abuse' capturing alternative features better explained by gay men's exposure to minority stress (Meyer, 2003). This underscores the importance of examining gay men's 'social situatedness', particularly how their marginalisation in society shapes the narration of their abuse experiences (Wengraf, 2001). To that end, the following section discusses how gay men position themselves in their life stories. Three dominant narratives related to men's masculinity emerged among their abuse narratives. This included 'the fixer narrative', 'the invisibility narrative', and 'the vulnerability narrative' which served as narrative strategies for these men to maintain more traditional masculine identities while recounting their experiences of IPV. These are expounded upon further below.

6.3 How Gay Men Account for Abuse: Dominant Narratives

Having examined the nature of gay men's abuse, this section explores how gay men portray themselves in their biographical narratives. It is argued that the narrator's identity transforms 'across' their narrative touching on to the past, the present and the future (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Bruner, 1986). Thus, participants portrayed a complex array of selves, navigating exchanges between their public and private worlds (Plummer, 2001). This pertains to the dominant narratives found in men's stories shedding light on their construction of narrative identities. **The three dominant narratives discovered in this study include 'the fixer narrative,' 'the invisibility narrative', and 'the vulnerability narrative'.** These narratives served as effective strategies for men to articulate their experiences of abuse while projecting more masculine presentations in their biographies. These themes will be further explored with greater depth and elaboration in the following section.

6.3.1 The Fixer Narrative

Despite the heterogeneity of abuse reported by the six men, their accounts of IPV were all orientated towards the portrayal of wanting to ‘fix’ their abusive partner. Whilst this was most commonly associated with a feminine role, the fixer narrative reflected how men negotiated their masculinity and victimhood. Evidence suggests that navigating LGBTQ relationships requires ‘inhabiting’ particular heteronormative roles associated with masculinity and femininity (Donovan and Hester 2015). Similarly, in this study, talking about IPV was a site in which men continued to perform their masculinity. In particular, the fixer narrative was used by men to articulate their accounts of IPV while framing the importance of caring for and protecting their abusive partners. This appeared to be an expression of masculinity for men in this study to avoid being seen as powerless or victims, ill-judged in their decision-making. This presented as a dominant narrative in this study characterised by a focus on helping, problem-solving, and empathy. In this context, ‘fixing’ refers to the acts of repairing, mending, and correcting with the intent of making whole. Throughout their biographical work, men were observed to tackle problems head on, attempting to ‘fix’ their abusive partners in the hopes of making their lives and relationships ‘whole’. To that end, the fixer narrative played a predominant role in how gay men articulated and elucidated their experiences of abuse. Consequently, prioritising their partner’s welfare shaped the biographical trajectory processes in men’s life stories. When George audibly attempts to make sense of himself and his abuse story, he depicts the quintessence of the fixer narrative:

‘I am sure where my own obsession with helping people comes from, where it is almost attractive to me to see someone having a hard time. It is almost like oh I can fix this person. I don't know, it was kind of weird, I kind of liked that he needed me. I thought that I was going to be able to assist him. I was going to save this man’.

Notably, like George, the remaining men portrayed themselves as highly empathic, sensitive and conscientious of others. Arguably, the men’s caring natures compelled them to help because they felt what others were feeling. While the capacity for compassion were admirable and positive traits, they veered into dangerous territory when ‘fixing’ was unilaterally exercised in

the backdrop of abuse. This exposed a susceptibility for these men to encounter abuse by perpetrators that found such traits detectable and appealing. Examples of the ‘fixer narrative’ are presented below.

‘I got really suckered by him. I mean, you know, I felt sorry for him’ (Will)

‘I can't judge him on what has happened to him, I have to stand up and try and help him, protect him, do whatever I can to improve his life. I convinced myself that I was helping him’ (George)

‘I would do everything I could to appease that for him and make him feel better’ (Sam)

‘But I wanted to do it for him.... I don't want him hurting, I don't want him upset’ (Tom)

‘I was basically trying to help her... It was a lot of emotional energy from me. I have to manage her emotions all of the time’ (James).

‘I feel sorry for him in that sense, there was obviously an obsessive side to him that he thought if he corrected you he was helping you be better’ (Cole)

Table 4 provides an index of quotes extracted from the BNIM case accounts of Will, George and Sam capturing their portrayal as ‘fixer’.

Narrative Descriptions of ‘the fixer’		
Will	George	Sam
<p>‘I let him move into my flat... so he could use the Wi-Fi to look for jobs’.</p> <p>‘I got really suckered by him. I mean, you know, I felt sorry for him’.</p> <p>‘He was basically living off me’.</p> <p>It was basically my fault’.</p> <p>‘I use to defend him’.</p> <p>‘Everything was about him’.</p> <p>‘I actually would chase him’.</p> <p>‘I kept putting up with it’.</p> <p>‘I said, ‘be honest with me because maybe we can get you some help’.</p>	<p>‘I thought I was just going to accept it; I was going to try and help him with it’</p> <p>‘It is almost like oh I can fix this person’.</p> <p>‘I felt really, really bad for him.</p> <p>‘He has had a hard card dealt to him in life or a bad hand’.</p> <p>‘So, I convinced him to go and start seeing a therapist’.</p> <p>‘I felt so bad for him’.</p> <p>‘I could just see the hurt in his eyes’.</p> <p>‘I couldn't believe it, this poor guy, I don't know why he would make it worse for himself’.</p> <p>‘I just need to know that he is okay’.</p> <p>‘I think he could be a good guy, ‘If he needs help, he can always reach out to me’.</p>	<p>‘I did put him first in that situation’.</p> <p>‘I was like, oh no I have hurt this person, or I did this wrong, oh no’.</p> <p>‘I would do everything I could to appease that for him and make him feel better.</p> <p>‘Oh, he didn't mean it, he was having a bad day’.</p> <p>‘I felt very torn and very, torn and guilty.’</p> <p>‘I would end up apologising to him for upsetting him by questioning his behaviour’.</p> <p>‘Don't let this happen again, this is your fault it happened’.</p> <p>‘‘he must have been battling his own demons’.</p>

Table 4: Narrative descriptions of the Fixer

Childhood presents a major life event (Dunlop and Walker, 2013) and biographical arguments refers to tracing childhood events to current storylines and character traits (Reese et al., 2010). Both Will and George documented the parallels when abuse was exercised by their fathers as children and later by their boyfriends as adults: *'It sounds like I was a child again living in my father's house, I had to abide by the rules'* (George). Caretaking and rescuing have been previously linked to skills acquired through childhood trauma (Beattie, 2009). In accordance with the social learning theory (Bandura and Walters 1977), Will and George's proclivity to 'fix' their abusive boyfriends can be linked to the behavioural patterns modelled in their childhoods, especially when their fathers were portrayed as abusive and they needed to manage or intervene when witnessing this abuse: *'he was becoming physically abusive and I had to step in'* (Will) *'I was trapped into a situation between a very strange interaction between him and my mother'* (George). This pathway was formally recognised by George, who imposed the strongest control over the fixer narrative:

'I grew up in quite an aggressive violent environment and that I was kind of used to it, it was kind of something normal to me that I could handle this. I felt that I was in control, although that is quite foolish, but that I could in some way manage the situation.'

Among all the men, James appeared most cognizant of the performances entailed as the fixer. This portrayal was distinctly intertwined with prioritising his partner's needs through acts of caregiving and support.

'I was not sure where to draw the boundaries of being supportive. I kind of fitted myself to the needs of my previous partners as opposed to paying attention to what I wanted. I was playing a role, the supportive boyfriend.'

The term 'fixer' has been documented among other victim cohorts. For example, Goetting (1999) described how female victims persist in abusive relationships in their quest to change their abusive partners. In a qualitative study with abused heterosexual women, Enander and Holmberg (2008) discovered that a desire to understand their abusive partners led to feelings of love and compassion. Consequently, these victims described their abusive partners as completely dependent on them for care and support. Hochschild (1979) explored related themes

through the concept of 'emotional work' undertaken in one's private life. This concept has also been explored with LGBTQ victims of abusive relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2011).

The fixer narrative has been previously conceptualised by Donovan and Hester (2015) as a second 'relationship rule' in which the victim is held entirely responsible for providing emotional care to their abusive partner. This includes obligations towards the household, labour, or children etc. This theoretical perspective is outlined in the literature review (in section 2.2.2.1). Donovan and Hester (2015) observed that women in their study were more likely to "fix" their relationships by trying harder, displaying loyalty, and shielding their abusive partners from external criticism. It is worth noting that 'several' gay male victims in Donovan and Hester's study also exhibited fixing behaviours. Likewise for men in the present study, their self-presentation in their life stories was marked by self-sacrifice and a resolute sense of purpose towards 'fixing' their abusive partner:

'I kind of neglected my own feelings because I kind of said to myself I am a very privileged person; it doesn't matter what I feel because I did not experience whatever he was experiencing' (George).

'I did put him first in that situation' (Sam)

'I have to manage her emotions all of the time' (James)'

'It just really hammered home that it actually doesn't matter what I want, it is what he needs' (Tom)

'Everything was about him' (Cole).

The prevalence of the fixer identity in Donovan and Hester's (2015) research and among the men in the present study, suggests that engaging in emotional work such as care, aid, and support is a common response for victims in abusive relationships, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the victim (for examples, see Anderson et al., 2003; Enander, 2011; Enander and Holmberg, 2008; Tarzia, 2021). This could be attributed to the parallels between the 'fixer identity' and the inherent caregiving tendencies found in adult relationships. For example, attachment theory, as outlined by Bowlby (1979), underscores the role of caregiving within adult

relationships, positing that healthy and secure intimate relationships are only attainable when partners mutually acknowledge and respect their roles as caregivers to each other. However, within the context of abusive relationships, where caregiving is often one-sided and only the victims assume this role, it may be conceptualised as a 'fixer identity' that, while meeting interpersonal needs, may also contribute to the abuse dynamic.

Currently, there is limited research on individual perspectives concerning the motivations behind the 'fixer narrative' and its manifestation among gay male victims. Donovan and Hester (2015)'s study of LGBTQ victims explored how they navigate 'relationship rules' by considering gendered behaviour and relationship scripts. They highlighted how the influence of gendered behaviour is shaped by the participants' social positioning, thus removing assumptions of gender when examining IPV in relationships. The authors suggest pinpointing decision-making roles and the assumption of responsibility for these decisions to identify instances of abuse and the victim involved. However, there is value in examining individual variations between subgroups of LGBTQ victims and how their abuse narratives are uniquely shaped by their gender. Donovan and Hester's study was predominantly composed of females, accounting for nearly two-thirds (or 61 percent) of the cohort. Less is known about how gay men account for "fixing" and their underlying motivations for these narrative portrayals. It is likely that victims from different backgrounds and gender identities draw upon different understandings of masculinity and femininity when describing their strategies to "fix" or care for their abusive partners. This underscores the significance of documenting these distinctions and exploring the gendered nature of their IPV narratives. As an illustration, in Donovan and Hester's study, a lesbian victim named Ella referred to the act of fixing as a 'very female thing' (p.150). Emotional care has traditionally been associated with societal constructs of femininity. However, the current study found that for gay men, the fixer identity was more closely linked to their performances of masculinity, a finding at the heart of this study.

Whilst the fixer narrative has been explored by numerous scholars, it has traditionally been associated with female subjects, with prior studies linking it to femininity and associated feminine traits (Debold et al., 1993). This is reinforced by how empirical evidence highlights how more women than men display caregiving, problem solving and empathy towards others (Beutel and Marini, 1995; Feingold, 1994). In particular, fixing has been historically tied to women's roles as wives, mothers, and nurturing caregivers (Enander and Holmberg, 2008; Ferraro and Johnson, 1983; Marden and Rice, 1995). Consequently, the exploration of the fixer identity in men, or male abuse victims remains an uncharted area, making this study a more thorough documentation of this phenomenon. In contrast to previous literature, this study found that gay men drew upon their understanding of masculinity to portray 'fixing' within their abusive relationships. This proved an effective narrative resource that allowed men to articulate abuse in alignment with normative discourses of masculinity (Connell, 2005). Thus, the ensuing section delves into how the 'fixer identity' was rooted in how gay men, as victims, align themselves with localised masculine norms in their abuse stories.

The cross-case analysis revealed that participants collectively drew on constructions of masculinity and masculine traits to portray themselves as the 'fixers' in their abuse stories. This finding is consistent with prior research that has documented gender-related differences in how abuse victims account for their victimisation (Corbally, 2011; Dufee, 2011; Eckstein, 2009; Migliaccio, 2001, 2002). Given that hegemonic masculinity underscores the prominence of men's power and dominance within their intimate relationships (Dufee, 2011), this was most visibly captured when participants talked about abuse in the paradoxical context of running and bettering their abusive partner's lives. Their vernacular conveys a sense of agency and decision-making. This was a way for men to regain or preserve their masculinity that was undermined by their exposure to abuse: *'I let him move in to use my internet connection to look for jobs'* (Will) *'I convinced him to go and start seeing a therapist'* (George) *'I pushed him to make an appointment with a therapist'* (James). In doing so, the men strategically engulfed the

vulnerability and helplessness embedded in the abuse experience, presenting instead as proactive, supportive and ultimately taking the lead in their life stories, thus aligned with socially valued expressions of masculinity (Faludi, 2000; Mutunda, 2009).

In men, the fixer identity can be broadly traced back to the traditional 'do-it-yourself' attitude, symbolising male agency and self-sufficiency. Historically, these attitudes showcased men taking charge by independently handling household tasks such as repairing and maintenance (Gelber, 1997). However, men have evolved over time to encompass a wider range of fixing behaviours, marked by taking the lead, personal sacrifices, and problem-solving. Similarly, Levant (1992) suggests that men were taught problem-solving skills, logical thinking, risk-taking, and maintaining composure in challenging situations, which manifests in adulthood as expressions of care including taking care of family and friends, looking out for their well-being, and actively solving problems on their behalf. For instance, children's television shows frequently depict male characters as leaders involved in rational thinking, problem-solving, or tasked with fixing things, such as characters like 'Bob the Builder' for example. It is suggested that boys may try to live up to these stereotypical ideals (Marttila, 2013).

A more recent online survey conducted with 4,000 men provides compelling evidence for the fixer identity. Notably, more than half (58%) of male participants suggested that society expects them to 'fix things'. This portrayal was succinctly encapsulated by one participant, who defined manliness or masculinity as being 'strong, not open about feelings, always fix everything.' (Ipsos Public Services, 2019, p. 3). In this study, men's descriptions of fixing, wherein they assert their agency, proactively address their partner's issues and confront challenges amid their own adversity, challenges the public story of IPV in which victims are typically depicted as female, passive and lacking the ability to act or be seen as dominant or powerful (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Dufee, 2011). Therefore, men who have experienced abuse may find greater

resonance with a portrayal of a 'fixer' aligned with heteronormative hegemonic masculinity, rather than identifying with victim discourses.

Toerien and Durrheim (2005) propose that masculinity constitutes an ongoing life project, wherein men fashion narratives that encapsulate their gendered identities. For some participants, the 'fixer identity' was aligned with gender norms where men are expected to take on the roles of provider or breadwinner. This portrayal extended beyond emotional support to assuming responsibility for the financial security of their intimate partners: *'I was providing for us. I was managing our lives' 'I had some kind of superiority in our interaction because we were living in my house, he was driving one of my cars'* (George) *'he had no money, and he needed me to kind of, to bankroll him'* (Will). Financially supporting the household is recognised as an idealised trait of masculinity, often rooted in the societal constructs associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Pleck 1981; Walby, 1989). Given that other commonly associated characteristics of hegemonic masculinity include power, assertiveness, rationality, self-control, and self-determination (Connell, 1995; Migliaccio, 2001), financial provision is viewed as a masculine form of caregiving (Hanlon, 2012). It becomes clear that financial contributions often play a role in how men express care within their interpersonal relationships. As Bhana and Anderson (2013) observed, 'gifts, money, and other commodities fuel everyday sexual relations' (p. 29). However, it is worth noting that the investigation of the provider role in the context of financial IPV has garnered less attention in the violence-based scholarship. Despite being considered relics of the past, the provider role remains ingrained in many modern male identities transcending nationalities, racial and ethnic communities (Fuller, 2001; Sikweyiya et al., 2022). Paradoxically, evolving masculine norms hinge on men being empathetic and gentle (Hine et al., 2020), however, the 'provider status' continues to be a measurement of men's self-worth and social status (Connell, 2005; Sikweyiya et al., 2022).

Arguably, life stories serve as deliberate constructions by the narrator aimed at shaping a particular self-presentation (Goffman, 1990). Presenting as the ‘fixer’ portrayed men as their most idealised male roles, attuned to the portrayal of the rescuer, whereby helping their partners likely provided purpose within their biographies: *‘I have to stand up and try and help him, protect him, do whatever I can to improve his life’* (George). Sam, the youngest participant, expressed his position as the ‘fixer’ through personal sacrifices by forgoing his friendships to support his boyfriend: *‘these were people that I didn't know as long as I knew him, so I did put him first in that situation’*. This aligns with the rescuer role, in which the participants demonstrate a willingness to put the well-being and needs of their partner ahead of others and themselves. By casting themselves as the rescuer, the men steered their story in a direction that reflects their masculinity, including their agency and decision-making, rather than being a victim, passive observer or powerless.

According to some scholars, the rescue archetype is rooted in a body of fairy tales that frequently portray men as heroic figures, rushing to the aid of female damsels in distress (Rodríguez, 2002). This narrative tradition has significantly shaped the constructs of romantic love, perpetuating the expectation that men are rescuers who are strong, charming and powerful (Lelaurain et al., 2018; Towns and Adams, 2000). Others discuss such behaviour in the context of ‘heroic masculinity’ where men actively craft their identities as heroic men of action (Dawson, 1994; Holt and Thompson, 2004; Whitehead, 2005). Similarly, Wetherell and Edley (1999) described their male interviewees as embodying a heroic masculine persona. Overall, the portrayal of fixing may allow men to focus on their efforts to protect and rescue, which can serve as a distraction from their own abuse or the fact that they require rescuing.

Overall, the fixer identity served as a strategic narrative technique for the men in this study to skilfully balance the dual roles of ‘victim’ and ‘man’ by framing their victimisation in a manner that shields the essence of being a victim. The influence of meta-narratives of masculinity, as

discussed in section 6.1, becomes apparent as participants align themselves with ideals of hegemonic masculinity by portraying themselves as ‘rescuers’ and ‘problem solvers’ or individuals in positions of power, rather than identifying as the ‘victim’ within their narratives. Thus, the fixer narrative provided a ‘local culture’ in which men could share their abuse experiences but in line with socially acceptable discourse (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Dufee (2011) coined this process as ‘victimised masculinity’ whereby he documented differences in how men and women talked about abuse when filing for protective orders. In particular, heterosexual male victims conveyed their abuse without appearing weak or helpless by presenting themselves as assertive, rational, and capable of managing their assault. Similarly, when recounting violent crimes, men are described as portraying a desired identity that embodied ‘masculine coolness.’, reinterpreting their actions during assaults as ‘tactical behaviours’ as opposed to expressions of passivity (Burcar and Akerström, 2009). Plummer (2003) coined these narrative portrayals as a ‘public identity narrative’ in which men speak about their intimate life while adhering to the optics of their public identities. This was exemplified by Tom, who described his tendency to control how he depicted his vulnerability and experiences of abuse. I coined this phenomenon the ‘male vulnerability crisis’ to capture the internal conflict and dissonance that gay men grapple with when they find themselves feeling more vulnerable than societal norms typically permit. As a result, men strive to conceal their vulnerability in connection to their abuse. Tom’s statement encapsulates the essence and function of the fixer narrative: *‘Like I could be as vulnerable as I want to be without appearing vulnerable in that moment’* (Tom).

Rather than focusing on their own abuse, men in this study dedicated large portions of their biographical work to their partners who were all framed as vulnerable to explain their own portrayal as protective and caring: *‘he had no proper upbringing’ ‘he is actually mentally insane’* (Will) *‘his father who then kicked him out of the house at 12’*. *‘he, got involved with drugs and then unfortunately prostitution as a child’* (George) *‘he arrived with a huge amount*

of baggage into our relationship' (Tom) *'he had used drugs, he engaged in sex work, self-harmed, attempted suicide. They got a diagnosis of major depression, generalised anxiety disorder, bipolar type 2'* (James) *'he had been bullied at school. I got all the excuses that he didn't have a great relationship with his parents'* (Cole). It is worth noting that previous studies have documented how victims depict their abusive partners as vulnerable or helpless, and express empathy over their plight (Baker, 1997; Corbally, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2015; Effiong et al. 2022; Lahav, 2023). Several theories have been proposed to explain this portrayal, including traumatic bonding (Dutton and Painter, 1993), Stockholm syndrome (Graham, 1995) and identification with the aggressor (Ferenczi, 1988). Victims displaying these characteristics, such as empathy and intensified emotional attachment, are more likely to seek reconciliation in the abusive relationship after termination (Griffing et al., 2002; Lahav, 2023). This insight may shed light on why several participants in the present study described their relationships as on-and-off again, as exemplified by Tom's statement: *'we had had three or four mini break-ups'*.

Donovan and Hester (2015) propose that intimate relationships, irrespective of the gender or sexuality of the partners, which escalate into violence, often originate from a foundation of love. Therefore, the portrayal of gay men as the fixer can be elucidated by their practices of love, encompassing values such as privacy, loyalty, fidelity, and care towards their abusive partners. The participants in this study shaped their understanding of the abuse within their relationships through a combination of empathy, care and responsibility towards their abusive partners: *'I kind of liked that he needed me'* (George). Notably, Will, George, Tom, and Cole refrained from articulating the phrase 'love' for their partners, indicating a challenge in discussing their feelings or vulnerable sides. In contrast, Sam expressed, *"I wanted to see the person I had fallen in love with come back again,"* while James affirmed, *"I was willing, at least, to acknowledge that I do love you and I want to see how I can manage this."* These quotes underscore the role that love played for gay men in the endurance and commitment to their abusive relationships, ultimately shaping their portrayal as the 'fixer' in their life stories.

This section has demonstrated how the fixer narrative aligns with the practices of love and relationship rules as outlined by Donovan and Hester (2015). This framework proved invaluable in illuminating the distinctive context of IPV within men's sexual minority relationships. However, it can be argued that the findings in this study not only build upon but also contribute a novel perspective to previous literature, justifying the need for a new conceptualization as the fixer narrative. Regarding Donovan and Hester's (2015) work, the victim emphasises caregiving and taking responsibility for the welfare of the abusive partner (under rule two) to counteract their displays of control and volatility (under rule one). While there is an attempt to fix the partner, the qualities emphasised under this relationship rule are more aligned with traditional caretaking roles usually associated with femininity as opposed to a consciously adopted masculine narrative identity. In comparison, gay men in this study articulated their abuse by strategically adopting a hyper-masculine identity, emphasising qualities such as assertiveness, proactivity, and breadwinning, in which they attempted to rescue their abusive partners. The portrayal of these men as masculine rather than vulnerable or victimised is pivotal to these findings. In the context of its contribution to the knowledge field, the 'fixer narrative' evokes an image of someone assuming control, confronting challenges directly, and endeavouring to repair what is broken. This portrayal captures the masculine performances observed in men in this study and may hold relevance for future male victims. Hence, this study marked one of the first attempts to explore the concept of "fixing" within the context of male abuse victims, situated within the framework of masculinity (Connell, 2005).

For Sam, Tom and James, the fixing identity was solidified by scrupulously attending to and managing their partners suicidal behaviour. Consequently, their sense of responsibility for their partner's lives took precedence over their abuse: 'I was *worried constantly that he is going to harm himself irreparably*' (Sam) '*he is suicidal*' (Tom) '*I took the day off work to be with her so she wouldn't kill herself*' (James). It appeared intuitive for men to privilege the subjectivity

of their abusive partners which strategically distracted them from their own insecurities and unpleasant life experiences. The positioning of their partners as in need was a means of portraying themselves with more traditionally masculine qualities such as strong, competent and resilient: *'I am the voice of reason between the two of us'* (Tom). The embedding of their partner's plights provided the appropriate 'staging' in which men could continuously position themselves as virtuous as opposed to vulnerable in their storytelling (Goffman, 1990).

The men in this study struggled to recognise themselves as the survivors of their abuse narratives. This connection stems from the societal construction of victims as possessing feminine qualities and the societal construction of violence as a masculine attribute. This reinforces a gendered stereotype that positions victims, particularly male victims, as being at odds with traditional masculine ideals (Connell, 2005). Given that the strategy of men was to present themselves as serving the vulnerable, fixing was irreconcilable to align themselves with vulnerable identities such as 'victim'. This was most visibly captured by George: *'I just thought I was just dealing with an unruly boyfriend. I didn't think that I was a victim at all, I thought he was the victim, this poor guy'*. Even as George describes his abuse, he positions his intimate partner as the victim: *'hearing that pain in his voice calling out and saying, 'where the fuck are you, I will kill you''*. Sam directed blame towards himself and was unable to recognise his own victimisation: *'I took on every single ounce of the blame that was going... in my head I didn't blame him even slightly'*. As the fixer, Tom enacted the role of consolidator while his partner played the role of victim: *'He was like, I am the victim of this. Like he was always the victim of his own creation in these fights. And then I'd be consoling him at the end of a fight that he had started'* (Tom). Overall, the 'fixer narrative' elucidated on men's vulnerabilities to be abused. Providing that terminating the abusive relationship was contingent on this, men portrayed their incapacity to prioritise themselves over the welfare of their partners. Their biographical commitment to 'fixing' and inability to let go of their empathy and responsibility of their ex-partners coincided with multiple unsuccessful breakups and prolonged friendships with abusive

ex partners which crossed over in Will, George, Sam' and Cole's life stories. In the vignette below, George portrays his concern about his partner's future, which takes precedence over his own welfare (i.e. recognising his abuse and the danger he was in). This highlights the calibre of the 'fixing narrative' as interfering with recovery and the crucial biographical work for men to recognize and disclose their victimisation:

'He did cut me with the knife on my arms.... I would tell him, listen if you are going to stab me now you are going to go to jail. You are not going to get away with it... I realised that surely if he kills me, I mean have you ever been in an African jail? There is no way in hell he is going to survive.... I can't help him if he goes to jail, then he is on his own'.

The difficulty for men to recognise their portrayal as the 'fixer' was deepened by how love, support seeking, and caregiving form the scaffolding of intimate relationships, yet may be confused with portrayals of 'fixing' (Clark and Mills, 1993; Collins and Feeney, 2000; Holmes, 1991). May (2009) asserts that 'love is generally confused with dependence; but in point of fact, you can love only in proportion to your capacity for independence' (p.160). Similarly, Beattie (2008) marked an important distinction to the caregiving embedded in most intimate relationships to codependency; when care is offered to the individual who is portrayed as incapable of caring for themselves. With regards to the fixer identity, men collectively did not seek not to support nor guide but 'fix' their partners. The fixer identity particulates self sacrifice and being indispensable but distances itself from or even contradicts personal growth. Thus, the focus of men's biographic work became the personal growth of their partner who is portrayed as unable to take care of himself: *'this was someone who I think 'needs' me at this time'* (James). This entailed men interjecting their responsibility to fix their partners' issues: *'I said to him you can come here on the condition that you do something with yourself...do some courses or training or something, get a job'* (Will) *'I promised him that I would pay for him to go and study then build tools for himself'* (George) *'I pushed him to make an appointment with a therapist for gender dysphoria'* (James). The overwhelming desire to 'fix' and make their partners 'whole' emerged as identifying markers of the fixer narrative.

"Fixing" served as a way to depict men as masculine figures in control, strategically masking the reality that they were actually under the control of their partners: *'I thought I was in control of the situation. I could handle this, I thought, to a degree. I felt that I was in control, although that is quite foolish, but that I could in some way manage the situation'* (George). This portrayal aligned with the construction of hegemonic masculinity representing men as pillars of power and authority (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). As the homeowner, Will's display of 'house rules' offered an illusory sense of control in his narrative: *'I've asked you not to engage in this behaviour when you're under my roof, you know'*. This resonates with how men portray a sense of autonomy and capacity for decision making while articulating their victimisation (Hogan et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2020; Corbally, 2011).

The evolution of the 'fixer narrative' was characterised by downward spirals, turning points and epiphanies within their abuse narratives (Schutze, 2008). This was termed 'fixing the unfixable' and was characterised by men's portrayal of abuse as escalating in both frequency and severity whilst recognising that their unilateral efforts to 'fix' their partners were futile. For example, George said: *'I said to him I would rather try and help you and be there for you. And I guess saying that led up to me having to become a punching bag in the beginning by deciding that and then later I was the punching bag against my will'*. In this narrative thread, the self is portrayed as no longer mastering control but affirming vulnerability: *'I lost control of the situation every single time and it became quite dangerous'* (George) *'this is out of my control'* (Tom). Furthermore, men's narrative positioning merged from 'fixing' to acknowledging that such a process was unsustainable as highlighted in the examples below.

'I was not going to save this man. He has to save himself' (George).

'The moment I decided to break up with him it got to the stage where I went. If he really does harm himself this is not my fault, I cannot be in this relationship to keep him alive, that is not fair on me. And I know it is potentially a very selfish thing for me to say but

I was like, you are 19 years old, it is not your responsibility to keep him alive, this is not a palliative care relationship' (Sam).

'But it is not on me to solve this, he is the one that brought this into the room, he is the one that has to take it out of it... I think he had never seen me actually just be neutral about it. I wasn't actively compassionately trying to solve the problem for him or trying to save him' (Tom).

'It got to a position where I realised, I can't do this anymore where this is being in a relationship with them. Partly because it is emotionally destructive. Well at a certain point you stop caring, which is pretty much what it got to.... she would call me a couple of times, she is like, 'I am thinking of killing myself, can we meet up?' And I was like, 'I am very sorry but no, remember I am not your boyfriend anymore, here are some helplines' (James).

Overall, George constituted the strongest portrayal of fixing. To that end he expressed the most difficulty with disentangling himself from this narrative: *'I really, really thought that I was going to somehow fix this guy. But no. Who knows, maybe I did? Maybe he is a brilliant boyfriend right now?'* As George describes sending his ex-partner money following years of separation, this serves as a testament to the deeply coded nature of 'fixing' and how it coloured his account of abuse: *'even though I knew it was stupid I just sent him the money. I felt that I needed to help him'*. Subsequently, the fixer narrative demonstrated the capacity to capture long term-effects of IPV, offering insights into how a hyper-masculine narrative identity endorsed by a victim can persist beyond the abusive relationship, potentially resulting in ongoing abuse even after the abusive relationship has ended. Overall, the fixer narrative served as a powerful vehicle through which men could articulate abuse under the portrayal of virtuous masculine characteristics (Connell, 2005). This was likely a product of their struggles to account for their victimisation within masculinity and female-centred abuse discourses (Burrell and Westmarland, 2019; Corbally, 2011; Machado et al., 2016). Therefore, the positioning of self as the 'fixer' was culturally valued over the contested position of victim, given it provided men with the opportunity to present themselves as the provider, the rescuer and the fixer; roles which remain ingrained and celebrated by contemporary society (Davies and Harré, 1990). To that end, the narrative presentation as the 'fixer' demonstrated what Goffman (1990) called 'front stage' performances of normativity. It hid the 'backstage' experiences, in which gay men were

positioned as abused, vulnerable and powerless. This performance was most visibly captured by Tom:

'I am tired and I am wrecked from putting on this performance all the time'

6.3.2 The Invisibility Narrative

The invisibility narrative emerged from observing that, for gay men experiencing abuse, a bridge of invisibility connected their public and intimate lives, rendering their abuse invisible in both spheres. Thus, the invisibility narrative elucidates how gay men accounted for their abuse when positioning themselves as an invisible minority. This was in tandem with BNIM assumptions by which the men generalised (societal) and particularised (individual) their abuse when constructing their life stories (Wengraf, 2008). Plummer (2001) argued that there is no division between a person's public and private world, they are intertwined by an inseparable bridge. Two distinct narrative forms were identified including (a) public invisibility and (b) intimate invisibility. 'Public invisibility' illustrated how society effectively obscured gay men's experiences of abuse (Wengraf, 2008). 'Intimate invisibility' underscored how invisibility took place in an intimate dimension, as men themselves concealed their experiences of abuse through narrative tactics including minimising, generalising, and normalising. These themes are discussed further below.

6.3.2.1 Public Invisibility

In this study, 'public invisibility' describes a phenomenon by which men portrayed themselves as invisible figures within the structural formations underpinning their abuse narratives. This ties into a central thread in this study, whereby abused gay men constitute an invisible minority in social discourses. At a socio-cultural level, the 'local contexts' or 'scenes of storytelling' of men's narratives were enveloped by heteronormativity emanating from their historical positioning as deviant and abnormal (Donovan et al., 2018; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). The

Irish government decriminalised homosexuality in 1993, following decades of social prejudice influenced by Catholicism (Kondakov, 2021). Will's account of growing up in Ireland as a gay man in the 1970s confirms his positionality as invisible: *'I can't be this disgusting faggot in this world...this feeling of absolute hopelessness and loneliness and being alone'*. As illustrated by the exemplars below, the public expression of 'gay men's abuse' generates disbelief and blame and is seldom discussed in public arenas. This explained the crossover in men's narrative style, in which they presented defensively and justified their abuse throughout their storytelling (Goffman, 1990).

'I mean a lot of people would tell me you are 35 year old man, how did that happen? I don't think it really matters what your gender is but I guess it is harder for a man to realise that he might be as invincible as you might think you are' (George)

*'I walked really calmly over to a bouncer and said, 'that fellow just hit me over there'. And the bouncer was like, 'why?' And I was like, 'look I broke up with him over the summer, I don't think he took it very well'. **And the bouncer told me to stop making up lies and to go off and enjoy my night or he would throw me out. That is classic bouncers though.**'*(Sam)

*'I said, he treats me like absolutely shite most of the time, I am not going to lie to you, I can't be dealing with it, I have my own shit to do'. **And she [the mother of Sam's partner said], was like, 'you can't be like that now, relationships are tough, and they take work, you can't just break up with someone when it gets tough, that is not fair'*** (Sam)

'People have been like, 'I just wouldn't have had you pegged as the kind of person who would end up being abused in a relationship'. And I am like I don't know what that means. *'You are very strong and confident and bold and brassy; you don't strike me as someone who would be a bit of a wallflower in that moment'*. And I am like, *'I know you think you are helping **but it just sounds like you don't believe me'*** (Tom)

*'After I had broken up with him, one friend actually said to me, **'oh my God you have killed Bambi'***. That was his perception of how nice your man had been and how mild mannered your man had been when ultimately it was only, they knew the extent of the persistent negativity' (Cole).

*'I worked with the CBT counsellor ... he was like, 'you are over stressed with everything that has happened, relax into this relationship, **it will be fine, you need to let it happen'*** (Cole)

The quotations demonstrated the habitual disbelief and minimisation reflected by 'biographical caretakers' or friends, family and professionals who were entrusted to care for gay men throughout their biographical journeys of abuse (Riemann and Schutze, 2005). The influence of

men's perceived masculinity is evident here. This ties into the 'ideological denial' of gay men's abuse stemming from the construction of IPV ideologies based on traits associated with heterosexuality and femininity (Cohen, 2010; Donovan and Hester, 2015). In turn, men face a 'gender paradox' when articulating the legitimacy of their abuse experiences (Durfee, 2011), given that social constructs of masculinity are linked with violence perpetuation (Connell, 2005). In this top-down portrayal, men are positioned as 'primary power holders' seen as incapable of enduring abuse by 'secondary power holders' (Dasgupta, 2002). These sentiments were echoed in this study, by Tom due to his perceived masculinity:

'I am a fairly well built man, shall we say, and he isn't so also I don't think people would have believed from the visibility of the physicality of us that it would have been him abusing me in this story' (Tom)

'A lot of people would tell me you are a 35 year old man, how did that happen?' (George)

Once more, men's life stories illustrate their alignment with the public story of IPV, reflecting a rigid portrayal of gender (the female victim and male perpetrator) (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Thus, Tom's male body is presented as undermining or casting doubt on his experiences of abuse. This phenomenon was classified by Corbally (2011) as 'second wave abuse' in which members of the public (other than the abuser) engage in separate forms of abuse on account of the victim's masculinity, such as denial, suspicion and ridicule. For example, James' articulation of not being believed as a victim by emergency personnel based on his masculinity and his partner positionality as female exemplifies second-wave abuse. *'There is a woman in the bathroom crying and cutting themselves and a stressed out man calling the ambulance they presume that he is the reason she is doing this'*. This would suggest that gay men face double jeopardy, as both heteronormative and masculine norms exacerbate their exposure to second-wave abuse and create a veil of public invisibility around their experiences of abuse.

The men in this study portrayed that the LGBTQ community also perpetuated invisibility: *'even like in the gay community there, there can be a lot of narrow mindedness'* (Will) *'gay men are struggling we all feel like we are in isolation regarding these issues, and no one is really talking about it'* (George) *'I think there is a lot of silence around that in the community. Because people are embarrassed to be a man who says this happened to them and particularly to be a man that says this has happened with another man'* (Tom) *'it is not talked about within the gay scene'* (James) *'there are very few places for people to go and talk about that'* (Cole). Moreover, participants perceived that the abuse occurring in gay men's relationships propagated shame or stigma within the LGBTQ community. Overall, the concealment of abuse within the sexual minority community was not a new phenomenon. Up until the 1960s, homosexuality was surrounded by silence (Gronfors and Stalstrom, 1987), so the invisibility around abuse is an extension of this silence. These echo the work of Cahill (2019) and Ristock (2002).

In this study, Tom situated his story against the backdrop of the 2015 Irish Marriage Referendum in Ireland, followed twelve years after the decriminalisation of homosexuality. He depicted the political and social pressures he encountered, emphasising the challenges of keeping his abuse invisible within his close-knit LGBTQ community:

'I think gay and bi men generally don't really talk about these things, particularly around the 2015 marriage equality referendum, like my biggest gripe about the campaign was it was very heteronormative and very straight. I think [because of] the well-to-doness of what happened for gay and bi men in 2015, people are afraid to unravel [any issues] [people will not admit that] actually there is problems in the community, sexual assault does happen.... like domestic violence happens'

While secrecy and shame were common threads within narratives of abuse survivors, they were uniquely explained in this study through a combination of hegemonic masculinity norms and heteronormativity, culminating in the manifestation of public invisibility (Connell, 1995; Rich, 1980). Due to the public invisibility surrounding their abuse, the men in this study experienced

a legitimacy crisis, concerning the validity of their abuse narratives. Consequently, participants internalised this invisibility by concealing and minimising their own abuse. A comprehensive exploration of these themes follows below.

6.3.2.2 Intimate Invisibility

The concept of ‘intimate visibility’ captured how men in this study persistently obscured their abuse and vulnerability: *‘it was really embarrassing and quite degrading. I definitely found myself trying to not make it visible to other people’* (Tom). At the heart of the intimate invisibility narrative lies its connection to how men perceive their masculinity and abuse. This underscores how discourses on masculinity, heteronormativity, and femininity shaped men's discussions about IPV (as outlined in section 6.1). Despite volunteering to speak about their experiences of IPV specifically, men appeared reluctant to express emotions and share details of the abuse itself. This was explained by how men perform more accessible aspects of masculinity and restrict their emotions to portray the ‘strong silent type’ (Carner, 1997, Faludi, 2000; Wetherell and Edley 1999). This was in keeping with culturally prescribed ‘display rules’ in which men are expected to remain resolute, rational and unemotional (Ekman and Friesen, 1969). Therefore, participants in this study often circumvented topics of abuse to avoid portraying the vulnerability and pain these memories may have evoked. This was explained by men’s general discomfort and struggle to talk about intimate details of their lives. According to Rubin and colleagues (1985), men tend to engage in shared activities as opposed to talking or sharing feelings. As reiterated by Tom: *‘whereas men are more likely to sit side by side and watch a match or be passive observers of something and discuss what is happening there rather than each other's lives’*. Other authors have highlighted the unwillingness of men to verbally share their feelings (Real, 1998; Walker, 1994).

Evidence suggests that in choosing not to disclose emotional events, men render their emotional lives invisible (Addis, 2011; Ellison, 1952; Frank, 2004; Schwab et al., 2016). The invisibility narrative characterises such a process, as the participants' efforts to conceal their own abuse was

an illustration of 'intimate invisibility'. As a key finding of this study, men unknowingly contributed to their own abuse invisibility in their own discourse. This was linguistically constructed through purposeful topic changes, opening and closing the conversation and using abstract, pacifying or minimised descriptions.

Intimate invisibility entailed men omitting and downplaying their abuse from their public lives. This emerged as a performative expression of men's masculinity, wherein the 'male self' made sense of abuse through silence, stoicism and concealment (Connell, 2005). Addis (2011) coined this 'private silence' and Ackerman (2008) coined this 'negative silence' to explain how men feel the need to hold it all together by keeping their struggles close to their chest. This was explained in this study by participants positioning their victimisation and vulnerability as directly at odds with their public identities as men and thus required concealment: *'I remember thinking the neighbours will hear this, I am so embarrassed, I couldn't believe that he was acting this way'* (George) *'these were my colleagues, and they were going to see and hear and know something'* (Tom). Sam, the youngest participant assuaged threats to his masculinity by orchestrating the 'intimate invisibility' narrative: *'he had hit me, and I was afraid that it would take, the narrative of him hitting me would take its own life on and there would be no way I could minimise the damage that it would do to my own reputation'* (Sam). Similarly, Tom's explanation of masculinity resembling a prison demonstrates 'intimate invisibility' at work:

'I also think that masculinity is a prison scenario. I present as my happy former self day to day to ensure people didn't see what was happening. But I am also a victim of my own problem of no one talking about it and no one doing anything about it, you know. I mean I was embarrassed it happened to me' (Tom).

In this study, it was discovered that men minimised the abuse they experienced. More specifically, minimising language was a means for participants to discursively undermine the severity and seriousness of abuse, thereby disparaging the pain and seriousness embedded in these experiences. Despite IPV being notably extreme and severe in men's life stories, this was cognitively distorted in how men storied and recounted their abuse. For example, it was common

for men to downplay, underestimate and reduce the perception of their abusive experiences: *'We think of abuse as quite a linear or a small thing'* (Tom). In doing so, men's narratives were laden with equanimity and conscious minimising expressions: *'I was really, like almost terrified'* *'It was little things like the very controlling behaviour'* (Will) *'I was locked in a room and beaten all night and it was not great'* (George). *'A minor thing of him giving me a small smack'* (Sam) *'Really, really small niggly things. It is basically at the lower end of the scale'* (Cole) *'it was kind of horrifying'* (James) *'it wasn't as dramatic as I remember it to be'* (Tom). Despite the severity and chronicity of their abuse, the vernacular of men constructed abuse in a minimalist fashion; as less than and seemingly insignificant in their narratives: *'almost'* (Will) *'never'* (George) *'minor'* (Sam) *'small'* (Cole) *'kind of'* (James) *'it wasn't'* (Tom). This reflects both a dilution and detraction from the seriousness of the abuse men were subjected to. Ekstein (2010) refers to this as a 'masculine interpretation of abuse' (P.6). In particular, participants constructed abuse through minimising their experiences, displaying toughness, and restricting their emotional expression. This strategy seemed to serve as a means for men to balance the uneasy relationship between their masculinity and victimisation (Durfee, 2011; Kimmel, 2013).

Cole's correction of the term *'abusive'* to *'unhealthy'* typified the rendering of his abuse as invisible: *'it just shows you the extent of the abusive relationship, sorry, the unhealthy relationship'*. This culminated in him minimising his experiences of sexual coercion as *'mild and minor'*. George, in particular, availed of euphemisms to discursively trivialise his abuse. Rather than acknowledge he was repeatedly stabbed with a knife by his gay partner, he distorted this as a *'very superficial cut'* *'I wouldn't say stab but more cutting me with the knife'*. Furthermore, the men in this study availed of reduction words (Hoyk and Hersey, 2008) such as *'small'* or *'little'* to minimise the abuse they experienced: *'It was stuff like that, those small things'* (Will) *'It started off as something quite small'* (George) *'had a small tiff'* (Sam) *'It is very small and subtle changes'* (Tom) *'So this is a little embarrassing'* *'a little bit bumpy on the relationship side'* (Cole). The abbreviation of their abuse facilitated men to not be seen as

powerless or fearful. This suggested that minimisation was a conscious masculine performance in which men project their abuse towards the light, alongside their need to remain hidden in the shadows of their masculinity, whereby stoicism is accentuated over vulnerability (Connell, 2005). Their narrative identities in which they were portrayed as strong and capable of dealing successfully with difficult conditions aligned to a 'local culture' of acceptable discourse in which men could position themselves with masculine ideals while articulating their abuse (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Schwab and colleagues (2016) termed this phenomenon 'cloudy visibility,' describing how men disclose their personal struggles under the veil of stoicism, strength and other desirable masculine traits.

Men's minimisation of abuse can be interpreted as them not recognising their victim status or the severity of the abuse they experienced. This was in keeping with how when speaking, gay men have been observed to have low awareness of IPV (Island and Letellier, 1991; Merrill and Wolfe, 2000). Their knowledge of abuse is obfuscated by how heterosexual female experiences and gender representations have enshrined to the public narrative of IPV (Donovan and Hester, 2015). To that end, IPV literature characterises 'minimisation' as the denial and deflection of blame by men for the abuse they enacted against women (Dobash et al., 2000) as opposed to what is observed in this study in which men present abuse they endured as trivial and unimportant. This was illustrated below, as Sam and his partner worked together to minimise and render the abuse, as it transpired, invisible:

'He struck me to my face, and I was really taken aback, and I was like, 'what the hell was that about?' And he was like, 'I was only messing'. And I didn't know what possessed me at the time to minimise it immediately, but I went, 'oh it wasn't even sore anyway, I get you, very funny'. It is a big joke we are all in on. He looked at me really funny and he was like, 'that didn't hurt?' And I was like, 'no it didn't'. And then he hit me far harder and said, 'you won't forget that one'. And I was like, 'no I won't'' (Sam)

The minimisation performed by Sam and his gay partner was conceptualised by Clarkson (2005), as 'straight acting' in which gay men conform to hegemonic masculine stereotypes such as trivialisation and endurance (Connell, 2005). Unique to Sam's biographical work was his

awareness that he intentionally minimised his abuse: *'he would hit me and immediately I would minimise it completely, oh he didn't mean it, he was having a bad day'*. This narrative technique was mirrored by Cole: *'where you still blot it out... you brush yourself off, you just brush it off, you go this is fine, we are ploughing on as we are, and this is grand, and this is great'*. On the other hand, George had a stronger tendency to neutralise the severity of his abuse. This was clear in his response to his boyfriend's death threats to kill him and his friends: *'I don't think this was an unusual situation, I think it was just a very scary experience for him' 'I was trying to normalise my situation with this guy who was absolutely trying to destroy my life'*. For George, these narrative techniques deflect being perceived as a victim and extend this portrayal to his partner: *'I didn't think that I was a victim at all, I thought he was the victim, this poor guy'*.

In structuring the invisible narrative, men intercepted their abuse through generalised commentary. Generalising was a form of distant abstraction in which men converted detailed facts pertaining to their abuse into elusive and broad statements. This allowed men to stay emotionally distant from their stories and diverted attention away from the specifications and severity of their abuse: *'he would fly into a rage over the most simple thing you know' 'So it was like just loads of stuff like that (Will) 'I suffered quite a lot of explosions from him' 'he was being a bit strange about things' 'constant unpleasant behaviour' (George) 'that is really when things took a swan dive personally for both of us' 'putting up with the behaviour' (Sam) 'But he would just fly off the handle' (Tom) 'in a fit of rage' 'because lots of stuff happens' (James).* This aligns with how stoicism, ambiguity and composure aided men in preserving their masculinity (Burcar and Akerström, 2009; Durfee, 2011). As a common thread to their narratives, men spoke indirectly about their abuse through abstract metaphors: *'show his true colours' 'all hell used to break loose' 'he was just acting the eejit again' (Will) 'lost his shit' George) 'swan dive' (Sam).* Through generalisation, men ciphered abuse over multiple incidents rather than highlighting a single incident that risked them adopting a victim and vulnerable stance. This was exemplified by Sam when he generalised the entirety of his experiences of

physical abuse as *'the handful of times he hit me'*. At the same time, generalisation counteracted the trauma and feelings associated with their abuse and aligned with more accessible aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995).

As a distinct feature of the invisibility narrative, men in this study questioned the legitimacy of their abuse experiences. Legitimation concerns the compliance to one's constructed social reality and the schemas, norms and patterns of behaviour embedded (Zelditch, 2001). It is through this cultural endorsement that gay men can explain and support their existence and the legitimacy of their experiences (Ridgeway and Berger, 1986). More specifically, the crisis of legitimacy featured in men's live stories illustrated that they construed their abuse by their gay partners as illegitimate, not factually relevant, worthy or deserving of attention. The question *'does it count though?'* posed separately by Will, Sam, and Cole defines this crisis of legitimacy. This was echoed in Tom's portrayal of imposter syndrome *'it always gives me imposter syndrome when these conversations come up that I am like my story is not the best story'*. Across cases, the vernacular of the 'male abused self' was marked by persistent questioning, uncertainty and hesitancy. In one sense, these two perspectives are perpetually at war, in which men seek to talk about abuse but discredit the validity of these experiences for example: *'I'm unsure if my experience wholly qualifies as domestic abuse (Sam) 'Am I the right person to be interviewed? I feel like I shouldn't be here usurping a position by doing this interview (Tom) 'I have anxieties around what I experienced domestic violence' 'well you wonder sometimes does it count though?'* (James) *'I don't define what I have gone through as bad'* (Cole). This was replicated by Tom who simultaneously asserted and doubted the credibility of his abuse up to the point of participating in his interview: *'Even though I know what this study is about and what it is for I still went back and looked at screen shots to nearly like justify it to myself. So, I don't know why I am othering myself in the narrative'* (Tom).

Due to their diverse sexualities, gay men have a long tradition of dealing with legitimacy (Cannon, 2020). This is because heterosexuality constitutes the basis for legitimacy (Ingraham, 1994). With the recursive narration of heterosexual relationship plots, heterosexuality lends an authority to how relationships are legitimised (Mills and White, 1997). Consequently, gay male relationships are often situated outside the circle of legitimacy (Butler 2006; Connell, 1995). For men in this study, the crisis of legitimation was the result of having no repertoire from which to articulate abuse operating within gay male relationships. This observation was poignantly exemplified by Sam.

'I had no frame of reference really for a long term relationship before that point. And I especially had no frame of reference for a gay relationship long term with two guys or two girls interacting in a relationship for a long period of time to gauge it off. There was no visibility whether it was in my personal life with other friends that I had or even in the media. I didn't have the words to ask someone for help and I didn't know how to say to myself or even to question myself is this right? There wasn't the language then in my own life anyway for me to vocalise any of that' (Sam)

When Sam is asked what it was like to experience abuse with no frame of reference. His answer epitomises the extent of the 'invisibility narrative' in which his abuse experiences were not legitimised by his public world: *'It was very lonely'*. The search for legitimacy was driven by heteronormativity embedded in broader cultural beliefs, values, and norms which serve to universalize particular modes of living (Bower, 1997). Discourses are the building blocks through which men construct versions of their worlds (Plummer, 2001). They also provide the basis for legitimacy (Van Dijk, 1998). With this in mind, IPV and masculinity discourses continue to legitimise heterosexual female abuse. Therefore, the inextricable linkage of victimhood to femininity (i.e. passivity, vulnerability, weakness etc) within cultural accounts has led to abuse being understood as mostly impacting on women (Corbally, 2015; Donovan and Barnes, 2019). As mentioned previously this has been encapsulated as the public story of IPV (Donovan and Hester, 2015), Consequently, the men in this study constructed abuse as a non-inclusive category inherent with characteristics of womanhood and heterosexuality. Based

on such selective criteria, they struggled to secure a position within this category, forming the basis of their legitimacy crisis:

'I wouldn't have thought of myself as a person who would end up in a potentially domestic violent or volatile relationship because we are always told, it is always like the downtrodden housewife and the alcoholic husband. Like we are handed caricatures in the media that inform what it is we think those things look like and I didn't see myself reflected in those so I didn't expect to see myself in it in real life' (Tom).

As highlighted by the cases below, men suggested that physical abuse was central to the perceived legitimacy of abuse: *'I am sorry I've just looked at the ad again. I should point out that I didn't actually suffer physical abuse' (Will)* *'I don't even know if this counts as violence because he didn't hit me' (Sam)* *'So now we are in a position where no physical violence to me has ever happened' (James).* *'the typical abusive thing where somebody is afraid, they are going to physically get hurt' (Cole).* This is attributed to how men perceive their own masculinity and the emphasis on physically masculine traits in male socialisation (Connell, 2005). As Cruz (2003) postulates: *'when we remember that males are typically socialised to express anger and aggression via physical means, some gay men might view domestic violence as proscribed and gender-typical behaviours' (p. 310).* It was telling that Cole stopped his interview completely to seek legitimacy for his narrative: *'are you happy enough with how it is going, is there enough material to work with? I was concerned that the quality wasn't as in depth as whether it was physical abuse'.* The narrative portrayal that abuse solely encompasses physical acts was found among previous cohorts of gay and heterosexual men (Moore and Stuart 2005; Toro-Alfonso and Rodriguez-Madera, 2004;). Tom's exemplar showcases that the physicality of his abuse lends a necessitated legitimacy to his story:

'My story is only valid by the fact that it ended with a physical altercation... Some part of me very clearly knew that it was going to end in some kind of physical altercation but somehow couldn't do the mental gymnastics to leave before it happened. I think I needed some kind of proof because it was always going to be my word versus his and I think having that moment happen felt very solid to me as a thing....

I actually needed this to happen because it was real, people saw it and it was physical. I think everything up to that point I was like maybe I am being really sensitive at the minute, maybe I am really not in a great space mentally. Maybe I am blowing all this

out of proportion, maybe, maybe, maybe. But actually, this was something and it was tacit, it was physical, and it happened in public... I have a real reason to walk away now, I am not making it up. I wasn't over stating it, I wasn't overplaying it, it is there now, and it is done, and I think people will believe this'. (Tom).

Tom's narrative represents a clear positioning of 'self' as 'illegitimate' in which physical evidence is required to establish legitimacy: 'proof' 'my word versus his' 'it was real' 'tacit'. This corresponds to how the public story of IPV is highly schematised towards physical abuse inflicted by 'strong' 'big' men (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This perspective is not very accepting of male victims, given their perceived portrayal as physically dominant, aggressive and capable of self-defence. Notably, in Donovan and Hester's community survey of LGBTQ victims, gay men were observed to be particularly influenced by the public story and struggled to recognize their abusive experiences if physical abuse was not present. Similarly, Zverina and colleagues (2011) recorded that physical abuse served as evidence and to legitimise and bolster victim status. Therefore, at the source of men's illegitimacy, is how the physical stature of the male bodies do not confirm how abuse is constructed within traditionally female narratives (Butler 1999; Connell, 2005). This observation was poignantly pointed out by Tom:

'I think when it comes to domestic violence, it is always images of bruises and shadows and people hiding in corners. We don't look like someone who would take a punch. I would be well spoken, well educated, well able to go, well built, nothing about me seemed like the person that you see in the media that goes through those things. You know they are portrayed to be frail, fragile, small, you know, all of those things that explains why they are the kind of person who might end up in that relationship'.

In summary, this section has highlighted that the invisibility surrounding men's abuse was perpetuated by society (public invisibility) and, in turn, was internalised by men themselves (intimate invisibility). As further evidence of the influence of men's masculinity, participants downplayed and generalised their abuse and vulnerability. Such displays of stoicism seemed deeply rooted in the retelling of men's life stories, likely reflecting a response to societal expectations associated with normative masculinity (Connell, 2005). The next section presents

the vulnerability narrative relating to men's expressions of how they first resisted but finally made peace with their vulnerability.

6.3.3 The Vulnerability Narrative:

Abuse narratives in which vulnerabilities are laid bare, are recognised for being particularly difficult to tell (Plummer 1995). Vulnerability in men's life stories had two meanings; referring to their vulnerability to be subjected to abuse but also their capacity to be candid or open about their vulnerability and abuse experiences (Hoffmaster, 2006). It was found that men expressed difficulty expressing their vulnerable sides and mobilised narrative strategies to avoid exposing their own vulnerability. As previously discussed, the 'fixer narrative' and the 'invisibility narrative' were a means by which men could articulate their abuse but mask the vulnerability entrenched in this process.

A prominent theme emerges in study as men's articulation of their abuse is closely tied to their performative masculinity. In particular, their difficulty with expressing vulnerability is likely because vulnerability is seen as a central attribute of femininity and thus forbidden within masculine discourses (see section 6.1). Traditionally, female bodies are thought to be more vulnerable due to their smaller size, perceived lack of strength, and susceptibility to physical assault. Conversely, men's bodies are typically perceived as larger, stronger, and somewhat invulnerable (Hollander, 2001). Despite the challenge men encountered in articulating vulnerability, it remained at the heart of each of their abuse narratives. This section delves into how men depicted their vulnerability.

The term 'vulnerability' is a derivation from the Latin word '*vulnus*' meaning 'wound' (Mackenzie et al., 2014). Humans share the same capacity to be wounded either physically or

emotionally (Hoffmaster, 2006). Meaning at some point, we experience vulnerability and identify as ‘vulnerable’. The six participants in this study underwent chronic abuse, and therefore were no exception to wounding and suffering: *‘I was really hurt by that’* (Will) *‘he said some quite hurtful things to me’* (George) *‘That was really, really hurtful’* (Sam) *‘I was just really hurt’* (Tom) *‘he could probably have hurt me pretty badly’* (James) *‘I was deeply hurt’* (Cole). The capacity to be vulnerable was most recognised by Cole who philosophised: *‘I am vulnerable, I am fragile, like every other human’* (Cole). It is the actions of others that contribute to how vulnerability occurs, points out Martha Nussbaum (2006). Similarly, for the men, the ‘vulnerability narrative’ was made intelligible by the actions of their partners, who as opposed to support and care, exercised abuse and control. Here, the men’s portrayal of abuse epitomises what it is to be vulnerable:

‘I remember feeling kind of really helpless and really powerless and actually quite frightened’ (Will)

‘Em... complete hopelessness I guess, powerlessness. There were times I think I would think of suicide thinking that I was in a completely helpless situation’ (George)

‘Helplessness... like severe uncomfortability in my own body because being there was physically and emotionally uncomfortable. It was trepidation and fear’ (Sam)

‘It was really embarrassing and quite degrading’ (Tom)

‘It was traumatic, which was very upsetting, it made me feel somewhat not great, used, taken advantage of’ (James)

‘You are powerless, where you are powerless to stop it’ (Cole)

As a key feature of the vulnerability narrative, men conveyed their vulnerabilities as a reason for their abuse. This narrative thread was coined ‘the vulnerable position’. Survivors of abuse are frequently asked ‘why do they stay?’ or ‘why do they not just leave?’ (Anderson et al., 2003). Thereby, the ‘vulnerability narrative’ was underpinned by how men seemingly anticipated and answered this question. This dominant narrative expression: *‘I was vulnerable when I met him’* (Will) emerged as a frequently expressed term. This was strongly articulated by men who collectively drew upon their own vulnerability to explain their abuse justifying why they found

themselves in abusive relationships. Defining themselves as ‘vulnerable’ served a particular purpose; in which men demonstrated their victim worthiness; as being deserving of compassion and empathy. The narrative strategy of the ‘vulnerable narrative’ was characterised by how men drew on their personal plight: *‘if you are a victim of something it is because you were vulnerable in the first place whether it was your fault or not is different, but you are vulnerable’* *‘whatever vulnerabilities he saw in me to be able to pick at me’* (Cole). Further examples of men’s portrayal of the ‘vulnerable position’ are illustrated below.

‘I met this guy and because I think I was so vulnerable, and I was very lonely...there was so much other crazy stuff going on in my life because I, you know, I basically lost em...my relationship with my mother. Em...you know, lonely in England. So, I think it was a case of, well, it was better off being with somebody than being with nobody, you know. Em... so my guard was down.’ (Will)

‘But at the end of the day I am not ashamed to admit that the only reason I was with him was that I didn't want to be lonely, I didn't want to just be this sad guy who was single and at least I had a beautiful blond young man who was interested in me even though he tried to kill me numerous times’(George)

‘It was kind of like I can go and be alone forever, forever alone, or stay with him and be miserable but at that stage I didn't know how to be by myself and be happy in myself and to see my own self-worth. So, I didn't know... I knew that there must be some other option, but I did not know what that option was supposed to feel like. So, in retrospect I chose better the devil you know that taking the plunge and try something different and something just for you, something just for me, sorry’ (Sam).

‘I am completely burned out and feel like shit and dead inside because I had just finished up a doctorate and I was working three jobs while writing up at the end as well. And like in a very bad place mental health wise’ (James)

‘But I think it was the series of events before that that put me in the place and position that I was in to be vulnerable, to be available to that. I am not sure had the sexual assault and my grandfather dying happened and me being at a very low ebb emotionally at the time, I probably would have been a bit more aware or a lot less available for some of that stuff... I think he saw that and latched onto it and played into that fear and twisted that to his own uses and devices at the time’ (Tom).

‘At the time I was in a very, very stressful time of my life, I was doing my master's, I was buying a house, just a lot going on for me at the time. And yeah, work was particularly stressful’(Cole).

Despite men’s idiosyncratic expressions of plight, they collectively looked towards biographic explanations to make sense of their abuse: *‘very lonely’* (Will) *‘lonely’* (George) *‘alone forever’* (Sam) *‘a very bad place’* (James) *‘very low’* (Tom) *‘very stressful’* (Cole). Therefore,

explorations of personal vulnerability offer a clear vantage point to the 'abused self'. It is worth noting that as a social performance, men in this study explained and justified their actions and decisions and positioned themselves as accountable for their abuse (Goffman, 1990). It is contended that the male vulnerable self is interwoven with self-culpability and self-blame: *'If I was to textbook style read my own story, I would be like, what were you still doing there?'* (Tom) *'I have to own part of that because obviously I let him into a part of my mind where that could happen. I take the blame for that, but it happened'* (Cole) *'I took on every single ounce of the blame that was going'* (Sam). The portrayal of control and blame over their abuse collides with negotiating hegemonic masculinity in which men were expected to be stoic and capable of taking care of themselves (Fohring, 2018; Connell, 2003).

The 'vulnerability position' traced how men balanced their narrative performance of victimisation and masculinity, through subjecting positions of vulnerability to entice further plausibility for their abuse. The bolstering of the 'victim self' served to counteract the 'local culture' in which men were not believed and victim blaming attitudes towards male victims were internalised by men and exuded by society (Christie's 1986; Plummer, 2001). Arguably, questions pertaining to why men stay in their abusive relationships reflect victim-blaming, assigning blame to men as opposed to their perpetrators who bear full responsibility to end the abuse. This type of questioning ignores the 'situated subjectivity' of men's life stories in which 'leaving' was at times not possible or a recognisable option (Wengraf, 2008). It is also presumed easier for gay men to terminate contact with their abusive partner due to stereotypes that they are unable to maintain stable relationships, change partners more frequently, or have fewer responsibilities such as marriage or children (Gates, 2015). These victim blaming attitudes were echoed by Tom: *"you are gay, and you don't have children or possibly couldn't have gotten married there is a sense that you can be like 'let's call it a day, pack up and walk away and never*

have to see each other again'. Overall, the 'vulnerability narrative' was a means for men to account for their abusive experience while counteracting those who wished to blame them.

Throughout their stories, men shared their victimisation and vulnerability equipped by snippets of narrative details. Despite the objective of storying abuse, the majority of their narration was dedicated to masking their vulnerability. This can be conceptualised as a 'male vulnerability crisis,' wherein men grapple with an internalised turmoil, feeling more vulnerable than societal norms expect them to be. In the face of this disturbance, participants attempt to control the portrayal of their vulnerability and how it was perceived by others: *'I could be as vulnerable as I want to be without appearing vulnerable in that moment'* (Tom). For example, James reflected that his abusive partner *'is the only person who will ever love me'* but immediately brushes off this vulnerable moment by commenting *'blah, blah, blah'*. Although these moments of fragility were fleeting, they nevertheless conveyed the depth and breadth of their vulnerability: *'powerless'* (Will) (Cole) *'hopelessness'* (George) *'helplessness'* (Sam).

It should be noted that narratives depicting men's abuse and fragility were not volunteered during the initial interview in which men were asked a SQUIN but were probed by narrative inducing questions during the second interview. This suggested that men did not speak freely nor was it natural to talk about abuse and for meaning-making of vulnerability. Their struggle to articulate abuse coincides with how terms of powerlessness and vulnerability are often overlooked in masculinity discourse (Corbally, 2011).

Central to the 'vulnerability narrative' was men's portrayal of their endurance of abuse. These windows of vulnerability occurred when the narrative strategies and defensive measures mobilised by men were at their most compromised. These passages of vulnerability were expressive of the private self in that they directly concerned men's most inner private feelings

and portrayed moments in which they were most exposed. This was marked by participants, specifying abuse, particularising emotions and strongly reliving memories that typically centred on their isolation, embarrassment and exposure to extreme harm and cruelty. The male ‘abused self’ was construed as a private experience, whereby it typically occurred in the confines of intimate spaces *‘it almost always happened obviously in private but in a situation where it was just me and him’* (George) *it was very internal and very isolating* (Tom) and was made private by the men themselves: *‘I was fully so in my head about it’* (Cole). Examples of the ‘vulnerability narrative’ in which men allowed themselves the vulnerability during their oral narratives are presented below.

‘I would actually be physically crying saying to him you know you em... you're really really upsetting me... You're being really disrespectful and really abusive... he would just laugh; he would just laugh at that... It's like you are crying and you are telling somebody how much damage they are doing to you, and they are laughing at you as if it was a joke’. (Will)

‘I was locked in the room. It was much worse for me because I was completely powerless at that time. Like I said no one could help me, I couldn't even scream or do anything, he could kill me right there and no one was there’. (George)

‘He caught me by the collar, ‘you are nothing but a cunt’, and threw me into a crowd of people. And I was like, like I know all these people, it is a gay bar, we all know each other, and everyone just saw that. I am embarrassed even though this is out of my control, but I am mortified this has happened and that everyone has seen it’. (Tom)

‘She read out the suicide note out to me that she had been planning to leave. As you might expect that was emotionally traumatising and manipulative and all of the other shit obviously. I believe a lot of it was along the lines of, you know, you will be happier now not having to deal with somebody as fucked up as me... Yeah honestly, I would say that is probably the cruellest thing she did’. (James)

‘We proceeded to have sex. Ultimately the consent probably wasn't there. Did I kick and scream about it? No, I didn't, I acquiesced. But straight afterwards I had that horrible feeling of I suppose being taken advantage of’. (Cole)

The men’s articulation of male vulnerability challenged the deep seated gendered assumptions that they themselves carried to the interview. For men, ‘the abused self’ was contrary to traditional representations of masculinity: *‘I wasn't man enough to be able to control the situation’* (George). As explored earlier, these men frequently drew upon discourses of

masculinity and preferred to be perceived as masculine: *'societally speaking men are seen as more aggressive and dominant and whereas females are seen as the softer, warmer, more nurturing type'* (Sam). These attitudes were commonly threaded to narratives told by other male victims (Corbally, 2011; Durfee 2011; Hine et al., 2020; Hogan et al., 2022; Migliaccio, 2002, 2001). For example, George demonstrates how when men's bodies experience abuse, they portray a loss of masculinity: *'it was almost like I became a vulnerable person which you would maybe associate with a feminine situation'* (George). One explanation for why men feminise abuse is found in how male vulnerability has been rendered invisibility by masculinity and abuse ideologies (Burr, 2008). Consequently, stories portraying male victimisation have been classified as 'forbidden' narratives (Allen-Collinson, 2008). Although forbidden, the men's narratives of vulnerability reflect the content of female narratives of abuse (Walkers, 2011). Therefore, their portrayal of vulnerability speaks to being human and how many of us experience at some point the highs of love and companionship, but also the lows of abuse and vulnerability. The next section provides an in-depth analysis of the significant discoveries made in this study, as well as their broader implications.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This biographical narrative study was driven by three key research questions: ‘How *do gay men make sense of their experiences of IPV?*’, ‘*What is the nature of IPV for such men?*’ and ‘*in what way does being a member of a sexual minority group impact their experiences of IPV?*’.

The answers to these inquiries have been presented in the preceding three chapters. This study identified a continuous interplay between men’s intimate and public worlds both of which rendered their abuse invisible (Plummer, 2001).

The findings of this study demonstrate that Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) was intricately woven into the biographical narratives of gay men, offering insights into their portrayal of gay male victimisation. The interconnecting social discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity intersect within the crucible of gay men's lived experiences, influencing the construction of their IPV narratives (Connell, 2003; Rich, 1980; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). These concepts served as the cornerstone of the conceptual framework guiding this study and the related findings are elaborated in greater detail below. In particular, the participants' portrayal of their abuse reflected their understanding and negotiation of their masculinities which involved men adopting traditional ideals aligned with hegemonic masculinity to divert attention from their victimisation in their narrative accounts. Although the findings chapters were interpretively presented with reference to theoretical and research literature throughout, the section below provides additional discussion of the study findings. This chapter presented the findings that emerged from the cross-case theorisation of all six cases. The key findings are summarized on the following page.

Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) featured prominently in the self-portrayal of participants. Traditional masculine attributes including stoicism, control and expressions of invulnerability were preferred means of masculine identity portrayal for the gay men in this study. Their prior experiences of feminisation and subordinated masculinity underscore these performances.

Social discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity informed how the gay men in this study constructed their IPV life stories.

The men described 'traditional abuse' resonating with IPV described in heterosexual relationships. They also described distinct expressions of abuse, here categorised as 'sexual minority abuse' representing a distinct subcategory within the domain of identity abuse.

Donovan and Hester's (2015) relationship rules and practices of love were clearly illustrated in the biographical accounts of these gay men. However, a significant aspect of how the men portrayed these experiences was their emphasis on masculinity.

The men accounted for their abuse through three dominant narratives. This included 'the fixer narrative' 'the invisibility narrative' and 'the vulnerability narrative'. These narratives distanced men from their victimisation and vulnerability.

The findings support the thesis that gay men constitute an invisible minority in society and within their intimate dimensions of their relationships. Not only did their abuse go ignored or unrecognised by others, but the men in this study internalised their own invisibility by downplaying the severity and significance of their abuse. They employed persistent narrative techniques, including minimization, generalisation, and neutralisation.

The 'vulnerability narrative' marked the moment when the men no longer masked but articulated their vulnerability before and throughout the abusive experience. There was a sense of self-culpability and blame permeating these narrative portrayals.

A crisis of legitimacy emerged when gay men faced challenges aligning their experiences of abuse with heteronormative and gendered constructs, leading them to question the credibility of their narratives.

Figure 12: Key findings that emerged from the cross-case theorisation of all six cases.

Overall, masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity proved to be influential social discourses for participants, impacting them both as gay men and as IPV victims. This influence stems from the plethora of expressions, behaviours and qualities associated with what it means to be a man in society. The men in this study had to negotiate this on a daily basis, shaping their worldviews, experiences, identities and even their interpretations of their own adversity. To that end, Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) has emerged as a valuable conceptual framework

for analysing the self-portrayal of abused gay men. For instance, hegemonic masculinity was socially defined by stigmatising femininity and homosexuality, thus participants were perceived as deviating from the established norm of masculinity and subject to frequent feminisation in their life stories (Connell, 2005; Messner, 1994). This reflected Doan (2010)'s 'tyranny of gender', illustrating the constraints imposed on the expression of gender among sexual minority groups amidst the landscapes of heteronormativity and homophobia. Put differently, this study found that gay men portrayed a multitude of masculinities, as their abuse narratives presented a stage upon which they could continue to perform their gender. By virtue of their sexuality and perceived masculinity, these individuals were often relegated to a 'subordinated masculinity.' In response, they adhered to more accessible aspects of 'hegemonic masculinity,' which was associated with greater power and societal approval (Beynon, 2002; Connell, 2005). This was evident in the exaggerated displays of stoicism among gay men, their tendency to downplay their experiences of abuse, and their emphasis on maintaining masculine identities throughout their storytelling. In line with Cruz's observations (2000), participants in this study interpreted their abusive partner's acts of violence as manifestations of 'hegemonic masculinity,' reinforcing the notion that aggression, stoicism and dominance are inherent in the social construction of masculinity. This study builds on the findings of earlier research emphasising the relevance of Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) in examining abusive relationships involving gay men (Cruz, 2000; Island and Letellier, 1991; Kay and Jeffies, 2010; Oliffe et al., 2014; Oringher and Samuelson, 2011). The diverse expressions of 'gay masculinity' among men could offer insights into the dynamics of power within their abusive relationships. For example, men may choose to preserve their identity through fixing, rendering them more susceptible to victimisation, or through displays of dominance and control, rendering them more susceptible to perpetrating IPV. Either way, it is evident that the study of men's masculinities is key to understanding the presence of IPV in their intimate relationships.

The findings from this study are important because they identify strong associations between gender (masculinities) and IPV among gay men, thereby illuminating a previously overlooked facet of gay men's health. This includes the insight that presenting as masculine is central to how these victims understand and articulate their abuse, which holds critical implications for future practitioners and scholars. Therefore, the focus of these participants should be on identifying as men and negotiating manhood, rather than solely focusing on their sexual orientation as gay men, which is a key insight from this study. To that end, it was found that these gay men, like all individuals, navigated complex webs of identity beyond just their sexuality. They grappled with the expectations, norms, and pressures associated with masculinity, both in public spheres and within the intimacy of their private lives. In other words, when conducting a study on gay men, it is easy to focus primarily on their sexual identities and experiences of sexual marginalisation. However, it is important to also acknowledge their universal experiences of negotiating manhood and recognize the inherent challenges this presents when facing IPV. Additionally, the findings provide direct evidence of the strategies mobilised by gay men to talk about abuse but in ways that preserve their masculinity, including the fixer, vulnerability, and invisibility narrative. By shedding light on these nuanced narrative approaches, the study enhances our understanding of how gay men navigate and communicate their experiences of abuse within intimate relationships. This is invaluable for future victims, as it provides a framework for recognizing and addressing abusive dynamics, ultimately empowering such individuals to recognize IPV and seek support.

Overall, the lack of space for male victimisation, open communication and displays of vulnerability in masculine discourses hindered men as victims from narrating their experiences of IPV. Thus doing 'gay masculinity' entailed men counterbalancing feminisation by continually adopting more masculinised performances in their life stories. Presenting as more heteronormatively masculine emerged as a strategic approach for men to assimilate into heteronormative society while also providing a means to articulate experiences of IPV more

comfortably, preserving their masculine identities. Overall, these hypermasculinized performances performed by gay men were not surprising but rather understandable, considering men had little choice but to respond to the ongoing feminisation they experienced related to their abuse and sexual identities. Therefore, the leveraging of masculine identities over victim identities (which they viewed as feminine and likely to add to their feminisation) was not merely a preference for gay men in this study; but rather arised from the necessity for them to conform to societal expectations that prohibit the expression of femininity, vulnerability, and victimisation within the context of their life stories.

Findings distilled from the life stories of gay men suggest they accounted for IPV through two distinct abuse categories, which included 'traditional abuse' and 'sexual minority abuse'. 'Traditional abuse' traced how current definitions of IPV incorporated men's perspectives. The men constructed patterns of abuse congruent with those identified in heterosexual couples. Moreover, IPV paradigms developed from heterosexual female cohorts usefully captured the abuse patterns portrayed by men in this study (Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2007; Walker, 1979). In addition, men expressed distinct forms of IPV which were associated with their sexual minority status, previously referred to within the umbrella category of identity abuse, reflecting both experiences perpetrated by an abusive partner, as well as broader collective experiences from society.

It is suggested here that sexual minority abuse, however, is distinct from how identity abuse has been described in the literature, e.g. when a partner attempts to control and undermine the sexual identities of the victimised individual (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This study identified aspects of IPV that were not fully covered within the category of 'identity abuse'. Sexual minority abuse, can therefore be considered as a subset within the broader category of identity abuse, illustrating distinct forms of abuse that gay men encountered, shaped by 'minority stress' and men's experiences of heteronormativity and homophobia (Meyer, 2003). Given that gay men come

from invisible and marginalised backgrounds, it underscores the importance of understanding not only individual abusive relationships but also the societal context in which these experiences occur due to the pervasive influence of heteronormativity and homophobia. This terminology may facilitate a more nuanced exploration of the dynamics surrounding abuse, encompassing not only aspects related to the victim's sexual identity but also experiences rooted in their sexual marginalisation, including inadequate levels of family support, encounters with heteronormativity and homophobia, and denial of access to the LGBTQ community. Overall, sexual minority abuse challenges the conventional perspective of IPV, whereby sexuality and gender were not fixed but emerged as fluid social constructs and IPV was portrayed in diverse relationships beyond just monogamous pairings. This emphasises the significance of exploring these nuances, including the individual's sexual identity, gender identity, and relationship type, when investigating gay men's abusive interpersonal relationships.

Regarding how gay men talk about IPV, three dominant narratives were featured in their life stories. This included 'the fixer narrative', 'the invisibility narrative' and 'the vulnerability narrative'. A prevalent theme among these narratives was the emphasis men placed on masculine attributes such as stoicism, control, resilience which was cultivated through their portrayal as 'fixer', as men strategically minimised their abusive experiences and diverted attention away from their vulnerability in their narrative portrayal. This delicate balancing act was elucidated by men's positioning themselves within social discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity. It encompasses the intricate interplay between contradictory constructs of masculinity, femininity, and IPV, which sometimes serve to suppress and deny male victimisation (Akerstrom et al., 2011). Thus, gay men's IPV narratives showcase how they talk about their abuse experiences but in ways which align with prevailing masculine norms, even in the face of their victimisation. Understandably, gay men prioritise socially acceptable aspects of heteronormative masculinity when discussing their IPV experiences, given that

discourse entailing male victimisation are often socially unacceptable for men to speak openly about (Allen-Collinson 2008; Corbally, 2011).

Social constructions of IPV and masculinity were found to undermine the legitimacy of gay men's abuse impacting how they framed their abuse experiences. This was because both ideologies enshrine heterosexuality and femininity into their core conceptualisation (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Huntley et al., 2019; Moore, 2021). Subsequently, men in this study faced a two-fold marginalisation by virtue of their gender. Society, at times, perceived them as perpetrators rather than victims. Additionally, their sexual orientation introduced another layer of complexity, as society often struggled to recognize or comprehend the abuse found within their sexual minority relationships. In light of this, participants in this study persistently questioned the legitimacy of their IPV experiences. The question '*does it count though?*' asked by three men epitomises this legitimacy crisis, whereby gay men expressed doubt over the credibility of their own abuse experiences. This was not surprising, given the absence of formulaic stories and references related to gay male IPV for participants to draw upon. This prompted participants to draw their own comparisons and harbour doubts about their own experiences of abuse in light of heteronormative constructions of IPV.

Lastly, the "vulnerability narrative" differed from the others, suggesting that it was the most challenging for men to narrate. Despite their preference for masking their fragility, there were selective windows in which men articulated the depth of their vulnerability. Men positioned their personal struggles as having placed them in a 'vulnerable position' to experience IPV. Thus, the vulnerability narrative served to reinforce characteristics of an 'ideal victim' (passive, innocent, vulnerable etc), as to redress societal victim-blaming and gender stereotypes embedded in men's life stories (Christie, 1986; Goffman, 1976). Therefore, gay men conveyed how their public perceptions of masculinity contradicted their private expressions of vulnerability and victimisation, facing scepticism from society (Plummer, 2001). In response,

these men framed the vulnerability narrative as a private experience that posed a threat to their fundamental sense of masculinity and endeavoured to conceal these narratives whenever possible. In a cultural context where masculinity is associated with strength and invulnerability (Connell, 2005), the admission of vulnerability remains a complex and sensitive matter for male victims. Consequently, as long as vulnerability and victimisation remain socially constructed as feminine experiences, men, specifically those who have been feminised, such as gay men will continue to hide these expressions. This highlights the need to challenge stereotypes and outdated norms that associate vulnerability and victimisation exclusively with femininity. By doing so, there is a potential for men to feel more empowered to articulate their IPV experiences without compromising their sense of masculinity. Recommendations toward achieving this endeavour are outlined in this chapter. Having presented an overview of the findings from the individual case studies and the cross-case analysis, the following section critically examines these findings in relation to the three research questions which underpinned this study.

7.1 How Gay Men Make Sense of IPV

There have been significant academic efforts to extend knowledge of IPV in cisgender heterosexual male to female relationships. However, relatively little is known about what transpires in abusive gay relationships and how gay men make sense of these experiences. The six interpretive cases contribute to filling in these gaps in the literature. In particular, these cases provide insight into IPV as it is uniquely experienced and understood by these six gay men. **A key finding of this study was that gay men accounted for abuse in individualistic ways.** As evident from their life stories, the narrative style of men differed in the same way that fingerprints do. These distinct narrative stylings represent the distinguishing ridges and valley patterns of a fingerprint; they demonstrate that the way gay men account for abuse was highly individualised.

The first aim of this study was to discover how gay men accounted for IPV in their biographies. It was revealed that men faced challenges in recognising themselves as victims of abuse, instead opting for narratives which concealed their own vulnerability and IPV experiences. This was compatible with findings from Island and Letellier, (1991) and Merrill and Wolfe (2000) who observed that gay men possessed limited knowledge of IPV and were unable to recognize their own abusive experiences. It is notable that little has changed since the publication of their research two decades ago. One reason men in this study found it difficult to identify IPV was due to the covert and individualistic nature of their experiences. The examples of coercive control described by the men in earlier chapters were deeply intertwined with the fabric of their daily lives, making it challenging for them to outwardly perceive these as instances of IPV (Stark, 2007). The complexity of defining abuse in an intimate context is exemplified by how many examples provided by men did not typically represent traditional predefined definitions of IPV but were situationally contingent and captured only by an inductive interviewing style. The individuality embedded in the men's IPV narratives illuminates the shortcomings of policy and quantitative research methods, especially those utilising a limited index of predefined definitions and survey items to 'measure' violence. To that end, examining gay men's individualised cases of IPV elucidated on more grounded descriptions of this phenomenon, which may aid gay men in recognising abuse in the future.

Despite the heterogeneity of men's narratives, they shared common narrative techniques when accounting for IPV. It was found that men oscillated between 'the fixer narrative' and 'the invisibility narrative', as a means to articulate abuse while masking their own vulnerability. These narratives underscored how gay men placed importance on performatively preserving their masculinity when accounting for IPV (Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005). Collectively, these findings showcase the influence of social discourses of heteronormativity, femininity and masculinity on gay men as they articulate their abuse experiences. Notably,

similar masculine presentations (including attributes of control, stoicism and autonomy) were mirrored by abused heterosexual men (Corbally, 2011; Dixon et al., 2020; Durfee, 2011; Morgan and Wells, 2016). This may suggest that, although our understanding of gender has advanced to acknowledge that any individual (regardless of their gender or sexual identity) can fluidly embody both masculine or feminine self-performances (Messerschmidt, 2004), the narratives of men in this study reflect deeply rooted gender norms and stereotypes (e.g., the notion that men refrain from openly discussing or displaying vulnerability while women do so freely). This underscores the continued impact of gendered language on how such victims account for IPV. It necessitates revisiting the origins of gender norms which remain deeply ingrained within society today. It is important to identify specific gender norms (i.e. masculinities and femininities) within victim cohorts, as they will influence how individuals interpret and articulate their experiences of IPV. Particularly for abused gay men, delving into their perceptions of masculinities is recommended.

By focusing on gender, this study has not only identified how men's positioning within gender and heteronormative discourses resulted in the minimization of their abuse but has also uncovered some possible reasons or motivations behind this, traced to their life histories and prior socialisation as gay men. For example, men's past experiences of subordinated masculinity, homophobia, and feminisation foreshadowed the significance they placed on masculine identities and elucidated why they concealed and rationalised their abuse. These findings highlight the applicability of Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) and the social discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity as important theoretical perspectives to trace gay men's positioning within the gender order of society and recognize that social constructions of gender and gender roles impact how gay men behave, perceive their world, as well as how they articulate their IPV victimisation. In essence, gaining a deeper understanding of the role of gender in gay men's experiences of IPV carries significant

implications for practice. The construction of their identities, behaviour, and responses to IPV is shaped by social discourses surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity. However, these discourses act as barriers to seeking help, as stereotypes surrounding same-gender relationships, gay identities, and male victimisation emerged in this study as harmful, underscoring the necessity for future efforts to challenge and dispel them. Doing so is crucial for facilitating access to help and informing therapeutic interventions.

The expression ‘men like to fix things’ is commonly used to describe a tendency for men who enjoy and feel compelled to solve problems or address issues, whether they are practical, emotional, or related to relationships (Doucet and Merla, 2007; Gelber, 1997). These tendencies were captured in this study, when gay men portrayed wanting to ‘fix’ their abusive partner. It is arguable that the fixer identity originates from how men were taught problem-solving skills, logical thinking, risk-taking, and maintaining composure and control over challenging situations. These attributes manifest in their life stories through expressions of care, taking responsibility for their abusive partner's well-being, and actively solving problems on their behalf (Hyde and Lindberg, 2014; Levant, 1992). A second explanation reinforces the validity of Connell’s (2005) masculinity theory, linking ‘fixing’ to masculine social interactions and performances. In particular, the fixer narrative reflects men’s positioning within social discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Specifically, these men engaged in socially accepted expressions of masculinity as a means to counterbalance their experiences of feminization, heteronormativity and homophobia evident in their life stories (Connell, 2003; Island and Letellier, 1991; Kay and Jeffries, 2010). Therefore, adopting a fixer identity appeared more socially acceptable than embracing their identities as gay men or male victims, prompting a critical examination of societal attitudes toward this demographic and our collective responsibility to create more inclusive and supportive

environments where all individuals feel empowered to embrace their identities and seek the support they need without fear of judgement or discrimination.

Similarly, both heterosexual and gay men were found to portray empathetic characteristics towards their abusers (Entill and Cipolletta, 2017; McCann, 2011). Mcgrath and Oakley (2012) refer to these narrative descriptions as 'pathological altruism'. Moreover, 'fixing' was reminiscent of 'traumatic bonding' characterised as emotional attachments between the abuser and victim. Synonymous with fixing, traumatic bonding is laden with self-blame, compassion and neutralising abusive behaviour (Carnes, 1997). In a similar vein, this study developed our understanding of the ways in which abused gay men engage in 'practices of love,' notably through their portrayal as the fixer. Despite enduring abuse, these individuals were driven by discourses of love, embracing values such as privacy, loyalty, fidelity, and care for their abusive partners. This may explain why men often show empathy, develop trauma bonds, and take on caregiving roles in their relationships. Arguably, 'fixing' left men more malleable to abuse; in particular, to coming into contact with those perceived as vulnerable and in need, as is often the intentional portrayal of themselves of many abusers (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This reinforces recent research which has linked empathy as a mediating factor to IPV victimisation (Dodaj et al., 2020; Effiong et al., 2022).

Traditionally, 'fixing' has been associated with femininity or women's roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers (Enander and Holmberg, 2008; Ferraro and Johnson, 1983; Marden and Rice, 1995). Fixing has been more recently studied in the context of 'relationship rules' for LGBTQ victims where the perpetrator establishes the terms of the relationship (rule one), and the victim assumes entire responsibility for the emotional labour within the relationship (rule two). This study has demonstrated the applicability of Donovan and Hester's (2015) relationship rules and practices of love to account for how gay men make sense of their experiences of IPV. This would

suggest that conceptual frameworks and paradigms tailored to LGBTQ abusive relationships are particularly beneficial to study abuse in gay male victim cohorts. However, it is suggested that gay men navigate love and relationship rules by presenting themselves as masculine and infusing their storytelling with masculine narrative portrayals. Hence, a significant contribution of this study to the existing literature lies in the suggestion that masculinity plays a crucial role in shaping how gay men perceive and articulate their experiences of IPV.

In this study, the enactment of the 'fixer narrative' was characterised as assuming control, confronting challenges directly, and endeavouring to repair what was broken with strength, resilience, and determination. This depiction builds on Donovan and Hester's (2015) relationship rule two, which illustrates how the victim, driven by feelings of love and fear of violence, assumes the role of caretaker in the relationship. However, what distinguishes the fixer narrative is its interpretation as a hyper-masculine portrayal, where men embody identities celebrated in masculine discourse, such as the breadwinner, rescuer, or problem solver. Given that participants in this study demonstrated a tendency to try to fix their ex-partners even after their relationships had ended, the fixer narrative in this study sheds light on how a masculine narrative identity can extend beyond the abusive relationship and persist as post-relationship abuse. It is suggested that researchers investigating relationship rules and practices of love, as delineated by Donovan and Hester (2015), further develop this line of inquiry to examine how relationship rules and love practices extend beyond the boundaries of the abusive relationship itself, thereby resulting in long-term consequences for the victim.

The fixer narrative is situated within the context of abused gay men, offering cultural sensitivity and insight into how these victims articulate their abuse while positioning themselves within discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity. As society progresses in its comprehension of gender, there will exist a necessity to account for the gendered stereotypes

that influence how victims comprehend and articulate IPV. In this study, gay male victims navigated abusive relationships within the confines of outdated gender norms and stereotypes, in which gay men are feminised but expected to conform to high standards of masculinity. In essence, this study sheds light on how these men embody 'gay masculinity' by accentuating their masculine selves as the 'fixer' when recounting their abuse narratives. This exploration is crucial for developing support systems and interventions that are not only effective but also culturally sensitive, acknowledging the diverse ways in which abused gay men present their abuse and engage with normative discourse of gender and heteronormativity.

In particular, the fixer narrative showcased more socially acceptable aspects of men's masculinity, including breadwinning, protecting, problem solving and rescuing etc. which notably coexisted with traditionally feminine values including helping, caring, and sensitivity (Connell, 2005). This demonstrates that gender norms are contextually and culturally contingent and were reshaped overtime (Butler, 1999). Thus, these findings may suggest a shift in contemporary masculinities to reflect how men perform more caring roles (Wojnicka, 2021). For example, the fixer narrative may provide support for Miller's (2011) theoretical framing of 'caring masculinity', which recognizes that more men renounce patriarchal domination and embrace the caring values previously endorsed by women, such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality. While implications of caring masculinities have largely explained attentive fathers, it has not yet been fully theorised in relation to the portrayal of male IPV victimisation. Findings of this study are perhaps demonstrative of a new facet of caring masculinity; in that as 'fixers' gay men embraced caring roles in their relationships but for a more masculine agenda to feel empowered and in control, yet these portrayals left them more vulnerable to be abused. Lastly, given that language connoting IPV and vulnerability is difficult for men to identify and articulate, the 'fixer narrative' constitutes a meaningful dialogue in

which men can more comfortably convey their abuse experiences. The wider implications of the fixer narrative will be explored in this chapter.

The struggle for men in this study to share vulnerability was a key finding of this study.

Since IPV entails some of the most vulnerable human experiences, it is no surprise that emotional inexpressiveness, avoidance and minimisation were central to men's narrative performances. This was linked to the suppression of male vulnerability within paradoxical social and academic discourses, as traditional masculine ideologies purport men as invincible and stoic; while femininity is tethered to antithetical qualities including expressiveness and vulnerability (Connell, 2003; Connell Messerschmidt, 2005). Similar remarks are made by Hook (2003): 'patriarchal mores teach a form of emotional stoicism to men that says they are more manly if they do not feel, but if by chance they should feel and the feelings get hurt, the manly response is to stuff them down, to forget about them, to hope they go away.' (pp. 5–6). Furthermore, men in this study exhibited a 'male vulnerability crisis' in which they displayed a turbulence between the vulnerability they felt within themselves to the stoicism exterior they presented to society. Heterosexual men portray themselves similarly (Hogan et al. 2022; Huntley et al. 2019). Nevertheless, men's eventual expressions of vulnerability in their biographies led to a deeper recognition and narration of IPV. The narrative expression '*I was hurt*' was a collective means for men to convey their abuse and powerlessness. Additionally, men drew on their own vulnerability, suggesting that precursory or situational circumstances left them in a 'vulnerable position' to be abused. This would suggest that the risk of IPV is greater for individuals facing personal plight, given that they may not recognise the signs of abuse or establish personal boundaries.

There is an argument that men's difficulty with expressing vulnerability has paradoxically deepened their vulnerability; since identifying IPV, disclosure and relying on others for support is heavily dependent on sharing vulnerability. Given that abuse resided in men's most vulnerable moments, broaching these topics will likely open the doors to rich narrative descriptions of IPV. Questions such as "Can you describe a moment when you felt vulnerable?" may prompt men, in particular to share vulnerability, recognise abuse and engage in meaningful reflection as survivors. In other words, asking direct questions about male vulnerability will make it clear to men that vulnerability is an inherent and necessary aspect of being human. Furthermore, those in the field of IPV should legitimise the value of not overlooking vulnerability; in that studying victims begets the study of their vulnerability. Thus, we as a collective of researchers, policy makers, educators and practitioners must begin to open this critical dialogue on male vulnerability immediately.

7.2 The Nature of IPV for Gay Men.

Little consensus exists on what constitutes IPV in gay relationships (Cannon and Buttell, 2016; Donovan and Hester, 2015; Finneran and Stephenson, 2014). The second aim of this study was to examine the nature of the abuse transpiring between gay men. The findings demonstrate that IPV was extreme yet expressed minimally and presented by men in distinct categories, including 'traditional abuse' and 'sexual minority abuse'. **Men's descriptions of traditional abuse demonstrate that current IPV definitions and theoretical paradigms (in particular, the illustration of intimate terrorism and coercive control) largely account for their perspectives despite emanating from abused heterosexual women.** To that end, gay men described psychological, sexual, physical, financial, and technology-related violence and controlling behaviours in their biographies. These findings were corroborated by previous work on gay men (Cruz and Firestone, 1998; Stults et al. 2022). The accounts of captivity, death threats and use of weapons described by men were a testament to the extreme nature of IPV in this study. This contradicts how IPV in heterosexual couples is perceived as comparatively more

severe than IPV found in gay relationships (Brown and Groscup, 2009). This underscores the necessity for society to approach abuse within gay relationships with greater seriousness and attention.

In addition, the colloquial term ‘control’ rather than formal descriptions was a key means in which men expressed abuse and emphasised masculine performances in their storytelling. Given how the term control is widely featured in hegemonic masculine ideology, this term is likely to resonate with future male victims when probing for IPV. One explanation of traditional abuse is that men are ascribed to heterosexual gender roles and conventional scripts, given that heterosexuality is constructed as the ideal and valid sexual orientation (Butler, 1999; Rich, 1980). Thus, gay men in this study had no frame of reference for their own gender roles and relationship scripts, proceeding to adhere to heteronormative ones. The resonance between abuse found in opposite gender relationships and gay men’s relationships support a strong argument towards the universal understanding of IPV and how prevention must extend beyond categories of gender and sexuality.

Despite the similarities between female victims and men in this study regarding 'traditional' abuse, men also portrayed notable distinctions which were labelled as ‘sexual minority abuse’. It is argued that these nuances in how gay men express IPV warrant further investigation. These findings also recognise the importance of examining men’s positioning, in particular their ‘social situatedness’ and the ‘cultural assumptions’ embedded in their narratives (Davies and Harré, 1990; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Wengraf, 2008).

This study illuminated the presence of identity abuse within the narratives of IPV among gay men, exemplified by a participant who refrained from disclosing their abuse due to concerns about inadvertently revealing their transgender partner's identity. However, the literature underscored the lack of consensus regarding the measurement of identity abuse, with limited quantitative exploration of this phenomenon. This challenge was further compounded by documented variations in identity abuse across different genders and sexual orientations (Woulfe and Goodman, 2021). Numerous scholars (Ard and Makadon, 2011; Goodmark, 2013; Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony, 2016; Woulfe and Goodman, 2020) have previously addressed this issue, offering their own interpretations and definitions of identity abuse. Woulfe and Goodman (2020) broadened identity abuse to encompass tactics of violence that exploited systemic oppression to inflict harm on individuals, including forms such as heterosexism and cissexism. This sets a precedent for further refinement of identity abuse, including the examination of its subcategories.

Balsam and Szymanski (2005) emphasise the importance of integrating additional forms of oppression when examining IPV in same-sex relationships, suggesting that considering minority stressors is essential in this regard. Thus, based on the findings of this study, sexual minority abuse is proposed as a distinct subcategory within 'identity abuse' to encompass a broader spectrum of abuse that extends beyond the undermining or control of men's sexual identities by their abusive partners (Donovan and Hester, 2015), to include individual and societal factors associated with men's sexual marginalisation and exposure to minority stress. In particular, the conceptualization of this term was informed by Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress theory, which recognized the impact of men's continued association with a marginalised sexual community on their lives. This adds to the growing evidence that minority stress is a useful framework to understand the distinct presentations of IPV within gay relationships (Edwards and Sylaska, 2013; Finneran and Stephenson, 2014; Longobardi and Badenes-Ribera, 2017). Considering the

widespread adaptation of the minority stress framework, it is anticipated that scholars may find value in exploring the concept of sexual minority abuse.

Forms of sexual minority abuse, in this study, included outing, encountering heterosexist and hostile attitudes from family members, and restrictions from the LGBTQ community. It is proposed that future scholars exploring abuse in LGBTQ relationships might find this category particularly useful as a conceptual tool, providing a targeted understanding of the distinct forms of abuse but also the challenges faced by gay men within the sexual minority community, both within intimate relationships and in the broader societal context shaped by heteronormativity and homophobia. However, further research is necessary to validate these findings.

The manifestation of sexual minority abuse in the life narratives of gay men can be attributed to several factors. Nakano-Glenn (2000) observed how gender and sexuality are social structural processes that create categories of ‘differences’ for gay men who are outside heterosexual norms, symbols, and practices. Men’s distinct expressions of IPV depict the challenges they face being assumed heterosexual and marginalised due to their sexual identities. This finding mirrors how distinct expressions of abuse are found in many LGBTQ relationships (Duke and Davidson; 2009; Goldenberg et al., 2016). In light of these findings, the sole applicability of traditional abuse paradigms and definitions to examine abuse in gay men is highly cautioned. Such approaches might not capture LGBTQ-specific forms of IPV or accommodate the fluidity of men's sexualities, intimate relationships, and gender identities.

7.3 The Sexual Minority Experience of IPV for Gay Men

As mentioned earlier, the third aim propelling this study was to examine how gay men account for and present themselves in their abuse narratives. Findings indicate that participants made sense of IPV within the context of their sexual minority identity (Meyer, 2003). Unlike individuals in heterosexual relationships, gay men must contend with a society where their lives

and relationships do not conform to the norm. To that end, ‘sexual minority abuse’ (explored in the previous section) and the ‘invisibility narrative’ stemmed from gay men's marginalisation and the pervasive influence of heteronormativity within society.

The men’s portrayal of the ‘invisibility narrative’ demonstrated that invisibility emerged as a binding agent in their oral narratives, as they and society worked together to render their abuse invisible. Two key findings emerged from recognising that men’s intimate zones were socially produced and how their public and private spheres were interwoven invisibility (Plummer, 2001). **First, I conceptualised the term ‘public invisibility’ to illustrate that people, biographical caretakers and larger cultural and structural formations had rendered gay men’s abuse invisible** (Riemann and Schutze, 2005). The invisibility surrounding men’s IPV experiences were attributed to how abuse is obscured and deemed unbelievable within social discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity (Corbally, 2011). In these contexts, abuse experienced by gay men represented a deviation from the gamut of heteronormative female victim narratives (Rich, 1980; Ingraham, 1994). These findings further support Donovan and Hester’s (2015) assertion that the public story of IPV typically portrays heterosexual women as weaker victims enduring physical abuse from stronger, aggressive men. Because gay men were rendered publicly and privately invisible in their biographies, they were more likely to face an increased risk of IPV, increased isolation and missed opportunities to flee potentially life-threatening situations.

Findings from this study demonstrate that public invisibility transpired within the LGBTQ community, as disclosing IPV narratives was interpreted by men as propagating prejudice or hampering their pursuit of social and political equality. This was echoed by Cahill (2019) and Ristock (2002) who emphasise the reluctance of the LGBTQ community to

'air their dirty laundry' and speak publicly about interpersonal violence. This would suggest that when gay men 'story' abuse, they embody an 'invisible minority' in heteronormative and LGBTQ spaces. Therefore, gender-sensitive training is necessary to assist both the public and the sexual minority community in fostering greater sensitivity and understanding of IPV occurring within marginalised sexual relationships.

However, it is important to recognise that invisibility was not exclusive to gay men who were subject to IPV. Indeed, the 'invisibility narrative' likely resonates with other minority or marginalised communities. For instance, older adults have described feeling invisible due to shifting social landscapes (Menezes et al., 2021). Similarly, the concept of invisibility has been associated with disabled individuals in their efforts to combat societal stigma (Gupta et al., 2021). Transgender individuals (Namaste, 2000), bisexual individuals (Zivony and Lobel, 2014), lesbian women (Wolfe, 1992), and migrant men and women (Charsle and Wray, 2015; Kofman, 1999) have also been identified as experiencing invisibility. Given the common thread of feeling unseen or overlooked in society, it is likely that this invisibility manifests in similar dimensions to men in this study, including public and intimate invisibility (Plummer, 2001). Further research is needed to delve into how the invisibility narrative holds relevance and transferability within broader marginalised communities.

Overall, the question raised by Will Sam and Cole 'does *it count though?*' conveys a crisis of legitimacy for gay men to categorise themselves as victims, both in terms of recognising IPV behaviour and asserting their experiences as 'good enough' to be categorised within heteronormative and gendered constructions of IPV. The presence of 'public invisibility' shaped the dialogic structuring of men's biographies, in which participants engaged in private

invisibility when telling their IPV stories. The next section focuses on the significance of the silences, minimisations and attenuations that pervaded men's IPV narratives.

As the second key finding, the term 'intimate invisibility' demonstrated that gay men persistently obscured the presence of IPV in their life stories. This suggested that abuse was only made intelligible by men, through discursively reducing the significance and emotional impact of these events. Abuse was strategically portrayed as hidden and sporadic, allowing these men to dissociate from the violence they endured. **It was observed that the men's silence, avoidance and minimization of their experience of IPV reflected performances of their masculinities to ensure that their portrayal of self aligned with more desirable dominant masculinities (Connell, 2005).** To that end, men 'talked' invisibility through purposeful topic changes, opening and closing conversation and using abstract or pacifying language. In particular, minimisation, neutralisation and generalisation were popular narrative strategies mobilised by men throughout their biographies. Similar narrative portrayals were mirrored by heterosexual male victims (Hamberger and Guse, 2002; Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005). The invisibility embedded in men's narratives can be better understood by examining the complex interplay between the overarching societal constructs of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity. These discourses view 'male victimisation' as contradictory to public expressions of masculinity, which have shaped men's interpretations of their IPV experiences (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Faludi, 2000). For instance, the depiction of men as stoic, strong, and resilient is deeply ingrained in the 'public consciousness' over the portrayal of men as vulnerable or victimised (Allen, 2013; Sexton 1970). Findings mirror Mullaney's (2007) work with heterosexual male victims, indicating that their 'talk' reflected an attempt to repair and reclaim their masculinity which also functioned to persistently distance themselves from their victimisation and present themselves as strong, composed and silent in return (Ackerman, 2008). In a world where abused gay men face dual marginalisation, perceived by society as

potential perpetrators rather than victims, while contending with the veiled nature of their abusive relationships, it is understandable why the men in this study often remained silent and lacked comfort in discussing their abuse.

In summary, it emerged that gay men found it difficult to talk about their IPV. The imposed silences, avoidance and minimisation in their oral narratives emerged as a key finding. This reflected their cultural surroundings and how they performatively negotiated their masculine identities in the context of being abused (Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005). This was paradoxical to how 'talk' is contended as an effective medium of recovery and intervention for abused men (Corbally, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative to explore how these men talk about IPV and the ways in which researchers and practitioners can better facilitate their disclosure more effectively. The methodological premise of BNIM as a tool to excavate hidden abuse descriptions is discussed in detail in the next section.

7.4 Implications of Findings

'It's the role of narrative to bridge the gap between philosophy as abstract theory, ideas in the ether, and life as lived on the ground' (Held, 2016 P.6).

Building upon Held's observation, this study serves as a bridge connecting the lived realities of the six gay men who told IPV narratives, thereby shedding light on a topic largely hidden in academia and society. Wengraf and colleagues (2002) claim that biographical research can be used to shape education, training, and policy development. Given that IPV was evidenced as a multifaceted phenomenon in gay men's stories, the implications of this study are manifold and engender change in many areas. This section explores the implications of these findings in the areas of policy, education and research.

7.4.1 Implications for Policy: Towards Inclusivity

In providing a psycho-social perspective on individuals and their lived experiences, BNIM has been credited with establishing a firm basis for policy development (Chamberlayne, 2002; Calton et al., 2016; Wengraf, 2001). Historically, policy initiatives in Ireland and internationally have focused on identifying and responding to IPV experienced by heterosexual women (Ball and Hayes, 2009; Campo and Tayton, 2015). The exclusion of gay male victims aligns with the findings of previous studies (Donovan and Hester, 2015; Island and Letellie, 1999; Ristock, 2002). Therefore, in light of the invisibility concerning IPV among gay men in this study, the implementation of IPV policies aimed at granting abused gay men greater equality, representation, and resources is recommended (Berlach and Chambers, 2011). This could begin by incorporating more inclusive imagery and dialogue into future IPV policies, depicting the experiences of not just gay men but victims from all gender identities and sexual orientations. Such adjustments have the potential to transform the public story of IPV into one that resonates with everyone (Donovan and Hester, 2015).

Regrettably, the exclusion of gay men is illustrated in the most recent Irish national strategy on domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence, whose ‘emphasis within the strategy is particularly on meeting the needs of women and girls’ (Department of Justice, 2022, p. 6). The imagery of female victims on the front cover and throughout this document raises concerns regarding inclusivity. It is crucial to adopt inclusive and gender-neutral terminology and imagery so that the needs and lived experiences of gay male victims are included in Ireland. The strengths of the 2022-2026 National Strategy lie in its recommendations for developing specialised IPV education programs and dedicated stakeholder groups for vulnerable populations. Findings from this study hold potential value for the development of future policy in this often overlooked area.

Considering the 'public invisibility' surrounding abuse experienced by gay men, future IPV policies should contemplate implementing educational training programmes. These programmes should target both the LGBTQ community and the broader public, encompassing educational initiatives for healthcare professionals, law enforcement, community advocacy groups, and the general public. These interventions can help victims, professionals and bystanders recognize signs of IPV in gay men's relationships and dismantle taboos and silences surrounding this issue. It is hoped these campaigns will contribute to fostering a more supportive environment for gay men to disclose their abuse and educate the general public about the importance of inclusivity for all victims of IPV.

The first training programme for gay men and professionals was launched by Men's Aid (2022) in Ireland. However, there was an absence of current empirical evidence to inform these educational workshops. It is recommended to integrate the IPV stories told by gay men into educational programmes, which may resonate with potential victims in their attendance and provide more practical insights for professionals. It is hoped that the findings from this study will inform future educational training for practitioners and victims will be expanded across all regions of Ireland.

Currently, there are no specialised IPV shelters for gay men fleeing abuse in Ireland, and there are very few internationally (Cahill, 2019). This is problematic as participants in this study recounted experiences of homophobia, hostility, and heteronormativity from family members, which could potentially force them to rely on emergency accommodation. Given the severity and potentially life-threatening nature of IPV described by these men, it is advisable to establish emergency accommodation and specialised shelters staffed by trained professionals who understand the distinct challenges faced by this population. This recommendation aligns with

findings from other scholars who have also highlighted that LGBTQ victims experience specific forms of IPV related to their gender identity and sexuality and require specialised services (Laskey, Bates, and Taylor, 2019; Merrill and Wolfe, 2000 Roch et al., 2010). In alignment with the services available to heterosexual women, it is recommended that these tailored resources for gay male victims could include educational centres, peer support groups, helplines, and victim support at courts. It is pertinent to note that these recommendations are not exhaustive and require continuous collaboration with stakeholders, including researchers, IPV and LGBTQ organisations. True inclusivity in addressing this issue can only begin when all parties involved are inclusive with each other. Hence, the formation of tailored coalitions in Ireland set up to address IPV in the LGBTQ community is encouraged.

In light of the challenges men face with expressing their vulnerability which hindered their recognition and recovery from abuse, policies should be focused on reshaping the prevailing social discourses underpinning IPV. Thus, social discourses of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity must pivot towards men practising male vulnerability. This addresses the paradoxical and omitted nature of how these ideologies suppress male vulnerability. Corbally (2011) contended that it is questionable that vulnerability will ever be amalgamated into the lexis of masculinity. However, celebrating the strength and courage of men and talking openly about their struggles offers a stepping stone to change. Along these lines, it is suggested that men should be encouraged to practise vulnerability in their intimate and public lives (Plummer, 2001). This could involve educational resources designed to promote emotional health and foster healthy relationships among men. These sessions could encompass discussions on masculinity, exploring diverse expressions of emotions, and vulnerability beyond traditional gender stereotypes. Additionally, practical strategies for men to facilitate expressing vulnerability within the context of their masculine identities could be integrated into these workshops. To that end, only by men exhibiting vulnerability do they give permission for other men to do the same.

Considering that masculinity is not a static phenomenon, incorporating vulnerability into modern masculine language, expression, and identities is feasible and encouraged (Connell, 1995). Given that masculinity continues to shift towards nurturing or gentle roles (Hines et al., 2020; Miller, 2014), perhaps male vulnerability is a natural progression in this evolution.

7.4.2 Implications for Education

Throughout their biographies, the participants interacted with a panoply of professionals (mental health hospitals, doctors, therapists, bouncers, emergency personnel etc.) in their most vulnerable moments. Therefore, it is important to consider the educational implications of this study for practitioners in the field. It was found that gay men presented their abuse as invisible in society and to themselves. This parallels previous research (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Houston and McKirnan, 2007; Island and Letellier, 1991). It was also found that men portrayed professionals as dismissive and unfamiliar with their abuse. This is likely linked to how many educational training and victim support programmes utilise data generated from research studies on abused heterosexual women (Corbally, 2011). This is problematic for many reasons. Liang et al.'s (2005) help-seeking model underscores the critical role professions play in helping victims identify the problem, seek help, and determine the appropriate support services. These practices are not possible when abuse in gay relationships is invisible, and suitable infrastructure (information leaflets, violence-based screening tools, support programmes etc) are not in place. Thus, it is important for practitioners to have an understanding of the signs, indications and sequelae of IPV for this marginalised population.

Scholars strongly emphasise the role of education as a means to enhance the skills and knowledge of professionals in effectively addressing abuse (COSC, 2012). Thus, educators are entrusted to lift the veil on the phenomenon of abuse among gay men. However, currently, there is no training available to professionals on how to support gay male victims (Callan et al., 2023).

The findings of this study necessitate the need for tailored professional training aimed at identifying and responding to IPV among gay men (Crowley and Fagan, 2020; Somerville et al., 2015; Burke et al., 2006). Such training should encompass topics on ‘sexual minority abuse’ as well as ‘traditional abuse’, providing a comprehensive range of IPV descriptions, signs and identification markers. It is hoped that this inclusive approach should go some way to equip practitioners to effectively recognise and address abuse experienced by gay men.

Plummer (2001) highlights the transformative power of storytelling, suggesting that narratives generate new dialogue. In line with this perspective, the ‘fixer narrative’ has the potential to be a meaningful dialogue from which gay men can more comfortably articulate their abuse. According to Butler (2004), in order for a person to feel autonomous, they require norms of recognition. The fixer narrative provides a means in which men can talk about abuse in adherence with norms of socially acceptable expressions of masculinity. In particular, gay men may align themselves with more desirable male identities; that although abused, they can portray themselves as 'fixers' rather than ‘victims’. Unlike formal academic descriptions, which often rely on explicit acknowledgment and labelling of abuse, the ‘fixer narrative’ provides a useful tapestry of narrative portrayals which has the potential to be an educational tool for future practitioners and educators. It is hypothesised that questions framed around 'fixing' rather than victimisation or formal IPV terminology may resonate more with gay men experiencing abuse. This aligns with previous recommendations advocating for a broad questioning technique to compensate for men's limited knowledge and difficulty talking about IPV (Corbally, 2015; Dixon et al., 2022).

This approach also aligns with the national strategies suggesting that general practitioners should sensitively ask exploratory questions directly to potential victims in private settings. For

example, employing an attentive and approachable manner, such as asking the patient ‘how are things at home?’ is recommended (Naughton et al., 2022). The emphasis on general practitioners stems from findings in a patient survey (n=621), revealing that the majority of patients, (76% of women and 73% of men) felt comfortable discussing IPV with their GP (Westmarland et al., 2004). As a result, general practitioners, nurses, and other healthcare professionals may be the first point of contact for potential victims (Callan et al., 2023). Nevertheless, service providers and educators from diverse disciplines who engage with potential victims might also find the questions outlined below beneficial.

Considering the modest sample size of this study, it's crucial to acknowledge that these questions represent initial suggestions, requiring validation through further research. For instance, gathering feedback from field experts and conducting quantitative research and focus groups to refine and validate these questions would be beneficial. To that end, the following offers initial reflections about questions and conservation points that practitioners could utilise to enhance the potential for a victim’s disclosure.

- Do you spend your time focused on helping your partner? This may involve empathising with them, problem-solving, providing for them and making personal sacrifices.
- Are your displays of fixing reciprocated by your partner?
- Do you prioritise your partner’s needs and wellbeing above your own?
- Do you want to help your partner and change them into a better version of themselves?
- Do you perhaps put a lot of energy into fixing that moves the focus away from your partner's behaviour?
- Could fixing be a way of avoiding focusing on yourself and what upsets you?
- Do your efforts to fix your partner's problems work? What happens to your problems, and do they get resolved or do they increase?

The fixer identity was found to resonate with narrative portrayals observed in other victim demographics. For instance, female victims, particularly in their expressions of nurturing and care, demonstrate elements of the fixer narrative (Enander and Holmberg, 2008; Ferraro and Johnson, 1983; Marden and Rice, 1995;). The fixer identity was also endorsed by self-identified lesbian, transgender, gay, and heterosexual men and women as part of their love practices in their interpersonal relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This would suggest that the fixer narrative might have transferability to a broader demographic of survivors, such as heterosexual female victims or other LGBTQ individuals. However, substantiating this claim necessitates further research with these cohorts. In essence, the fixer narrative has the potential to be a universal language to talk about IPV. It is widely possible that many of us have identified as the 'fixer' at some point in our lives. For example, instances of 'fixing' can be spotted in various contexts, from media portrayals to casual conversations, like those overheard in which individuals often express empathy to their loved ones by saying, *'I wish I could fix it for you'*. Additionally, this role is frequently assigned to men, particularly in DIY projects when men are often asked: *'would you mind fixing it?'* In other words, the universality of 'fixing' prevalent in everyday life, may break down the formal barriers surrounding IPV, potentially serving as a bridge to reach a wide net of victims.

In summary, people see themselves in stories. The fixer narrative offers a relatable human story in which other victims can see themselves. In particular, men's own words have the means to educate future abuse survivors, practitioners and policymakers. The dialogue of fixing evokes a blend of colloquial language which will hopefully resonate with other gay men and survivors who struggle to find legitimacy in academic terminology. In light of how gay men found it difficult to formally pinpoint IPV, the fixer narrative strategically avoids relying on their intimate knowledge of IPV definitions but finds accessible ways to prompt men to recognise their abuse. Implications of the 'fixer narrative' may lead to nuanced directions for treatment

and preventive interventions, mainly among scholars and practitioners working with survivors who struggle to identify with victim labels. There is also the potential for a fixer narrative to serve as a mechanism by which a range of risk factors can be identified including empathy, caring masculinities and trauma bonding etc.

7.4.3 Implications for Future Research

This study demonstrates important implications for future research on IPV among gay men. The findings revealed IPV was a multifaceted phenomenon, uniquely shaped by participants' understanding of abuse and their distinct narrative styles. Consequently, measuring IPV becomes a complex endeavour, particularly when victims belong to hidden marginalised populations, wherein their sampling frames and methodologies pose significant challenges. The study highlights for these gay men in particular, they expressed traditional and distinct expressions of IPV (referred to here as sexual minority abuse), some of which would likely fall outside heteronormative definitions, predefined questions or may not be fully captured by large-scale quantitative methodologies, such as general population studies (Bourne et al. 2023; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This reinforces the need to be cautious about studies that claim to 'quantify' abuse within large populations, especially those that demand explicit acknowledgment and labelling of IPV. Where the phenomenon under study is complex, research should focus on also capturing the 'particular' rather than just the 'general', which attempts to take a predefined snapshot of this phenomenon (Schofield, 2007). Future studies would benefit from incorporating qualitative approaches, facilitating nuanced exploration through open-ended and inductive narrative questions. This will go some way to more inclusive representation of gay men and other sexual minority groups, within the domain of IPV research.

This study challenges the existing epistemological basis of IPV by demonstrating that the abuse experienced by the gay men in this study occurred outside conventional heterosexual male-to-

female relationships. However, it should be emphasised that these findings do not seek to downplay or detract from the vital research on violence against women. The results contribute to a growing body of work demonstrating that IPV operates in LGBTQ relationships, often outside the purview of feminist theories and patriarchy (Cahill, 2019; Cannon and Buttell, 2016; Donovan and Hester, 2015). Research also indicates a high prevalence of IPV within relationships among gay men (Black et al., 2011). However, this stark reality contrasts with the limited scholarly attention devoted to this topic. Consequently, there are many avenues for expanding research within this field. Gay men in this study, akin to abused heterosexual men in prior research (Hogan et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2020; Corbally, 2011), adhered to similar masculine ideologies and behaviours while elucidating their abuse experiences. Therefore, replicating this study with both heterosexual and gay men could facilitate a deeper understanding of the interconnections between social constructs of masculinity, sexuality, and IPV. To achieve this, future researchers are encouraged to utilise Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) and the social discourse surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity as conceptual frameworks for investigating how abused men interpret their victimisation. These theoretical approaches offer valuable insights into the complex ways in which gender norms influence men's behaviour, narrative portrayals, and relationship dynamics, particularly within the context of IPV. In addition, it is recommended to explore 'sexual minority abuse' under the subcategory of 'identity abuse' in these populations, which will hopefully uncover not only the role of gender but also how men's sexual marginalisation impacts their experiences of IPV.

To the author's knowledge, this study represents one of the first attempts to gather biographical narratives of IPV experienced by gay men using the BNIM approach. The contribution of this research is further strengthened by likely being the first doctoral-level study of its kind conducted in Ireland. In the broader context of IPV research in Ireland, there has been a limited focus on the topic. For instance, the last large-scale survey on IPV in Ireland was conducted

eighteen years ago (Watson and Parsons, 2005). While this survey was groundbreaking in establishing the prevalence of male abuse in Ireland, clear limitations to capture respondents' sexual orientation, gender identity and the nuanced structures of their relationships likely resulted in the invisibility of abuse within gay relationships or among victims in open, casual, or polyamorous relationships. This presents an opportunity to update and expand upon the existing knowledge by conducting a new prevalence study in Ireland which includes a diverse range of sexual orientations, relationship types, and gender identity options. Furthermore, it is recommended to utilise qualitative interpretive methodologies in future studies to address the significant lack of qualitative research concerning gay men within the Irish context. In doing so, it necessitates venturing beyond the 'general' spectrum of society towards democratising the inner realm and lived experiences of LGBTQ victims (Plummer, 2001).

The findings of this study shed light on the challenges faced by gay men in verbalising their private experiences and feelings, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics that expose their vulnerability (Ackerman, 1993; Addis, 2011; Schwab et al., 2016). It was observed that participants in this study struggled to acknowledge and identify their experiences as IPV often resorting to strategies of minimisation, neutralisation, and generalisation to convey their abusive encounters. These findings underscore the significance of practitioners and researchers being aware of the possibility that male victims may omit crucial details about their abuse or even present their experiences as irrelevant or inconsequential.

The invisibility described and enacted by men in this study is significant evidence indicating that gay male abuse victims constitute a hidden and invisible population (Hyden, 2008). While many studies concentrate on recruiting hard-to-reach populations, an equally crucial question is how to effectively encourage these groups to actively participate in the research process. The

findings of this study contribute to a body of work on the practical application of BNIM. It demonstrates this as a novel methodology to elicit IPV narratives of gay men and combating their struggles to articulate abuse. In particular BNIM is presented here as an effective means of facilitating a richer remembering and sometimes partially reliving of abuse experiences for the gay men involved in this study. Notably, inviting men to share their life stories was reported by the participants themselves as empowering. The inductive methodological approach employed in this study facilitated a greater level of sense-making, allowing the researcher to use the participants' own language, reference points and prompts to encourage a more profound recollection of narrative images, thoughts, and emotions. As illustrated in table 5, I demonstrate that the second sub-session of BNIM and use of narrative-inducing questions presented as an innovative way to overcome the narrative barriers imposed by these men when talking about their abuse. This technique proved particularly effective in counteracting men's minimisation, generalisation and neutralisation and prompting men to talk about their abuse in greater narrative depth.

The use of BNIM to elicit abuse details.	
Unscripted life story	Narrative inducing question in second sub-session: ‘So back to that time you said that he locked you in a room and beat you all night. Do you remember any more details about that particular night? How did it all happen?’
‘I was locked in a room and beaten all night and it was not great. The next morning my maid came in and she found me’	<p>‘By this time, we had been brawling for quite a bit now and he has been hitting me. He tore open the skin here on my shoulder and my shirt was full of blood and I was just so exhausted, and I couldn't deal with it anymore and I just sat down in this room and grabbed the phone and said, 'please don't do this, please don't do this'. And he just got up and locked the door and here I was inside this little room, and I couldn't believe it. At first, I thought what is happening, this is so weird, I can't get out. And then he just recurringly came into the room and just would stand right in my face and scream at the top of his lungs at me about how awful I am and how awful his life was. And he hit me over the head with whatever he could get his hands on.</p> <p>And I would just lie there, and he would just go off and lock the door and be gone for I don't know how long and then just come back and it just went on like that for hours. I just wanted to sleep to be honest, it was fucking awful. I just thought was he going to kill me? Well just kill me and get it over with, this is like torture. I don't remember how I got out of the room. I think he eventually did leave me in there and I slept, and I guess the maid unlocked the door in the morning when she was there’</p>

Table 5: The use of BNIM to elicit abuse details (George’s account)

As an implication for the research field, the process of exploring men’s life stories provided access to a wider net of abuse descriptions beyond what men recognised as IPV. This was exemplified by George who described financially aiding his partner in his 'lived life' but never formally recognised this as financial abuse in his ‘told story’. If not for the sense making properties of the BNIM interview style, this data would likely be unavailable, especially if probed by surveys or structured interviewing styles. In light of these observations, BNIM demonstrates strong capability to define and improve clarity regarding complex social

phenomena which participants may find challenging to articulate (Wallace, 2007). Future research should broaden the applicability of this methodology to examine sensitive topics in other hidden populations that are underrepresented in academic and social discourses.

7.4.4 Limitations of the Research

The study employed a purposeful sampling strategy (Cresswell et al., 2011) to recruit participants. This may have excluded male abuse victims who were not open or comfortable disclosing their sexuality. Consequently, the study may have missed narrative descriptions concerning internalised homophobia and experiences of sexual orientation outing, which would likely be found in closeted gay men (Callan et al., 2021). BNIM has been recognised for illuminating participants' lived situations and experiences (Wengraf, 2001). However, this novel methodology was not designed to achieve the same level of generalizability as quantitative inquiries with larger sample sizes. While the findings of this study provide valuable insights and contribute to knowledge in the field, they should be interpreted within the specific context of the sample size of this study. The limitation of potential bias in this study concerned how participants were intentionally self-preserving in their interviews or displayed lapses in their memories due to dissociation techniques (Van Der Kolk, 1998; Wengraf, 2001). However, this was not a concern under BNIM conventions, which seek to capture the participants' subjectivity as they choose to tell an improvised life story (Wengraf, 2006). Therefore, men choosing to talk about or not talk about abuse or present themselves in a certain light was a finding in its own right, shedding light on the complex dynamics when constructing abuse narratives. According to Rosenthal (2004), participants' subjectivities serve as 'texts' for cultivating new meanings. By this premise, Peta and colleagues (2019) argue that BNIM contributes to 'high-profile scholarly dialogues' (p. 516). Therefore, the value of the study lies in its inductive (top-down) methodology, whereby theory and novel insight were generated (Wengraf, 2001).

7.4.5 Final Reflections: Making the Invisible Minority Visible

As the conclusion of this study approaches, it becomes imperative to revisit the central themes and key findings. Intimate partner violence (IPV) poses a serious social problem. Its detrimental effects on the lives it touches cannot be underestimated. When attempting to fit within the narrow contours of society, men described themselves as being encumbered in performances, however the scripts of these performances emanated from heteronormative and gendered discourses (Goffman, 1990). This paradox was deepened for gay men, as they were feminised due to their sexuality while simultaneously being pressured to embody traditional masculine traits such as stoicism, problem-solving, and strength to the extent that they often portrayed themselves as invulnerable (Butler, 1999; Connell, 2005). This presented a double irony, as expressing vulnerability was perceived as a potential trigger for further feminization, thereby increasing their risk of being victimised. However gay men in this study demonstrated remarkable resilience by emphasising more heteronormative masculine identities to assimilate into society and these performances were found to have continued in their private narrations of IPV (Butler, 1999; Connell, 2002). Therefore, understanding the complex interplay between feminization, masculinity, and vulnerability is crucial for developing interventions that acknowledge the diverse experiences of gay men in abusive intimate relationships.

The influence of gender permeates every facet of life. However, the effects on how gay men interact, communicate, and navigate social structures reflect its omnipresence in their daily experiences. This study revealed that Connell's theory of masculinity (1995, 2005) and the prevailing social discourse surrounding masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity shaped how gay men constructed their experiences of IPV. Findings demonstrate that gay men often found themselves navigating a 'subordinated masculinity,' facing social marginalisation, homophobia, and heteronormativity. In response, these men conformed more closely to 'hegemonic masculinity,' as evidenced by their masculine and stoic portrayal of the abuse

featured in their life stories. While our understanding of gender has evolved, the perpetuity of gender norms and stereotypes in the lives of gay men warrants further investigation. Therefore, these theories are recommended as a valuable conceptual framework for future scholars examining this population.

Relationship rules were strongly featured in the biographical narratives of gay men, reflecting their prevalence across diverse relationship types (Donovan and Hester, 2015). This suggests that relationship rules rooted in practices of love and caregiving, aimed at mitigating control and volatility, offer valuable insights into understanding abuse in gay men's relationships. Moreover, it highlights the universal nature of these dynamics, illustrating how any relationship can begin from a place of love but potentially turn violent and controlling. A significant discovery of this study revolved around how gay men articulated practices of love and relationship rules through their interpretation and embodiment of masculinity. By delving into how these individuals understand and perform their masculinity, future researchers can glean invaluable insights into the complexities of IPV within the gay male community.

The ways in which gay men accounted for their abuse were likened to a delicate thread that was interwoven throughout their biographical narratives. This thread holds the weight of their vulnerability, their portrayal of 'fixing' and their struggle for visibility. In particular, gay men expressed difficulty articulating moments of vulnerability and employed narrative techniques to mask their position as vulnerable and abused. This manifested as hyper-masculine performances where men strategically presented as strong, assertive, proactive and caring in their narrative portrayals. In particular, the fixer narrative allowed men to express their experiences of abuse more comfortably, aligning with more socially acceptable masculine identities (such as the rescuer, protector, breadwinner etc) thus, distracting from how they were the 'victims' in their own narratives (Connell, 2005). As people find themselves reflected in stories, the fixer

narrative has the potential to resonate with future IPV survivors, particularly those, such as gay men who struggle to recognize their abuse experiences.

This study discovered that men experienced both traditional and distinct expressions of IPV. These were difficult stories to share, as evidenced by their avoidance, silences and minimisation. The narratives of gay men serve as a reminder that IPV transcends societal constructs and social boundaries and can manifest in the public and private spaces of any interpersonal relationship. Therefore, advocating for inclusivity in our discussions and approaches on this issue is imperative. In particular, the study calls for redefining IPV by dismantling heteronormative and gendered frameworks. This involves discussing interpersonal violence in more inclusive ways that acknowledge the fluidity of gender and sexuality while validating the experiences of gay men.

While gay men in this study initially concealed their vulnerability when telling their biographical stories, it was precisely this vulnerability that eventually enabled them to delve into the depths of their IPV experiences. In other words, there was a light that pulsated out of sharing that kind of vulnerability with others, allowing gay men to express themselves more openly, acknowledge their victimhood and reveal the depth of their humanity and the resilience required to confront such adversity. It can be concluded that male vulnerability should be viewed not as a weakness, but rather a source of strength and connection, empowering gay men to navigate and overcome formidable challenges.

The title of this study: 'The Invisible Minority', was initially an observation of the invisibility surrounding gay male victims and a desire to shed light on their lives and abusive experiences, or to make the 'invisible minority' visible. Thus, the abuse narratives elicited from the six gay men in this study were originally a 'story not yet told' (Squire, 2008 p.25). These narratives

revealed that gay men were invisible not only within their intimate relationships but also in public lives and their positioning within the public story of IPV (Donovan and Hester, 2015). Simultaneously, gay men became architects of their own invisibility, contributing to the concealment and minimization of their private abuse stories. By making the IPV narratives of gay male victims visible, this research is the first biographical study of its kind. It offers a substantial contribution to an under-researched area and paves the way for future scholarship.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Scoping Review published in *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* in April 2021.

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Title: A scoping review of intimate partner violence as it relates to the experiences of gay and bisexual men.

Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) encompasses a wide range of behaviours in an intimate relationship that may result in significant harm to an individual. These behaviours range from acts of physical, psychological and sexual violence, as well as controlling behaviours including isolation, stalking and restricting access to health care, education, employment or financial resources (World Health Organisation, 2012). The detrimental effects of IPV extend to adverse impacts on a person's health, social, economic welfare and even in some cases, a loss of life (Campbell et al., 2007; Renzetti, 2009). Research examining IPV in the heterosexual community (largely on self-identified female victims), in particular, has grown in abundance, emerging as a substantial evidence base. However, violence amongst gay and bisexual men is a hidden problem in society (Pimental, 2015; Goldenberg et al., 2016) requiring further study and consideration (Stephenson et al., 2013). On the backdrop of a shortage of data, (Stanley et al., 2006; Houston & McKirnan, 2007), this scoping review focuses on how gay and

bisexual men experience IPV and how these experiences are reflected in the literature base.

Research has suggested that the lesbian gay and bisexual (LGB) adult community may represent a total of 3.5% of the population of the U.S. (Gates, 2011). It is estimated that between 4% to 16% of the global population identify as men who have sex with men (World Health Organisation, 2003). It is also estimated that 2.3% of men in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2019) and 2.7% of men in Ireland (Layte et al., 2006) identify as homosexual or bisexual. As a marginalised group, gay and bisexual men experience IPV at disproportionately high rates (Finneran Stephenson, 2014a). A study in the U.S. reported that one in four gay men (26.0%), and four in ten bisexual men (37.3%) disclosed a life time experience of IPV, which included either sexual assault, physical violence or encounters of stalking (Breiding et al., 2013). Stephenson and Finneran (2017), in their large scale survey of 1,075 gay and bisexual men in the US, reported that 47.8% of the cohort had experienced at least one form of IPV from a male partner in the past 12 months. Studies in Australia (Ovenden et al., 2019) and the U.S. (Dickerson-Amaya & Coston, 2019) have reported prevalence rates of 62.1% and 83% respectively for sexual minority men (gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer).

Compared with heterosexual men and women, gay and bisexual men have been found to experience IPV five times more than heterosexual men (Yu et al., 2013). Dickerson-Amaya and Coston's (2019) study included bisexual, gay and heterosexual men and reported victimisation prevalence rates of IPV as 79%, 83% and 62% respectively for these three cohorts, highlighting the added vulnerability of gay and bisexual men to IPV. Several studies have documented that gay and bisexual men experience rates of violence equivalent to or higher than heterosexual women (Finneran

& Stephenson, 2013; Finneran & Stephenson, 2014a; Frierson, 2014; Goldenberg et al., 2016; Houston & McKirnan, 2007; Kay & Jeffries, 2010; Pimentel, 2015; Rollè et al., 2018; Woodyatt & Stephenson, 2016).

In 1999, Island and Letellier theorised that if the sexual minority community mobilised its efforts, it would take ten years to end IPV in this community. One year later, researchers Merrill and Wolfe (2000) posited that it had taken two decades for the battered women's movement to put IPV in the spotlight of the public and academic sphere. It therefore appears timely to consider the current literature base regarding same-sex IPV. Violence research that focuses on the lesbian, gay and bisexual community tends to have a predominant focus on lesbian and bisexual women (Dickerson-Amaya & Coston, 2019), despite the heightened risk of sexual minority men being exposed to IPV (Stephenson et al., 2013). Edwards and colleagues (2015) suggested that the literature base on sexual minority individuals (lesbian, gay, bisexual and non-heterosexual individuals) represented 3% of all research on IPV (Edwards et al., 2015). Research that does pay attention to men in same-sex relationships relies heavily on targeted groups and small convenience samples (Stanley et al., 2006; Bartholomew et al., 2008b; Finneran & Stephenson, 2014b) and often recruits participants disproportionately from urban populations (Pimental, 2015). Studies that do address same-sex violence reveal that typologies of violence for gay and bisexual men can mirror violence displayed by mixed sex or heterosexual couples, including psychological, physical and sexual abuse (Cruz & Firestone, 1998; Kay & Jeffries, 2010; Rollè et al., 2018; Michael, 1999).

However, Longobardi and Badenes-Ribera, (2017) have suggested that distinctive features of violence amongst gay and bisexual men have been overlooked in scholarly IPV work. While much is unknown about how and why violence occurs, even

less is known about how gay and bisexual men experience trauma and violence. Research into these men and their narratives of violence are understudied (Kay & Jeffries, 2010). This dearth of research potentially perpetuates the marginalisation and invisibility of gay and bisexual men; further awareness and a greater understanding of violence of such men is required. Insights distilled from gay and bisexual male cohorts regarding their experiences of violence may enhance and shape both a scholarly and societal understanding of trauma, violence and abuse, which can inform practice and offer a direction for future inquiry. The following two research questions guided the scoping review: “what is the prevalence and nature of IPV for gay and bisexual men?” and “what does the research literature tell us about the experiences of IPV for gay and bisexual men?”

Method

Scoping reviews are a moderately new but growing methodology (Levac et al., 2010; Pham et al., 2014), used to address broad research questions and obtain a clearer picture of the scale or scope of an existing research area (Grant & Boot, 2009). They involve a mapping process whereby an array of evidence is synthesised in order to find the breadth and depth of a field (Levac et al., 2010) and are particularly useful when mapping out key concepts that are underpinned by a multifaceted and broad area of research (Arskey & O’Malley, 2005), such as IPV. This scoping review drew on Arksey and O’Malley (2005)’s five-stage process (refined by Levac et al., 2010) of identifying the research question, pinpointing relevant studies, study selection, charting of the data, and lastly, synthesizing and reporting the results.

The comprehensive search strategy included studies published in English with a predominant focus on adult gay and bisexual men and their experiences of IPV. The

review examined literature published between the years 1931 and 2019. The search took place over a six-month period which commenced in May to October 2019. Studies were excluded if they had a singular focus on family violence, child abuse, heterosexual relationships, lesbian, bisexual women and transgender women. Given that the primary focus of scoping reviews is to broadly explore and map a complex and wide-ranging area of research activity (Arksey & O'Malley, 2007). While the scoping review cast a wide net of IPV literature to examine multiple research paradigms, editorials, dissertations, book reviews, books, newspaper articles, and discussion pieces, the findings reported here are based on peer reviewed literature sourced from academic databases (Social Services Abstracts, PubMed, PsycInfo and Academic Search Complete) with the exception of Island and Letellier's 1998 book "Men who Beat the Men who Love Them" . The initial search accumulated an initial pool of 648 articles. Through the use of Covidence, an online software tool, 148 duplicated studies were removed. During the screening of titles and abstracts, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied by two researchers, which excluded a further 240 manuscripts. The remaining 260 full-text manuscripts were reviewed. Regular convening of meetings to resolve conflicts resulted in 34 studies being chosen for the purpose of scope and extraction. Adhering to Arksey and O'Malley (2005)'s framework, an exploratory search of the reference lists was conducted, resulting in an additional 10 manuscripts being added. The format and structure of this paper were guided by PRISMA reporting guidelines for scoping reviews (PRISMA, 2015) and includes a flow diagram (See Figure 1).

The data were then collated to provide a descriptive summary of the results. Details pertaining to the data collection, recruitment methods, methodology, locations, and populations of each study can be found in the data extraction chart below (See Table

1). Arksey and O'Malley's (2007) framework recommends that researchers analyse data by introducing key issues and themes. Descriptive content and thematic analysis was subsequently carried out to chart data. Guidelines by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien (2010) were also closely followed involving a three-step process of analysing the data, reporting of the results and uncovering meanings behind the results.

The literature reflects mixed views on incorporating critical appraisal to scoping reviews. It has been argued that a quality assessment is not aligned with the objectives of a scoping review, which seeks to map large volumes of data emerging from heterogeneous fields of research (Pham et al., 2014). Arksey and O'Malley (2007)'s framework does not incorporate a quality assessment. However, without a quality review, the synthesis and interpretation of the data may be curtailed. Grant and Booth (2009) argue that in the absence of critical appraisal, scoping reviews may not be relied on in developing policy and practice. To provide methodological reporting transparency, the present study adopted a critical appraisal tool. Separate quality assessments were conducted for qualitative, quantitative and mixed method sources, informed by published critical appraisal frameworks (2002a; Long, 2002b Long et al., 2002). Studies were evaluated according to whether each paper included consideration of: study overview, study setting and sampling, ethics, data collection and analysis. For example, when evaluating quantitative studies under the category of 'sampling', the following questions were asked: "What was the source population? What were the inclusion criteria? What were the exclusion criteria? How was the sample selected, and is the sample appropriate to the aims of the study?" (Long, 2002a). The team then assigned the assessed studies with a checkmark (tick or x) depending on how they scored (i.e. provided the information to the reader and considered the above criteria). Once evaluation was complete, the studies were then categorised into low – medium ($x < 6$),

medium, medium-high ($x > 2$) depending on their overall quality scoring. (See Appendix 1).

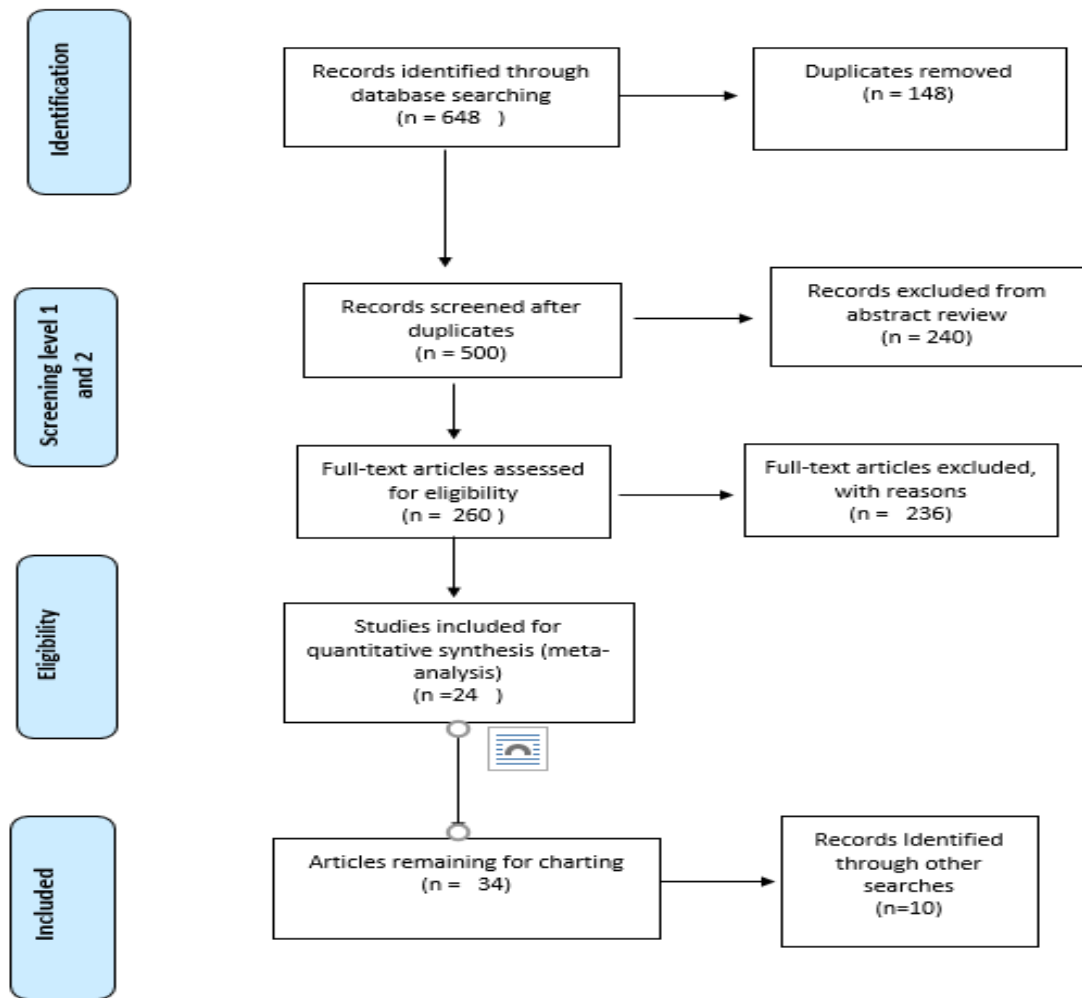


Figure 1: Flowchart illustrating selection process of studies

Table 1. *Studies included in scoping review (N=34)*

Study/Country	N	Sampling Method	Age (Mean=M)	Study Design	Terminology and IPV definition	Outcomes measured & Themes Identified
Goldenberg et al. (2016) USA	(N=64) 61 Gay men 3 Bisexual men	Venue based sampling of 160 gay themed events	M=32 Range 21-47	Focus groups	IPV Same sex	General perceptions of IPV for GBM. Themes: gender role conflict, dyadic inequalities (income, age, education, openness regarding sexual orientation) substance use, jealousy and homophobia.
Bartholomew et al. (2008 A) Canada	(N=186) GBM 94% Gay 6% Bisexual	Randomly selected community sample	M=38.53 Range 20-71	Telephone Survey Questionnaire	Partner abuse Gay MSM	Correlations of partner abuse for sexual minority men. Themes: income, education, attachment, sexual orientation, internalised homophobia, HIV status and public outness
Bartholomew et al. (2008 B) Canada	(n=284) 93% Gay men 7% Bisexual men	Random selected (contracted by telephone)	M:38.76 Range: 20-71	Telephone Survey	Partner abuse Male same-sex	Prevalence and patterns of abuse in male same sex relationships with a focus on psychological, sexual and physical violence
Finneran et al. (2012) USA, India, Canada, UK, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya.	(N=2,368) GBM Behavioural bisexuality measured	Convenience Facebook selective banner advertisements	young (18-24)	Online Surveys	IPV MSM	IPV social pressures experienced by MSM. Themes: physical violence, sexual violence, homophobic discrimination, internalised homophobia and heteronormative pressures.
Finneran & Stephenson (2014a) USA	(N= 700) Gay= 91.1% 639 Bisexual= 8.7% 61	Venue based sampling of gay friendly venues	N/A	Web based Survey Focus groups	IPV GBM Same-sex	Perceptions and understandings of antecedents of IPV for GBM: alcohol, drug use, jealousy, dishonesty, financial issues, outness, sexual positions and masculinity.
Finneran & Stephenson (2014b) USA	(N= 1575) MSM 92.25% Gay 92.25%Bisexual	Convenience advertisement social networking websites	N/A	Internet based Survey	IPV MSM Minority Stress	Associations between physical and sexual violence, minority stress, and sexual risk taking for MSM. Recall of IPV one year
Kay & Jeffries, (2010) Australia.	(N= 4) Gay friendly service providers	Expert sampling	N/A	Semi-structured interviews	Male Same-Sex IPV	Contextual triggers, barriers and services provision. Themes: homophobia heteronormativism and hegemonic masculinity.

Michael (2006) British Columbia	(N= 8) Queer	Purposive sample, gay advertisements newspapers, websites, venues	M:39 Range: 28-44	Semi structured interviews	Queer Partner abuse	Queer men's experiences of IPV. Themes: Gender, power, and service delivery.
Frierson (2014)	(N=13) African American Gay men	Purposive theoretical sampling social services / organisations	Ages 18-40	Semi structured interviews	IPV	African American men's experiences of IPV. Themes: race gender and sexual orientation.
Yu, Xiao & Liu, (2013) China	Homosexual men (N=418) Heterosexual men (N=330)	Network random sampling dating websites	Gay men: M:24 Range: 16-24	Self-administered questionnaires	Dating violence	Prevalence of abuse for gay men in China compared to abuse for heterosexual men.
Houston & McKirnan, (2007) USA	(N=817) MSM	Diverse, urban sample, gay/bisexual	M:33	Community survey	IPV MSM	Psychological abuse, demographic factors and health-related problems associated to MSM who experience IPV.
Kelley et al. (2014) USA	(N=107) 81.4% Gay men 9.3% Bisexual men	Purposive sampling, board, LGB list servers, websites & organisations	M:34.3 Range 18 to 74	Web based Survey	Partner Violence MSM same-sex	Alcohol consumption, internalised homophobia and sexual orientation outness were examined.
Merrill & Wolfe (2000) USA	(N=52)(96%) Gay men with lived experiences of IPV.	Purposive Sampling gay domestic violence programs HIV related agencies	N/A	Survey multiple-choice	Battering Same-Sex domestic violence	Help seeking behaviour and forms of IPV for gay men. Data on physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and sexual abuse collected.
Cruz & Firestone (1998) USA	(N=25) Gay men	Non probability-snowball Gay/Lesbian services social services	Range: 23 to 45	In-depth interviews	Family violence Gay men Interpersonal domestic violence	General perceptions of gay men explored. Themes: defining IPV, nature and experiences of violence, internalised homophobia, service provision, masculinity and triggers of violence.
Oringer & Samuelson (2011) USA	(N=-117) 100 Gay men, 10 Bisexual men	Non-random sampling. online LGBT postings emails, mailing lists.	Range: 20 to 63	Questionnaires and Internet-based surveys	Intimate partner violence IPV	Data collected on prevalence, perpetration, masculinity in male same-sex relationships.
Kwong-Lai Poon, (2010) Canada	Gay men (N=21) Service providers: (N=16)	Purposive sampling Flyers in community agencies social networking.	M:37.4 Range: 23 to 50	Semi structured Interviews with gay men. Focus groups with experts	Gay partner abuse Queer domestic Violence	Social construction of same-sex abuse, the lived experiences of gay men and experiences of service providers working with gay men were explored.
Finneran & Stephenson (2013) USA	(N= 912) Gay 89 Bisexual 10.2% 93	Venue based sampling 160 gay-themed or gay-friendly venues.	M:34.5	Internet based surveys Seven Focus groups	IPV GBM CTS2S	Examination of a new scale to measure IPV among gay and bisexual men. 30 forms of IPV identified.

Stephenson et al. (2014) Namibia	(N=52) MSM	Purposive sampling with local non-governmental organisations working MSM	N/A	7 Focus Group Discussions 28 In-depth interviews	Intimate partner, familial community violence MSM	Perceptions of IPV of men. Themes: Sex or gender roles, being out or closed regarding sexuality and financial security.
Pimentel, (2015) USA	(N=406) MSM 82.4% Gay 13.3% Bisexual	Diverse sampling strategies venue based sampling at Gay Pride event	M: 38.28, Range 18-79	Secondary analysis of data from a cross sectional survey 2013	IPV MSSIPV Male Same Sex	Syndemic, minority stress community protective measures explored for MSM. HIV, childhood sexual abuse, poly drug use, depression, sexual compulsivity, discrimination, homophobia, perceived stigma, social support and high risk behaviour.
Stephenson, Sato & Finneran (2013) USA	(N=403) Gay/homosexual : 92.8% Bisexual: 5.2%	Venue based sampling of gay-friendly venues	M: 36.1 Range: 18-71	Web-based survey In 2011	IPV MSM	Recent experiences of experiencing and perpetuating sexual and physical IPV examined. Themes: minority stress, dyadic factors including racial differences, age differences and social networks were examined.
Stephenson & Finneran, (2017) USA	(N=1075) Gay 671 89.4% Bisexual 79 10.6%	Venue based sampling Gay-friendly venues.	Approx . 50% younger than 35	Internet based Survey:	IPV, MSM Minority stress	Internalised homophobia, sexuality based discrimination and racism were examined in relation to perpetration and victimisation of IPV
Turell, Brown & Hermann (2018) USA	(N=439) Self-identified Bisexual people	Convenience sample online adverts Facebook, MTurk	M:31.53 Range 18 to 64	Internet based Survey	IPV Bisexual Polyamorous	Prevalence of IPV for bisexual people. Themes: bi-negativity, perceived and real infidelity was examined.
Woodyatt & Stephenson (2016) USA	(N=64) Gay men: 85.9% 55 Bisexual men: 14.1%	Venue-based sampling. gay-friendly ads, flyers posters	M: 34.5 Range: 18-45	10 focus groups (8 in person, 2 online)	IPV Emotional IPV	Gay and bisexual men's perspectives of IPV. Typologies, antecedents and experiences of emotional violence were examined
Stanley, Bartholomew, Taylor, Oram, & Landolt (2006) USA	(N=69) 75.4% Gay, 20.3% predominately Gay 4.2% degrees of bisexuality	Randomly selected community sample. Digit dialling telephone	M: 38.6 Range: 25 to 63	15-20 min telephone interview (N=300). interviews (n=195)	Intimate Violence Male Same-sex	Men's experiences provide general picture of same-sex IPV. The study examined nature, conflict, triggers and severity of IPV (emotional and physical IPV)
Ovenden et al. (2019) Australia	(N= 895) Gay 89.2% Bisexual 3.5% Queer 4.9% Pansexual 1.8% Asexual 0.6%	Convenience sample ACON's Facebook and Twitter.	M: 35 Range: 18-85	Online Survey with open ended questions	IPV Sexual Assault	Focused on men's views and experiences of healthy and or abusive relationships. IPV and sexual assault, help seeking, bystander intervention were also examined.

Dickerson-Amaya & Coston (2019) USA	(N = 18,957), 142 gay-identified men, and 88 bisexual men.	Random Selected sample (random-digit-dial)	Aged ≥18 years	Secondary Analysis of Survey in 2011	IPV	Explores the negative mental health outcomes of physical, sexual, emotional and control, and stalking IPV for men (gay bisexual and heterosexual).
Craft & Serovich, (2005) USA	(N=51) HIV positive gay men	Nonprobability convenience sampling. AIDS Clinical Trials Unit, HIV event/forum	M: 40.47. Range: 25 to 63	Questionnaires	Partner violence CTS2	Prevalence of IPV in gay HIV positive men. Examined family-of-origin factors, physical, psychological and sexual coercion.
Raghavan, Beck, Menke & Loveland, (2019) USA	(N=126) men in same-sex relationship. one-third were HIV positive	High risk sample harm-reduction clinic	M: 40.34 Range: 19 to 65	Semi-structured interview questionnaire	IPV Coercive control	Physical violence, verbal abuse, weapon use, coercive control, sexual violence and stalking were examined.
Nieves-Rosa, Carballo-Dieguez, & Dolezal, (2000) USA	(N=307) MSM: with ten sexual encounters, one encounter in the last twelve months	Snowball ads flyers, condom wrappers, ads in gay /non-gay venues	M: 31 Range: 18-55	Two sets of Questionnaire	Domestic Abuse, MSM	Prevalence and nature of domestic abuse for Latino American MSM. Results show association to men experiencing IPV to engaging in additional sexual risk taking.
Stults et al. (2016) USA	(N=528) young gay, bisexual, and other young MSM	Recruited from ongoing prospective cohort study of a diverse sample	ages 18–19	Analysis of audio computer survey Follow back survey	IPV YMSM	Examining the relationship between (IPV) perpetration versus victimization, condom-less sex and other sexual risk behaviours.
Wei et al. (2019) China	(N=431) MSM homosexual: 335 bisexual: 70	Convenience sampling: MSM-friendly health services	N/A	Survey structured questionnaire	IPV MSM GBM Scale	Study explored prevalence of all forms of IPV for Chinese MSM. Risk factors explored including drug use, transactional sex, self-esteem issues, age of first homosexual intercourse.
Bacchus et al. (2018) UK	Survey (N=532) Interviews (N=19) GBM	Convenience sampling: Recruited sexual health clinics	N/A	Survey semi structured interviews and survey 2010-2011	Domestic violence abuse (DVA) MSM	Examines prevalence of abusive partner behaviour for MSM, reporting abuse and perceptions of help seeking and service provision.
Cruz (2003)	(N=25) GBM	Purposive Snowball sampling. social service Agency	M= 32 Range: 23 to 43	Semi-structured interview	Gay Male Domestic Abuse	Examining reasons why men may stay in abusive relationships Such reasons include: Financial dependence, love, hope for change, and fear of escalated violence.
Note: GBM= Gay and Bisexual Men MSM= Men who have sex with men. YMSM= young men who have sex with men IPV= Intimate Partner Violence DVA= Domestic Violence Abuse MSSIPV= Male Same Sex Intimate Partner Violence CTS2= Conflict Tactic Scale CTS2S= Revised Conflict Tactic Scale						

Findings

The findings of this review are presented below under the following themes: classification of IPV, sexual minority status, societal and internal homophobia, bisexual invisibility and difficulties accessing minority men focused services.

Classification of IPV

Data on the classification of IPV among the 34 studies reviewed was limited. Nevertheless, across studies, the classification of violence for gay and bisexual men mirror that for heterosexual or mixed sex couples, comprising of psychological, sexual and physical abuse (Cruz & Firestone, 1998; Kay & Jeffries, 2010; Michael, 1999; Rollè et al., 2018). An exploratory qualitative study of 25 gay and bisexual men in the U.S. revealed that minority men experienced violence in ways akin to heterosexual individuals, using similar definitions and descriptions. As one participant explained, IPV was “exactly as you would in a heterosexual relationship...physical, mental and verbal abuse...” (Cruz & Firestone, 1998 p.166).

Physical Abuse

Physical violence featured strongly in studies on IPV. It is the most commonly measured form of violence for gay and bisexual men (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017; Woodyatt & Stephenson, 2016). A telephone survey conducted by Bartholomew et al. (2008b) found that over half (55%) of 284 gay and bisexual men reported physical violence with strong associations to sustaining injuries. Comparable findings are observed by Merrille and Wolfe (2000) who discovered that 87% out of 52 men surveyed, reported frequent physical abuse with 79% of the respondents reporting at least one injury. A 2017 systematic review revealed that for gay, bisexual men and other

sexual minority individuals, the rate of physical IPV ranged from 19.9% to 39%, (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017).

Psychological Abuse

According to Longobardi and Badenes-Ribera, (2017), despite the predominant focus on physical abuse in studies reviewed, individuals in same-sex pairings experience more psychological abuse than physical abuse. Inordinate psychological aggression rates (74%) were recorded in an exploratory survey of 51 HIV positive gay men with experiences of IPV (Craft & Serovich, 2005). Turrell (2000) found that 83% of a sample of 499 gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals, 43% of which were gay men, reported emotional abuse. Stephenson and Finneran (2017a) found that emotional abuse (29.4%) was the most common form of IPV in their cohort (n=1075). In Bartholomew, Regan, White & Oram, (2008b)'s survey of gay and bisexual men (n=284), 94% disclosed that they experienced psychological abuse. Breiding, Chen and Walters (2013)'s nationally representative survey in the U.S. revealed a lifetime prevalence of psychological aggression victimisation by a partner amongst 60% of gay men and 53% of bisexual men, compared to victimisation rates of physical violence (24% for gay men and 27% for bisexual men). A qualitative study by Stephenson and colleagues (2014) using focus groups and in-depth interviews with 52 men who have sex with men revealed that for victims of IPV, emotional and verbal was the most common form of abuse, again more frequently reported than physical violence.

Stalking was also identified as a common component of IPV that is more prevalent in sexual minority relationships than in heterosexual relationships. Studies largely recruit heterosexual samples and seldom take stock of sexual minority populations (Sheridan et al., 2019; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019; Strand &

McEwan, 2011; Chen et al., 2020) resulting in a scarcity of empirical data in the stalking literature base to expand the issue to gay and bisexual men (Black et al., 2011; Pathé et al., 2000). While many IPV studies exclude experiences of stalking, one study that examined both phenomena indicated that 66.27% of gay men and 60.38% of bisexual men reported victimisation of intimate stalking as a form of IPV (N=136) (Dickerson-Amaya & Coston, 2019). This compares with 26% of gay men and 37% of bisexual men who have experienced IPV that covers a range of abusive experiences (Breiding et al., 2013). In a US probability sample, gay and bisexual male participants reported higher rates of stalking than heterosexual men (recorded as 11.4% for gay men, 6.9% for bisexual men vs 5.2% for heterosexual men; Chen et al., 2020). Across eight US educational institutions, 53.1% of sexual minority students experienced unwanted pursuit, significantly higher than the heterosexual participants (36.0%) (Edwards et al., 2015). Transgender, bisexual, and queer individuals had the highest prevalence of lifetime stalking victimization in a large community-based sample (N = 1,116) (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2019).

Findings from one of the first US large scale survey on stalking revealed that 60% of men disclosed an encounter of stalking by a male, but the authors could not specify if experiences were related to hate crimes or intimate stalking. A total of 41.4% of male stalking victims reported that they had been stalked by an intimate partner (Black et al., 2011). Men were more likely than women to report engaging in stalking behaviour after a breakup, according to one study that analysed the phenomenon in a gay lesbian, bisexual and transgender sample (N= 165; Derlega et al., 2011). Sexual minority groups are also likely to report intrusive behaviours and stalking victimisation than their heterosexual peers (35.5% vs 15.0%; Sheridan et al., 2019). Other studies indicate a high prevalence of male same-gender stalking, ranging from 62% (ABS,

2010), 50% (Budd & Mattinson, 2000) 41% (Baum et al. 2009) to 24% (Purcell et al., 2002) and as low 18% (Pathé et al., 2000). Research indicates that in general, men stalking men are more likely to be resentfully motivated or carry a grievance towards their victim (as reported in 69% of male stalkers) (Strand & McEwan, 2011). Such individuals also display higher rates of threats towards their victims (Strand & McEwan, 2011) but are less likely to follow or approach their victims than opposite sex stalkers (Pathé et al., 2000). What remains unknown is the sexual minority status of the above participants (as most of the studies did not stipulate sexual orientation). Such data could provide a window into the stalking and IPV that transpires in gay and bisexual male relationships. Indeed, additional research targeting IPV and stalking behaviour of LGBTQ individuals as well as sexual minority men is needed.

An additional form of psychological abuse identified in this review is that of 'outing' (Brown, 2008; Kay & Jeffries, 2010). Outing or threats of outing are a unique feature of same-sex IPV leading to emotional stress or strain in relationships. Disclosing one's sexual orientation to the wider society is commonly referred to as 'coming out' which incorporates a long and personal process of accepting a sexual orientation, deciding to share this with others and forming a positive sexual identity (Higgins et al., 2016). Outing an individual's sexual orientation and forcing them to disclose their sexual status to family, friends and colleagues without their consent (Kelley et al., 2014) is seen as a form of social control (Michael, 2006) and can more broadly be conceptualised as a form of psychological abuse (Woodyatt & Stephenson, 2016).

Gay and bisexual men may be at a particular risk for such abuse, if they experience a 'double closet' (Finneran et al., 2012), which embodies feeling shame towards both their sexuality and their exposure to IPV. Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, (2017)'s systematic review found two studies that reported a relationship between sexual

orientation openness and IPV; being more open about a sexual orientation created further risk for men to experience IPV. Bartholomew, Regan, White and Oram (2008a), in their telephone survey of gay and bisexual men, found no association between sexual orientation outness and victimisation, while Carvalho and colleagues (2011) did find such a relationship (to which IPV victimization was associated with sexual orientation openness). Kelley and colleagues (2014) found that men who were less open about their sexual orientation were more likely to report IPV. These findings suggest that isolation and limited social connection due to concealing a sexual orientation from friends, family and colleagues could leave an individual more at risk of violence in male same-sex relationships.

It has been suggested that in adolescence, this may be more a feature of bisexual relationships than gay or lesbian relationships; in one study, bisexual male adolescents were five times more likely than gay or lesbian individuals to report that their partner threatened to out their sexual orientation to the wider society (Freedner et al., 2001). An Irish study of sexual minority individuals revealed that 34.2% reported that someone had attempted to out their sexual orientation (Mayock et al., 2008) while a study in China found that 12.4% of gay male adolescents (aged 16-24) had experienced threats from their previous or current partner to out them to their wider community (Yu et al., 2013).

The role of outing in gay and bisexual male relationships is not clear. Threatening to out a partner has been identified as a controlling or blackmailing measure in relationships (Duke & Davidson, 2009). As one professional stated, "Like the partner say, if you don't follow what I ask you to do, I will tell your family and your friends that you are gay" (Kwong-lai Poon, 2010, p.97). Focus groups with 64 gay and bisexual men revealed that men can use outing as a form of coercion to either force openness or suppress it. A 'closeted' man may suppress or control their openly gay or bisexual

partner to hide their secret, or conversely, an 'open' man may use their partner's concealed sexual orientation to gain power or exert control (Duke & Davidson, 2009; Goldenberg et al., 2016).

Sexual Violence

While sexual violence literature on the heterosexual population is extensive, there is limited research examining sexual abuse amongst gay and bisexual men (Binon & Gray, 2020). Research of this nature predominantly employs purposive or convenience sampling often leading to difficulties with generalization (Brown & Herman, 2015). Sexual violence can broadly encompass any involuntary sexual activity (Centre for Disease Control and Protection, 2020), therefore across studies there may be considerable variability in classification, overall description and measurements. Brown & Herman's (2015) review of the literature from 1989 to 2015 found lifetime prevalence rates of sexual violence victimisation among sexual minority people ranging from 3.1% to 15.7%. Four in ten (37.3%) bisexual men and one in four gay men (26.0%) in a U.S. study disclosed an experience of rape by an intimate partner in their lifetime. In the same study, nearly half of bisexual men and four out of ten gay men disclosed a life time experience of sexual violence (which excluded rape) by an unspecified perpetrator (Breiding et al., 2013).

Rates of self-reported sexual violence by an intimate partner ranged from four percent in 188 gay and bisexual men (Raghavan et al., 2019) to 27% in HIV positive gay men (Craft & Serovich, 2005), to 73% in gay men (Mereille & Wolfe, 2000). Cross sectional data obtained from surveys and interviews of 183 gay and bisexual men revealed that more than half (56.9%) disclosed a unwanted sexual contact experience, 67.2% reported sexual assault, 36.6% reported sexual coercion and 27.9% disclosed an

experience of rape by an unidentified perpetrator (Hequembourg et al., 2015). The varying rates of sexual violence illuminating the challenges of accurately measuring IPV for gay and bisexual men, but also draw attention to the high prevalence rates in selective samples.

Research has consistently documented the confluence of IPV amongst sexual minority men to increased sexual risk-taking (Houston & McKirnan, 2007; Stults et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2019), which can put this cohort at further risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Men in abusive partnerships have been found to be more likely to engage in risky behaviour adversely impacting on their health such as taking drugs or substances before or during intercourse and recent unprotected anal sex (Houston & McKirnan, 2007). Nieves-Rosa and colleagues (2000) were the first to highlight the prevalence of sexual minority men experiencing IPV who engaged in unprotected receptive anal intercourse. Samples of 51 HIV positive gay men identifying as victims of IPV disclosed having forced others (23.5%) or being forced (27%) to engage in sex without protection (Craft & Serovich, 2005). A possible explanation for this heightened risk may be their inability to negotiate safe condom use due to structural power differences and violence in their relationships (Goldenberg et al., 2016). This phenomenon appears to be a significant feature in gay and bisexual relationships. Stephenson & Finneran's (2017b) internet based anonymous survey in Atlanta found that more than half (55.1%) of 1,075 gay and bisexual men (in a sample of self-identified victims and perpetrators) reported condom-less anal intercourse. Those who had disclosed a recent experience of physical or sexual abuse were significantly more likely to report unprotected anal intercourse (Stephenson & Finneran, 2017b). Sexual practices between men requires continual negotiation and trust, which could prove difficult for those experiencing IPV.

Sexual Minority Status

A notable finding of the scoping review was the number of extracted studies that explored how gay and bisexual men experience distinctive stressors due to their sexual orientation. Such studies explored the distinctive social and cultural factors that impact men's experiences of violence (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2017; Finneran et al., 2012; Meyer, 1995; Pimental, 2015; Rollè et al., 2018). Those that examined the intersectionality between IPV and minority status often utilized the minority stress theory put forth by Meyer (1995). As an initial approach to examining mental health disparities amongst the LGBTQ (lesbian gay bisexual transgender and queer) population, Meyer's (1995) theory describes excess or pronounced stressors that are unique to the sexual minority individual.

Gay and bisexual men experience stress directly related to their sexual orientation, particularly in the form of verbal abuse or harassment (Higgins et al., 2016). Concealing a sexual minority status can result in additional stress in the form of increased risk of abuse and inadequate social network systems. Stephenson and Finneran (2017a) identified variables of minority stress as including internalized homophobia, discrimination and racism which in turn were strongly linked with increased likelihood of gay and bisexual men experiencing IPV. Studies that explore the minority stress theory provide new light on features of violence specific to gay and bisexual men. They include societal and internalised homophobia, bisexual invisibility and lack of available resources for gay and bisexual men. Such distinctive features could possibly explain the high rates of violence in male same-sex relationships (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2017).

Societal Homophobia

Homophobia and its pathway to IPV is a thread steadily documented in the literature (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2017; Bartholomew et al., 2008a; Kay & Jeffries, 2010). One exemplar obtained from a focus group with gay and bisexual men, articulated this point: ‘Violence [is] not just in your relationship, but just walking down the street [..]’ (Goldenberg et al., 2016, p.11). A significant proportion of the studies reviewed explored homophobia, a term initially coined by Weinberg to describe adverse feelings regarding a sexual identity (Brown, 2008). It can also include acts such as verbal harassment, slurs, threats, physical abuse as well as avoiding or refusing to acknowledge the existence of sexual minority people (Allen, 2019). Gay and bisexual men can encounter societal homophobia early in life. In one study of Irish schools (N= 788), 73% of sexual minority students aged 17 to 20 reported feeling unsafe in school and had experienced homophobic remarks (Pizmony-Levy, 2019).

Homophobia has complex roots and its full impact on male same-sex couples remains unclear. IPV perpetrators may reinforce the beliefs that the victim’s social supports such as peers, friends and family will not understand or help them (due to sexual orientation) if they leave the abusive relationship (Kay & Jeffries, 2010). Homophobia, stigma and rejection from family members can adversely influence how men experience and cope with IPV (Frierson, 2014). One large scale comparative study on 2,368 gay and bisexual men across six countries also indicated that homophobia and IPV is universal in this population, crossing different geographical locations (Finneran et al., 2012).

Notably, all of the 1,575 sexual minority male participants in an internet based survey reported experiencing some form of homophobic discrimination in their lifetime. Those who enacted physical violence reported higher levels of homophobic discrimination than non-abusive gay and bisexual men (Finneran & Stephenson, 2014b).

Thus, the relationship between homophobia and risk of IPV operates for both the victim and the perpetrator.

Internalised Homophobia

Internalised homophobia refers to the internalisation or inherent adverse attitudes regarding a sexual identity or orientation (Bartholomew et al., 2008a; Kelley et al., 2014; Cruz & Firestone, 1998). Negative feelings related to one's sexual identity can be strongly associated with depression, low self-esteem, shame and psychological distress (Finneran & Stephenson, 2014b; Meyer, 1995). Higher levels of internalized homophobia are associated with higher levels of IPV in same-sex couples (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2017; Stephenson & Finneran, 2017). However, a systematic review exploring the relationship between internalised homophobia and violent behaviour in same-sex couples observed a lack of consensus across all studies (Longobardi & Badnes-Ribera, 2017).

Given their different sexual orientations, gay and bisexual men may experience internalised homophobia differently. Finneran and Stephenson's (2014b) internet-recruited surveys with 1,575 sexual minority men revealed that self-identified bisexual men reported increased internalised homophobia, while self-identified gay men reported higher levels of societal homophobia, as evidenced by homophobic discrimination. Also, internalized homophobia has been identified as a predictor of the enactment of physical and psychological violence but has not been associated with IPV victimisation (Bartholomew et al., 2008a). Bartholomew et al. (2008a) have suggested that the stress arising from internalised homophobia in minority men may then manifest in the enactment of physical and psychological violence.

Bisexual Invisibility

An unsurprising finding involved the scarcity of data concerning bisexual men. Indeed, many authors investigating same-sex violence tended to pay particular attention to gay and lesbian populations, often overlooking bisexual men in the process. Scholars have a tendency to incorporate bisexual individuals into larger gay and lesbian groupings which leaves bisexual men often unrepresented in research analysis (Hequembourg et al., 2015; Turell et al., 2018). Some authors refer to this as bisexual erasure, which can be broadly defined as a process of rendering bisexual people invisible (Flanders et al., 2016) or overlooking bisexuality as a valid sexuality (Barker & Langdridge, 2008).

The limited empirical data on the experiences of bisexual people (Duke & Davidson, 2009; Freedner et al., 2001), it is argued, has resulted in myths shaping how society views bisexuality. Some of these myths can be detrimental to how bisexual men experience violence and seek help. They include labels of selfishness, confusion, promiscuity and presumed non-monogamy lifestyles. Bisexuality can be falsely stereotyped as a phase or a fictitious sexual identity (Duke & Davidson, 2009; Messenger, 2012; Turell et al., 2018).

There is some suggestion that bisexual people can be seen as confused about their sexual orientation (Higgins et al., 2016) although these views mainly come from studies of younger populations. Friedman and colleagues (2014) found that 14.4 % of undergraduate students agreed that bisexuality was not a valid sexual orientation. This survey also revealed a significantly higher negative attitude towards bisexual males than towards bisexual females. Given that limited research is available on bisexual people to

challenge and oppose these myths, the misconceptions of bisexual groups can lead to such people disengaging from the research process as well as experiencing biphobia which consists of adverse attitudes or feelings related to bisexuality (Messinger, 2012).

Bisexual people have frequently reported a limited connection with their community and a “double marginality” (Duke & Davidson, 2009) as they experience stigma and discrimination from both the heterosexual and LGBTQ community (Friedman et al., 2014). Online surveys with 439 bisexual participants revealed that bisexual men were more likely to have higher levels of biphobia about their sexual identity (Turell et al., 2018). Focus groups revealed bisexual women associated bisexual erasure to feelings of exclusion from LGBTQ health services (Flanders et al., 2016), a problematic finding, as cross sectional surveys have highlighted that many sexual minority individuals experiencing IPV may not have access to specialised IPV services and may overly depend on LGBTQ orientated services (Pimental, 2015).

The limited research suggests that experiencing biphobia in the sexual minority community could increase the risk of IPV for bisexual individuals (Freedner et al., 2001; Rollè et al., 2018). Negative attitudes towards bisexuality are associated with both victimization and perpetration in male bisexual couples (Turell et al., 2018). Bisexual men have been found to be more likely to experience physical and sexual violence and report poor mental health outcomes compared to heterosexual and homosexual men (Dickerson-Amaya & Coston, 2019). Higher levels of IPV have been reported in bisexual individuals (46.8%) when compared to gay and lesbians (26.6%; Barrett & St. Pierre, 2015). The myths, stereotypes and experiences of biphobia recorded in the literature suggest that further research is needed on the experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual.

Difficulty in Accessing Minority Men Focused Services

To terminate an abusive partnership, the victim may require support and assistance through formal or informal channels. Results of this scoping review highlight the inadequate level of resources for gay and bisexual men who experience IPV (Finneran et al., 2012; Letellier, 1991; Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; KwongLai Poon, 2010). Binion and Gray (2020) cite structural and institutional biases towards the sexual minority community as an obstacle to help seeking. Merrill and Wolfe (2000) suggested that sexual minority men are least likely to seek out services to which they deem are predominantly utilized and set up for women. Some men may feel that IPV services may not be equipped to deal with male same-sex abuse efficiently (Buford & Seamon-DeJohn, 2007; Houston & McKirnan, 2007). However, much of the writing on this issue appears to be speculative or based on anecdotal evidence, requiring additional research to draw stronger conclusions. According to Frierson (2014), how men view such services is seen to be crucial to outreach and support. Some of the men in their study feared being judged for undergoing violence by another man of a smaller build. Seeking professional help was also linked to their sense of manhood. When describing such abuse and their reasons for not seeking help, one respondent stated “(...) So yeah, I thought they would think of me as less of a man” (Frierson, 2014, p. 93) while another respondent said “(...) I’m a man what do I need with, domestic violence services” (p. 93).

Findings also indicate that having a HIV diagnosis may also influence how gay and bisexual men solicit support for IPV. A HIV diagnosis can influence the decision for such men to remain in harmful or abusive relationships (Island & Letellier, 1999). Men with HIV encounter additional challenges to leaving an abusive partner, including dependency for support and care (Cruz & Firestone, 1998; Island & Leteller, 1999) and fear that their HIV status would be outed or revealed to society (Pimental, 2015). Merille

and Wolfe (2000) found that a high number of their sample of 20 HIV positive men (in a cohort of 52 respondents) reported a fear of health deteriorating or dying contributed to their decision not to terminate the abusive relationship. However, as HIV was not a primary focus of their investigation, further research is needed to understand these associations.

A systematic review of literature (2006–2017) highlights how heterosexual, gay and bisexual men may feel invisible in IPV service provision (Huntley et al., 2019). The anticipation of experiencing homophobia or heterosexist discrimination from IPV service providers has also been identified as factors in minority men's reluctance to seek professional help (Bacchus et al., 2018; Duke & Davidson, 2009; Carvalho et al., 2011). Kay and Jeffries (2010) noted that gay and bisexual men may experience hostile or heterosexist attitudes from professionals in the field.

Participants in Cruz and Firestone (1998)'s highlighted how support services need to focus on their needs both as men and as a marginalised sexual minority group. Suggested services included education, measures to increase awareness of male same-sex IPV, counselling and therapy with trained and equipped professionals, financial aid, safe spaces and shelters for gay and bisexual men (Cruz & Firestone, 1998). Similar to heterosexual couples, reasons for remaining in an abusive relationship for men include financial restraints, love coexisting with the abuse, hope for change, fear of being alone, fear of repercussions and poor self-esteem (Cruz, 2003); thus, all of these need to be taken into account in developing services for this population. Much work is needed to improve the general perceptions of mainstream services for the sexual minority community. However, further research exploring outreach services, perceived helpfulness and help seeking behaviour for gay and bisexual men may go some way to addressing this much neglected sector of society.

Discussion

This review of 34 studies exploring the IPV experiences of gay and bisexual men revealed that such men experienced IPV at parallel or higher rates and in similar ways to heterosexual couples in which the focus was on male violence towards women. High rates of psychological, physical and sexual violence were recorded and while physical violence appeared to be the most frequently measured, psychological abuse was more prevalent and played a central role in gay and bisexual men's experiences of IPV. Qualitative research, in particular, illuminated the subtle nature of psychological abuse. Sexual violence in cohorts of gay and bisexual men was measured as low as 4% (Raghavan et al., 2019) but as high as 73% (Merille & Wolfe, 2000).

Determining the scope of violence for gay and bisexual men was challenging, often due to fluctuating empirical data (Turell, 2000), different recall periods of violence (Stephenson & Finneran, 2017a) inconsistent use of terminology, (Finneran et al., 2012; Kelley et al. 2014; Kwong-Lai Poon, 2010) and methodologies (Rollè et al., 2018), as well as variances in the types of relationships being investigated (Orginher & Samuelson, 2011). However, it should be noted that sexual minority groups are a hard to reach marginalised group in society outside the purview of the public eye. The use of non-probability or opportunist techniques, such as convenience sampling are considered time and cost effective (Etikan et al., 2016) and may be utilized by scholars due to a lack of public funding availability or policy agendas dedicated to this overlooked area of research.

However, despite the parallels between the experiences of minority men and heterosexual men and women, some distinctive features were identified in this minority population. Gay and bisexual men can experience IPV through the distinct lens of their sexual orientation and marginalised background. For instance, outing a partner's sexual

orientation to the wider society was a unique form of psychological abuse identified in this scoping review. Outing creates further risk for gay and bisexual men to experience IPV (Longobardi & Badenes-Ribera, 2017), however, currently, its role in research is not well characterised. Much of the data collected on outing relies on quantitative studies of unrepresentative samples. Outing is exclusive to the sexual minority community that requires further exploration. The lack of attention to this experience in the research literature is a clear example of the danger of employing heterosexual gendered paradigms on IPV (often centred on evidence emerging from female heterosexual cohorts) in trying to understand how gay and bisexual men experience and perpetrate such abuse.

An interesting finding of the scoping review was the intersection between IPV and determinants of gay and bisexual men's sexual health. Direct associations between experiencing IPV and heightened exposure to health risks including risky sexual behaviour (such as unprotected anal intercourse, increased substance use before or during sex) were steadily observed (Houston & McKirnan, 2007; Stephenson & Finneran, 2017b). Male victims of IPV may struggle to negotiate safe condom use (Goldenberg et al., 2016) which may leave them further at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Gay and bisexual men are disproportionately affected by HIV (Chan et al., 2020), it is therefore not surprising that studies exploring IPV briefly touched on men experiencing both living with HIV and violence. Such men may struggle to solicit the help of services. Commitments concerning caretaking, blame as well as fear of desertion or dying were cited as unique obstacles to such men seeking help (Island & Letellier, 1999; Merille & Wolfe, 2000). Future research should investigate this relationship further.

While identifying with the sexual minority community can provide both meaning and positive experiences for men, the discrimination and marginalisation arising from society linked directly to their sexual orientation, appears to be associated with additional stress in men's same-sex relationships. Several extracted studies attest to the use of Meyer's (1995) sexual minority theory to examine such stress (Kelley et al., 2014; Rollè et al., 2018). However, the sexual minority theory while having the potential to understand the unique stresses relating to this population, is also noted for its inability to account for the diverse cross contextual experiences and roles of social network systems for sexual minority individuals (Holman, 2008). Nevertheless, this lens does help to conceptualize minority stress as a unique feature of IPV for gay and bisexual men including societal homophobia, internalised homophobia, outing, heightened sexual risk taking and difficulty accessing specialised services. Findings revealed that gay and bisexual men endorsing minority stress were associated with higher rates of IPV. One limitation of these studies is the lack of attempt to explore society's role in exacerbating minority stress. A hostile societal climate can provide optimum conditions for such minority stress and distinctive features of abuse to take place. One third of the countries in the world (79 countries) do not have explicit protective laws dedicated to protecting the sexual minority community and in some cases even enforce illegal measures against those in same-sex relations (Luiz & Spicer, 2019).

A significant source of such stress was identified as homophobia. This review shed some light on how gay and bisexual men can encounter homophobia, both in their intimate relationships and in wider society and how such homophobic experiences both left them vulnerable to IPV and to not being able to access support. However, the role

of both societal homophobia and internalised homophobia in men's same-sex relationships is unclear and may be unique to each gay or bisexual man.

A significant limitation of the studies reviewed was the reliance on self-identified gay and bisexual men as study participants. Venue based, snowballing or convenience recruitment strategies may have enlisted a greater amount of self-identified 'open' sexual minority men, compared to 'non-open' or 'closeted' men who may arguably experience more shame, internalised homophobia, and sexual orientation concealment. Hence, studies that overtly seek out men to self-identify in order to participate in research may not reliably reflect the experiences of (internalised) homophobia. By seeking the accounts of men who must be willing to disclose or identify their sexuality, men who are closeted, ashamed or unwilling are inevitably excluded. Therefore, on issues such as IPV and homophobia in men, only a partial picture as it relates to selective members of the sexual minority community is obtained. To examine this phenomenon, additional research employing non-specific labels and terminology, as well as representative, randomised or alternative recruitment strategies are recommended.

A group largely invisible in social research is bisexual men. The findings of this scoping review confirm the low representation of that bisexual males. All of the studies reviewed predominantly recruited more gay men than bisexual men, despite employing an array of recruitment techniques targeting men of both sexual orientations. The lack of bisexual representation may impact such findings. For example, 90% of the male participants recruited by Woodyatt and Stephenson (2016) identified as homosexual or gay (n=60), while only 10 of the 117 men in Oringer and Samuelson's (2011) study identified as bisexual. Rates of bisexual representation in research ranged from 4% (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000) 5.2% (Stephenson et al., 2013), 7.75% (Finneran &

Stephenson, 2014b) 9.3% (Kelley et al., 2014) to 12.7% (Houston & McKirnan, 2007). More targeted research of this group of men is needed to better understand their experiences.

Several questions arise as to why bisexual men do not engage in research. Often referred to as a silenced sexuality (Barker & Langdridge, 2008), bisexual men may be the subject of stigma or discrimination and can develop a distrust or disconnection with those working in academia. Their vulnerability to experiences of stigma, feelings of isolation, and not belonging to either the heterosexual or sexual minority community may explain their reticence to engage with researchers (Friedman et al. 2014). Research suggests that encountering biphobia leaves bisexual men at a greater risk of experiencing IPV (Freedner et al., 2001; Rollè et al., 2018). Further research or empirical validation is needed to better understand the reality of bisexual men's lives, who by sharing their unique experiences may shed more light on the phenomenon of IPV.

A noticeable absence of resources for minority men experiencing IPV was a theme central to this review. However, few studies explored how gay and bisexual men seek help and what service provisions are dedicated to them in their area. Research consistently demonstrates the prevalence of IPV for gay and bisexual men can mirror (suggested to be as equal to or higher) that of heterosexual couples (Kay & Jeffries, 2010). However, the dearth of service provision, public agendas and funding for such men (Frierson, 2014) when compared to the response to heterosexual violence contradicts this finding.

Research consistently demonstrates the prevalence of IPV for gay and bisexual men as equal to or higher than that of heterosexual couples (Kay & Jeffries, 2010). However, this raises the question as to why there is such a dearth of service provision, public agendas and funding for such men? (Frierson, 2014), especially when compared to the

response dedicated to heterosexual violence. Perhaps it is the under studied and hidden nature of IPV in sexual minority populations that contributes to the marginalisation of this faction of society; more scholarly focus and public awareness may go some way to address this.

Conclusion

Social scientific research is often noted for its absence of studies that authentically explore the experiences of the sexual minority diverse groups, a concern which is amplified with regards to the literature pertaining to IPV and gay and bisexual men. The heterosexual experience of IPV (male abuse towards women) has a strong foundation in the literature base, which means unique features of violence for gay and bisexual men may go unreported, under researched or even ignored. This paper has endeavoured to collate what is known about both the prevalence of IPV in such populations and what the research reveals about these men's experiences. The study reveals that while there are similarities between these men's experiences and heterosexual men or women's experiences (equal to or higher prevalence rates of physical, psychological and sexual abuse; reasons why they stay in an abusive relationship), there are many distinctive features (outing, homophobia, difficulty accessing services) that require further research to both enhance our understanding of this phenomenon and to inform service development in this area.

Researchers, policy makers and practitioners may have a concern that independent inquiry of gay and bisexual men would reinforce their difference in society, exacerbate their marginalisation or paradoxically, or collude with homophobia. However, it may be that both the universal features of IPV and the distinctive features for certain populations both need attention. The detrimental and indelible effects of IPV

do not discriminate against age, gender or sexual orientation but instead present as a health concern shared and burdened by humanity.

This scoping review highlighted how gay and bisexual men experience unique features of violence which may go under researched in mainstream IPV literature. Sexual orientation outing, heightened health risks, societal and internalised homophobia as well as inadequate access to services for gay and bisexual men require independent consideration and pave the way to future research endeavours. It has also highlighted the need for more research on bisexual men's experiences. Future research should also address and explore the linkage to IPV, HIV and sexual risk taking for sexual minority men.

Perhaps one of the most crucial findings of this review is the call for minority men focused services. Michael (1999) whose work centres on the voices of queer individuals has posited that the lack of fundamental resources could lead to isolation, furthering the dependency of the victim to abuser as well as increased abuse for the victim. Twenty years later, that sentiment and concern remains true today.

Appendix for scoping review

Critical Appraisal of Extracted Studies

Critical Appraisal of Extracted Studies											
Qualitative Quality Assessment. This chart was guided by ETQS (Long et al. 2002)											
Auth or Year	Phenomena under study	Theoretical Framework	Setting	Sampling: Recruitment Process	Depth / Breath of perspective	Ethics Approval	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Reflexivity highlighting potential research bias	Practical implications	Quality assessment
Golde nberg et al., (2016)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Kay a& Jeffrie s, (2010)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Micha el, (1999)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Frierson, (2014)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Cruz & Firestone, (1998)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Kwon g-Lai Poon, 2(010)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Steph enson et al., (2014)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Wood yatt & Steph enson, (2016)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Island & Letelli er, (1999)	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Stanle y et al., (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Cruz, (2003)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H
Quantitative Quality Assessment. This chart was guided by ETQS (Long, 2002 a)											
Auth or year	Phenomena under study	Study Evaluation Overview	Study/ Setting	Sample	Ethical Approval	Outcome measurement : Data Collection	Outcome measurement : Data Analysis	Implications	Quality Assessment		
Barth olome w et al., (2008 a)	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Finner an et al., (2012)	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Finner an & Steph enson, (2014 b)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Barth olome w et al., 2008 b	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Yu et al.,(20 13)	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	M-H		

Houston & McKiernan, (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Kelly et al., (2014)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Merrill & Wolfe (2000)	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Oringer & Samuelson, (2011)	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Pimental., (2015)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Stephenson, et al., (2013)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Stephenson & Finneran, (2017)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Turell, et al., (2018)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Dickerson-Amaya & Coston, (2019)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Craft & Serovich, (2005)	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H		
Nieves-Rosa, Carballedo-Dieguez & Dolezal, (2000)	✓	✓	✓	✓	x					M-H		
Stults et al., (2016)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					M-H		
Wei et al., (2019)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					M-H		
Mixed Research Paradigms applying Evaluation Tool for 'Mixed Methods' Study Designs. This chart was guided by ETQS (long, 2002 b)												
Author Year	Phenomena Under Study	Study Evaluation Overview	Setting	Sample and Recruitment	Depth/Breadth of Perspective	Ethics	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis	Reflexivity highlighting potential research bias	Implications	Quality assessment	
Finneran & Stephenson, 2014 A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	M-H	
Finneran & Stephenson, (2013)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	M-H	
Ovenden et al., (2019)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	M-H	
Raghavan, et al., (2019)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H	
Bacchus et al., (2018)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M-H	
Note: Low – Medium (x < 6), Medium (x = 3 -5), Medium – High (x > 2)												

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Appendix B– Commentary Paper published in Advanced Nursing in April 2023

Citation: Callan, A., Corbally, M., & McElvaney, R. (2023). *A commentary on the challenges for nurses in identifying and responding to intimate partner violence amongst gay and bisexual men*. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 79(4),

Title of paper: Challenges for nurses in identifying and responding to IPV amongst gay and bisexual men.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive public health issue, transcending geographical settings, demographics of age, gender, sexual orientation and economic lines. It involves physical, psychological, and sexual violence occurring within a relationship and may include controlling behaviours, isolation, stalking, and restricting access to health care, education, employment, or financial resources (World Health Organization, 2012). Nurses are frequently the first point of contact for victims, across healthcare, obstetric and community settings. Their crucial role in responding appropriately, potentially influencing the life of an IPV victim is recognised worldwide. However, responding to individuals undergoing abuse who present to healthcare settings for other reasons is challenging; attention is needed to ensure that responses are both gender sensitive and evidence based.

The recognition of IPV through the women's rights movement in the late 1960s unveiled the inequality of women and male privilege in historical and social patriarchal contexts. This led to an exclusive focus on heterosexual violence enacted by men towards women, which invariably impacted on practice responses. Consequently, men received less attention concerning scholarship and structural level interventions to

combat IPV. As a hidden societal problem, IPV poses a significant threat to gay and bisexual men. According to Woodyatt and Stephenson (2016), the prevalence of violence against men in same-sex relationships is equal to or higher than that experienced by heterosexual women. This research challenges the myth that IPV is predominantly perpetrated against women; a heightened awareness of the prevalence of IPV in this marginalized group is essential if comprehensive responses are to be developed.

Little is known about the particular nature of this experience in gay and bisexual populations. A recent scoping review (Callan et al., 2020) highlighted similar IPV experiences within heterosexual and sexual minority relationships and identified unique features of IPV among gay and bisexual couples. These features include societal and internalised homophobia, outing and increased sexual risk taking, particularly for men. Nurses interface daily with such men and are well placed to intervene, facilitate disclosure, and potentially prevent further violence and susceptibility to abuse. This commentary outlines considerations for nurses to better respond to gay and bisexual victims, drawing on findings by Callan et al. (2020). The paper identifies challenges for nurses in recognising abuse in sexual minorities, detecting potential areas where discrimination against lesbian gay, bisexual transgender and queer (LGBTQ) patients in the health care sector occurs and recommendations for a more responsive, respectful service for this vulnerable population.

Potential for discrimination of sexual minority male patients in the health care system

Repeatedly referenced in the literature is sexual minority patients encountering discrimination in health care settings. Whether intentional or unintentional, language expressed by nurses could be described as heteronormative, as evident during standard

processes of patient admissions and history taking. For example, when a male patient states they are married, practitioners often ask for their wife's name or contact information, assuming they are heterosexual. Patient documentation employing civil status (married, divorced or single), while dismissing the relationship status of co-habiting couples, are additionally dismissive of sexual minority relationships, given the historical legal prohibition against marriage and civil partnerships in this community. Qualitative research investigating gay men's experiences in healthcare identified delays in treatment, perceived nurse discomfort with sexual minority patients, repetition of questions, and undermining patients' statements when they provided the name of their same-gender partner (Rondah et al., 2006).

Somerville (2015) observed acts of overt discrimination by health care workers. From a representative sample of 3,001 health and social care staff, one in seven reported the use of discriminatory language, including terms like 'poof', 'dyke' or 'queer' when describing the sexual minority community. While it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of nurses and healthcare practitioners endeavour to care to the best of their ability, these findings highlight the increased vulnerability of sexual minority victims undergoing IPV to experience discrimination by health care professionals, the deleterious impact on a victim's mental stability and safety, and the possible missed opportunities to disclose or flee a potentially life-threatening and abusive situation.

Challenges in identifying IPV in gay and bisexual men

Concurrent with physical, psychological and sexual violence, gay and bisexual men experience distinctive forms of IPV, including increased coerced sexual risk-taking, homophobia, and outing. Stresses concerning sexual minority identity hinder help-seeking, which may be compounded by the absence of services provision. Such individuals may conceal their sexual orientation from doctors and nurses due to previous

negative experiences of homophobia in their daily lives. Homophobia is also a dynamic of IPV, resulting in the sexual minority victim becoming more emotionally isolated and dependent on the abusing partner. The research indicates that nurses are doubly challenged, firstly in identifying their patient as a gay or bisexual man, and secondly, identifying them as an IPV victim.

Callan et al. (2020) found that gay and bisexual men are at increased vulnerability for contracting sexually transmitted infections as they are often coerced into sexual risk-taking behaviour as part of IPV. Staff in general hospital settings, sexual health clinics or general practice settings are well placed to facilitate IPV disclosure. However, it may be assumed that such risk-taking behaviour such as condom-less sex was consensual. Facilitating open-ended questions about sexual behaviour, without making assumptions, may convey a message to the patient that nurses are interested in hearing about their experiences which may unearth undisclosed IPV experiences.

Training and Education of Nurses

Research points to a lack of the requisite knowledge, confidence, practice training and organisational support for nurses to deal effectively with IPV. This is unsurprising, given competing demands for staff to remain clinically up to date whilst meeting the needs of patients with a myriad of health issues within often understaffed environments. Studies developing nursing practice frameworks for IPV identified the need for enhancing nurses' understanding of IPV, increasing their confidence to recognise IPV, while aiding victims to recognise abuse themselves as well as developing trusting relationships between practitioners and patients (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2016). Currently, training for screening of IPV victims often represents women as the victims. Knowledge of LGBTQ issues and the phenomenon of same-sex IPV appears limited in the nursing education curriculum, similar to that in social discourses. This may

perpetuate heterosexist and homophobic attitudes, impacting on the experiences of IPV victims in the health care system.

It is important to acknowledge that the transferable skills developed through nurse training including empathy, adaptability, active listening, tact and diplomacy are crucial to facilitating opportunities for victims to disclose abuse. The nursing profession internationally offers guidelines on how to care for LGBTQ patients (Royal College of Nursing, 2016) while in Ireland, a similar initiative has been undertaken by family doctors (Crowley, 2020). Central to this work is the importance of facilitating openness and safe spaces for LGBTQ patients in health care settings.

TABLE 1 IPV sample questions from international guidelines for LGBTQ+ patients

Author	Description	Interventions aimed at addressing IPV amongst LGBTQ+ patients
Bass and Nagy (2021)	Cultural competence in the care of LGBTQ patients	Are you now or have you ever been physically, mentally or sexually abused by someone close to you? Are you currently abused in any way? Have you ever been sexually assaulted? Are you afraid of anyone?
McNamara and Ng (2016)	Best practices in LGBT care: A guide for primary care physicians	Have you been hit, kicked, punched or otherwise hurt by someone in the past year? If so, by whom? Do you feel safe in your current relationship? Is there a partner from a previous relationship who is making you feel unsafe now?
GLMA: Gay Lesbian Medical Association (2005)	Guidelines for care of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patients	Have you ever been hurt (physically or sexually) by someone you are close to or involved with, or by a stranger? Are you currently being hurt by someone you are close to or involved with? Have you ever experienced violence or abuse? Have you ever been sexually assaulted/raped?
Ard and Makadon (2011)	Addressing intimate partner violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender patients	Does your partner ever hit, kick, hurt, or threaten you? Do you feel safe at home?

Practical Recommendations

Improved awareness of and sensitivity to the stereotypes about a person's gender, as well as the unique features of same-sex IPV such as sexual orientation outing, homophobia and increased sexual risk taking, in addition to more traditionalised abuse patterns (physical, sexual and psychological abuse) would be helpful. Recognition of the particular forms of abuse presented in male sexual minorities that are often absent

in dominant discourses on IPV will create a more open space for nurses to enable gay and bisexual men to disclose their experiences of IPV.

Sensitive nursing care can and should be delivered without heterosexist and homophobic practices. The use of open and direct communication, non-judgemental attitudes and gender-sensitive and universally appropriate language facilitates a safe space for victims to disclose sensitive information. Explicit reassurance from a nurse that the patient will not be judged if they disclose their sexual orientation is recommended. This can be operationalised through directly asking patients about their relationship status in ways that acknowledge the options of a range of sexual orientations and references to relationship status. Nurses should avoid comments on gender identity or appearance (such as how they look or dress), instead mirroring the patient's language to describe their sexual orientation, gender pronouns and relationship status. They could ask the patient which pronoun (he, she, they, them etc.) they feel best describes them and their partner. Examples include 'How would you identify your gender identity?' and 'What gender pronouns do you prefer?'

Gay and bisexual men also experience threats of having their sexual orientation outed to society by the abuser. Therefore, asking patients about their social circles and specifically who knows about their sexual orientation provides an opportunity for patients to disclose difficulties with naming their sexual orientation and their fears surrounding this. Some patients will not feel comfortable to disclose their sexual orientation to members of the medical community; thus nurses need to seek permission to document sexual orientation on records. Continual reassurance to the patient that all information is confidential is recommended (Royal College of Nursing, 2016).

The employment of universally acceptable terms such as "your partner" and "your significant other" validates sexual minority intimate relationships. Sexual

minority people may identify with a myriad of relationship types (casual dating, polyamorous relationships etc.) therefore assuming the patient has a singular monogamous partner is to be avoided. While it is challenging to give time to patients in busy healthcare settings to enable them to comfortably disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity, being aware of the importance of such questions and considerations may help nurses to find opportunities to facilitate disclosure, where possible. It is also important for nurse practitioners to be open to the possibility that key people in the patient's life, such as intimate partners and family members, are not supportive or may also act as barriers to receiving support. Specific screening tools to identify abuse in gay and bisexual men have been developed and may be applicable to healthcare settings. Stephenson et al. (2012) developed a 6 item scale of five domains of IPV for sexual minorities, including physical and sexual IPV, monitoring behaviours, controlling behaviours, HIV-related IPV, and emotional IPV. Nurses in their own practice could adapt this tool to screen for distinctive features of abuse in sexual minority relationships.

Zero-tolerance discrimination initiatives concerning sexual orientation and gender identity in hospital-based, or health care settings are helpful. Literature identifying inclusive language, LGBTQ resources, in waiting rooms demonstrates to patients that staff are accepting of minority status patients and in staff rooms conveys a message to staff that discrimination will not be tolerated. Routine training and awareness events on discrimination policies for all health professionals are useful. Policies should address homophobia, biphobia and transphobic harassment, outlining routes for patients and staff to report such encounters. Ultimately, sexual and gender minority patients must feel that hospitals and nursing-led environments are safe spaces for them. Nurses and nurse managers could act as ambassadors through the use of visible symbols, such as

rainbow badges or pins. Nursing education and training programmes could incorporate mandatory training on best practices to respond to the phenomenon of same-sex IPV. Finally, hospitals could undertake public initiatives in collaboration with sexual minority organisations and social media campaigns to demonstrate their commitment to non-discriminatory practices and combating IPV.

TABLE 2 Recommendations to enhance the nursing response

Recommendations	Proposed solution
Increasing awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand gender and sexuality stereotypes Recognize heteronormative and discrimination in nursing contexts Identify distinctive features of IPV for gay and bisexual men Acknowledge that gay and bisexual men may conceal their sexuality or IPV experiences and that their significant others may not be supportive of their sexual orientation
Combating discrimination in health care settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce zero-tolerance discrimination initiatives on sexual orientations and gender identity Introduce routine training concerning discrimination policies on homophobic, biphobic and transphobic harassment Outline accessible routes for patients and staff to report discrimination Introduce changes in patient documentation systems to incorporate multiple options for data input to reflect the patient's pronouns, gender identity and sexual orientation preferences Circulate literature on LGBTQ+ resources in waiting room and staff rooms Promote the wearing of inclusive visible symbols including rainbow badges or pins by ambassadors Introduce public initiatives to raise awareness of discriminatory practice in health care settings
Open-ended communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid commenting on a patient's gender identity or appearance Obtain permission to document the patient's sexual orientation on records Reassure patients that they will not be judged and all information is kept confidential Mirror the patient's language to describe their sexual orientation, gender pronouns and relationship status Do not assume the patient is in a monogamous relationship and acknowledge the diverse set of relationship types

Implementing gender inclusive language	<p>Ask the patient about their relationship status in ways that acknowledge a range of sexual orientations. This may include implementing terms such as "your partner" and "your significant other"</p> <p>Ask the patient which gender pronouns best describes them and their partner</p> <p>Ask the patient if their significant others are aware of their sexual orientation so nurses can be mindful of their situation, if deemed appropriate</p>
Asking about IPV in gay and bisexual male populations	<p>Facilitate disclosure conversations by asking specified questions that refrain from using academic IPV terminology (e.g. domestic violence, domestic abuse, interpersonal violence etc.). Questions should be gender-neutral and constructed around the acts and characteristics of violence, e.g. have you ever been hurt by someone you are close to?</p> <p>Promote public initiatives in health care contexts to raise awareness of same-gendered IPV</p> <p>Develop tailored identification tools and interventions on the signs and symptoms of IPV in gay and bisexual male survivors</p> <p>Introduce mandated nursing education and training programmes concerning best practices to respond to IPV in LGBTQ+ relationships</p> <p>Gain an awareness of Johnson's (2008) typology of violence</p> <p>Adopt Stephenson et al. (2013) 6-item screening tool to identify abuse in gay and bisexual male patients</p>

Conclusion

Nurses in their line of work, encounter a plethora of cultures and genders across a variety of different healthcare contexts. They are ideally positioned to identify and respond to IPV in opposite as well as same-sex relationships. This paper has highlighted how sexual minority men can encounter multiple health disparities in the primary care sector concerning general care, service delivery and support seeking for IPV. The nursing community are no strangers to responding to challenging contexts with sensitivity, compassion and professionalism. We hope that this paper offers some suggestions to augment how nurses worldwide can improve their responses to individuals experiencing IPV, particularly those from a same-sex minority background. The paper calls for additional research eliciting the voices of LGBTQ individuals and nurses to investigate how the phenomenon of same-sex IPV can be more accurately identified and addressed in health care and nurse led environments. Acquiring specialised knowledge and empirical evidence will help cultivate an open environment

to allow such practitioners to offer informed support and effectively aid people in sexual minority communities on their pathways to disclosing and recovering from IPV.

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Appendix C – Search Strategy

The following search terms have been inputted to the academic databases which include Social Services Abstracts, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Complete on the 10th May 2023. Additional searches were carried out on a monthly basis.

Search 1: "domestic violence" OR "domestic abuse" OR "domestic violence abuse" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "dating violence" OR "intimate violence" OR IPV OR DV OR "domestic violations" OR "partner abuse" OR "spousal abuse" OR "spouse abuse" OR "dating violence" OR "adult domestic violence" OR "abusive relationship" OR "abusive intimate relationships" OR "DVA

Search 2: (LGBT OR LGBTQ OR LGBTQIA OR LGBTQ+ OR LGBTQI OR GBM OR OR homosex* OR "same sex" OR "LGBT community" OR "minority group" OR "sexual minority group" OR LGB OR queer OR "queer man" OR "gay men" OR gay OR "male same sex" OR "sexual orientation" OR MSM OR bisexual OR LGBTI OR "homosexual men" OR "gay community" OR "gay men's community") NOT (women OR female OR lesbian OR transgender OR trans)

Appendix D – Safety Protocol

To minimise risk and ensure the physical safety of both respondents and researcher, a safety protocol will be utilised during recruitment and interview stages. The protocol was developed in line with Langford (2000) and Corbally's (2011) safety protocol measures. This included the following measures:

Recruitment phase:

- When the researcher organises interview dates, times and locations, there will be guidelines in place for contacting participants by telephone. The interviewer will only talk to the participant directly. The participant and interviewer will discuss together guidelines for leaving messages or answering phone calls. The participant will ensure they are in a safe place to talk to the interviewer. The participant will let the interviewer know if it is not safe to talk by saying "I cannot talk today, I am busy".
- At the point of recruitment, all potential participants will be provided with information on what to expect of the interview and how this study will be conducted. The respondents will also be made aware of the precautions they need to take to ensure safety and privacy. To take part in an interview, the participants must have access to a private location for the online interview, where they feel safe and are unlikely to be disturbed or overheard.

Face to Face Interviews:

- The location of the interview will be in a mutually agreed upon non-isolated public building which may include a room in the DCU Glasnevin Campus.
- Participants will be asked about their safety measures and steps to ensure they are not followed to the interview location.
- The interviewer will not exit or enter the building with the participant. The interviewer will wait at least 5 minutes before exiting the building to ensure they are not followed.
- The researcher will share details of the location, time and completion of the interview with their supervisors. They will send the supervisors a text before and after the interview takes place.

Online Meetings:

If interviews take place online via Zoom, there is a risk to participants that online meetings may be hacked or overheard by unauthorised parties. To address such a risk Zoom has recently introduced new security measures to prevent unauthorised people from entering video calls and meetings. To further minimise risk, the researcher will put the following risk management plan in place:

- Before the online interview takes place, the researcher will be situated in a private office with access to reliable wireless or network signal.
- Prior to the interview, the participants will be briefed on key safety measures. The participants will be made aware of the need to secure a comfortable and private location for the interview, including a place where they feel safe and are unlikely to be disturbed or overheard.
- Prior to the interview, the researcher will become familiar with Zoom features, including policies and controls related to security and identity.
- The researcher will inform the participant that Zoom will not have access to identifiable information. Zoom has several policies and features in place to protect and encrypt all audio, video, and screen sharing data.
- The online interview will take place at a time and date most convenient for each participant.
- The researcher will secure a meeting with encryption. They will generate a random meeting ID to both protect their IP address and prevent unauthorised people from entering the meeting room.
- They will lock the meeting once the participant and interviewer have entered the virtual meeting room.
- The researcher will password protect the meeting.
- At the beginning of the interview, the respondents will be reminded that they can pause or end the interview at any stage by clicking the 'end meeting' option.
- The researcher will inform the participant that the meeting is being recorded, upon beginning to record the meeting, the researcher will repeat the information and consent material, ensuring the participant's verbal consent to continue is obtained and recorded. Such material will be sent to the participants by post or email in advance of the interview.
- In the event of a disturbance or network disconnection, a mutually agreed protocol will be put in place for the researcher to ring the participant using the mobile device purchased for the study. The number of the mobile will be exchanged to every participant. They will then check in with the participant to find out if they are ok and offer to end the interview and reschedule.
- In the unlikely chance that an unauthorised party accesses the online meeting, the researcher will immediately end the Zoom meeting. The researcher will then contact the participant by phone to check in on the participant's psychological status and make sure that they are feeling ok (using the mobile device purchased for the study). If the respondent reports that they are upset over the encounter on Zoom, the researcher will encourage the participant to use the therapeutic services where information will be found on the therapeutic information sheet which will be emailed or sent by post in advance.
- Upon completion of the interview, the participants will be offered a debriefing session either on Zoom or by phone (using the mobile device purchased for the study). The researcher will check in on the respondents to find out if they are ok. The participants will also be provided with information on therapeutic services should they require it. The respondents can also ask any questions that they may have in relation to the conduct or outcomes of the study.

This safety protocol has been adapted from the following:

A safety protocol devised in a study of battered women:
 Langford (2000, p.136) Langford, D.R. (2000) Developing a safety protocol in qualitative research involving battered women. *Qualitative Health Research*. 10 (1), 133-142.

A safety protocol devised in a study of male victims:

Corbally (2011 P.226) Corbally M. *Making sense of the unbelievable: a biographical narrative study of men's stories of female abuse* PhD thesis. Dublin City University.

Appendix E – Informed Consent form

Participant Informed Consent Form

I. Research Title: An exploration of intimate partner violence as experienced by gay and bisexual men.

School: School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health

Principal Investigator: Aisling Callan

Email: aisling.callan8@mail.dcu.ie

Phone: 0831555701

Supervisors: Dr. Melissa Corbally (melissa.corbally@dcu.ie) and Dr. Rosaleen McElvaney (rosaleen.mcelvaney@dcu.ie)

II. Purpose of the research

This study seeks to explore the experiences of domestic violence from the perspectives of gay and bisexual men. This research is about exploring men's stories of same-sex (man to man) domestic violence. Domestic violence has many different names and can also be known as intimate partner violence or intimate partner abuse. This study entails participants telling their stories to an interviewer in a quiet setting. The interviewer may take notes but will mainly listen to the person and collect their life stories. Gay and bisexual men's stories are important and can help us to better understand domestic violence.

III. Consent

As stated in the information sheet, participants in this research will be requested to participate in at least one face-to-face interview, which will be recorded (audio only).

Please complete the following questions (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or have had read to you the Information Sheet? Yes/No

Do you understand the information provided? Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Do you agree to have your interview audiotaped? Yes/No

Participation in this study is voluntary. This means that participants are free to change their mind and withdraw at any stage of the study. This will not have any impact on access to services.

VI. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data.

The information that the participant shares is subject to legal limitations and Children First policy. Thus, if a participant shares information that suggests a risk to themselves or others, it may not be possible to keep this confidential. Given that the sample for this study will be small, and the researcher may use direct quotations, protecting a participant’s confidentiality can be challenging. However, every effort will be made by the researcher to respect the participants’ privacy. Fictional names or pseudonyms will be used in the write up or publication of the findings of the study. Interview notes will be held by the principal researcher and stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office in DCU. The researcher will ensure that all interview data is deleted from the digital recorder once all participant data is transcribed. Transcripts will be held on a password protected and encrypted computer.

VII. Signature

I have read and understood the information in this consent form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant’s Signature:

Name in Block Capitals: Date:

Researcher’s Signature:

Name in Block Capitals: Date:

Appendix F – Plain Language Statement

Information Sheet for Participants

Research Title: An exploration of intimate partner violence as experienced by gay and bisexual men.

School: School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health.

Principal Investigator: Aisling Callan

Email: aisling.callan8@mail.dcu.ie

Phone: 0831555701

Supervisors: Dr. Melissa Corbally (melissa.corbally@dcu.ie) Dr. Rosaleen

McElvaney (rosaleen.mcelvaney@dcu.ie)

What is this research about?

This study seeks to explore the experiences of domestic violence from the perspectives of gay and bisexual men. This research is about exploring men's stories of same-sex (man to man) domestic violence. Domestic violence has many different names and can also be known as intimate partner violence or intimate partner abuse. This study entails participants telling their stories to an interviewer in a quiet setting. The interviewer may take notes but will mainly listen to the person and collect their life stories. Gay and bisexual men's stories are important and can help us to better understand domestic violence.

Participation in Research

The participant will be invited to meet up with the interviewer at a mutually agreed date, time and location. The location will be in a public building with access to a private room, so that the participants will not be disturbed or overheard during the interview. This meeting may include one or two interview sessions. The interviews will not last longer than a two hour duration. This will mean that you sit down and talk to the interviewer about your experiences of domestic violence. The interviews will be audio-recorded and then typed up. The information that participants provide will be analysed by the research team. A summary of the results of the study will be sent to the participant by email at the end of the study. The participants can choose to contact the research team if they require any updates on the study.

(If face to face interviews are not possible given Covid-19 restrictions, interviews may take place online through Zoom. In such an event, the researcher will discuss the safety measures that the participants will need to follow. Measures will include having access to a private location where participants feel safe and are unlikely to be disturbed or overheard. There will also be a mobile phone purchased for the study, and the number will be provided to every participant. In the event of any technical or safety issues on Zoom, the researcher will end the online interview and contact the participants directly using the mobile phone)

Voluntary Involvement

Participation in this study is voluntary. This means that participants are free to change their mind and withdraw at any stage of the study. The research team understands that the decision to participate in the research study is the participant's alone, they can choose to end the interview at any time. Volunteering is a personal choice, and there will be no consequences to ending the interview or withdrawing from the study.

Benefit to Participants

It is hoped that participants may benefit from taking part in the study. Gay and bisexual men may feel empowered to talk about issues that directly affect them and to know that those in academia care about and value their experiences. The interviews are an opportunity for them to voice their stories, share their experiences and spread awareness. By exploring gay and bisexual men's stories of domestic violence, it may help us to better understand domestic violence and how best to support other men and members of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community.

Risks to Participants

Participants should be aware that recalling past stories of domestic violence from an intimate partner may be emotionally distressing. Talking about your experience of domestic violence may mean talking about sensitive themes of violence or abuse. The participants can choose to withdraw from the interview at any stage. There will also be an information sheet of LGBTQ friendly local therapeutic services made available before the interview begins. Once the interview is completed, the participants will be invited to ask any questions they may have to the researcher, in relation to the nature and outcomes of the study.

Risks to Confidentiality

There are risks associated with volunteering in this study. The information that participants share will be treated as strictly confidential. This will mean that the story they share will not be published under their name, but instead will be published under a fictional name or pseudonym.

As is the case of many research studies, there are limitations to confidentiality. The information that participants share is subject to legal limitations and Children First policy. The researcher may use direct quotations from the participant's interview to convey their stories. However, the research team will make every effort to protect the participant's identity. This includes a comprehensive data management plan to protect a participant's privacy and information.

The interview will be audio-recorded. All written records apart from consent forms will be anonymised, which means all identifiable information related to the participant (name, home address etc) will be removed. This information will be kept securely in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected and encrypted computer, both in an office in DCU which has a strict security card lock system. After five years, all participant data will be permanently erased. The research team (researcher, their two supervisors and panel members) will only have access to participant data.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:
The Secretary,
Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University,
Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Appendix G – Therapeutic Support Sheet

Therapeutic Support Sheet

LGBTQ+ services



LGBT Ireland

Phone Number: 1890929539 Email:

info@lgbt.ie

Services include a helpline, online instant messaging support and peer support groups.

Belong To.

Support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans Young People In Ireland.

Phone number 01 670 6223

Email info@belongto.org

Services: one to one support service, counselling service with Pieta House and drugs, alcohol outreach.

Gay Switchboard Ireland

phone number: 01-8721055

website address: www.gayswitchboard.ie

Services include confidential listening and support. Information and signposting for lesbians, gay men, bisexual & trans people.

Outhouse LGBT Community Resource Centre

phone number: (01) 873 4999

email: info@outhouse.ie

Services include café, library, personal development courses, community groups, information and signposting.

Garda LGBT Liaison Officers

Sergeant Paul Roche Phone number: 01 - 6665000

Garda Cian Long Phone number: 01 - 6665000

Garda Sean Greene Phone number: 01 - 6665000

Garda Angela Murray Phone number: 01 - 6665000

G-Force

Services include a confidential support structure for LGB members, both personally and professionally, within an Garda Síochána

<http://www.g-force.ie/>

Domestic Violence services



Men's Aid Ireland

Phone number: 01-55942777

Email: hello@mensaid.ie

Services include confidential help, peer support and counselling support, legal help and support clinics.

Male Advice Line (for men experiencing domestic abuse)

Phone number: 1800 816 588

Services include advice and support, counselling for male victims of domestic abuse.

COSC

The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence

National Sexual Violence Helpline: 1800 77 88 88

Services include national 24- hour helpline, counselling and therapy, resources for survivors.

Mental Health Services:



St Patricks' Mental Health Services:

Phone number: 01 249 3333

Services include support and information line.

Northsides Counselling Service:

Phone Number: 01-8484789

Email info@citytherapy.ie

Services include: caring, confidential, professional and non-judgmental counselling.

Healthy Living Centre, DCU

Number: 01 700 7171 / 700 7173

Email: hlc@dcu.ie

Services include counselling, psychotherapy, general health screening and family therapy.

Appendix H – Promotional Research Poster

RESEARCH STUDY
LOOKING FOR MALE VOLUNTEERS

**ARE YOU A MAN WHO HAS
EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE OR ABUSE BY
A MALE INTIMATE PARTNER?**

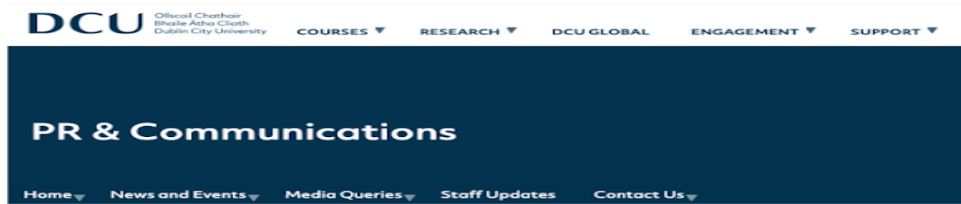


Seeking cisgender men aged 18+
To participate in an anonymous interview
and share their stories
of male same-sex violence



TO FIND OUT MORE
Phone X or email X
or check out our Facebook page X

Appendix I – Promotional advertisement shared on the Dublin City University website.



New DCU study to explore the issue of intimate partner violence experienced by gay and bisexual men

29/03/2021

The study is the first of its kind in Ireland to look at a topic which is a notable but hidden issue in Irish society

A new DCU study is aiming to explore the issue of intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by gay and bisexual men in Ireland.

Researchers at DCU highlight that preliminary findings show that the prevalence of violence in male to male intimate relationships is as high or equal to the rates experienced by heterosexual females. It is also estimated that, globally, one in four gay men and one in ten bisexual men have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

Led by DCU's School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health, the study is the first of its kind in Ireland to look at a topic which is a notable but hidden issue in Irish society and is often absent from mainstream social and academic discourses.

The research will be undertaken by Aisling Callan with the assistance of Dr Rosaleen McElvaney and Dr Melissa Corbally who are leading experts in domestic violence and trauma research.

"Gay and bisexual men experience violence from intimate partners differently to that of heterosexual couples. For example, they may encounter threats to have their sexual orientation outed to society, experience societal and internalised homophobia and have difficulty accessing support services," commented Aisling Callan.

"The research will focus on their experiences as told to us through their own personal stories. This will also help us in understanding how violence transpires in male same-sex relationships by speaking directly to those with first-hand experiences. It is anticipated that the findings from this latest study will inform policies and services on how best to reach out and support such individuals in society."

Researchers will conduct interviews in LGBTQ+ online spaces. By accessing the private spheres of gay and bisexual men and collecting their stories, new perspectives can be unearthed, thus leading to a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of violence.

"I would like this to be a space where gay and bisexual men feel empowered to tell their stories of intimate partner violence. More awareness and attention should be paid to the experiences and realities of those

Appendix J – Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN):

Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN):

‘As you know, I am researching gay and bisexual men’s experiences of domestic violence, and the impact or effects of those experiences. I understand you have had those experiences.

So, tell me your story of domestic violence, all the events and experiences which were important for you... up until now. You can begin whenever you like. Please take your time and go as slowly as you like.

I will just listen quietly and not interrupt.

I may take down some notes in case I have any further questions for you. However, I will only ask the questions once you have finished telling me about your story’.

Example of 'narrative-pointed' questions:

You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Occasion	How did it all
You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Event	How did it all
You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Moment	How did it all
You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Incident	How did it all
You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Time	How did it all
You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Occasion	How did it all
You said happen?	Do you remember any more about that particular	Situation	How did it all

The questions to monitor the participant's psychological wellbeing during the interview are as follows:

'Are you ok to continue with the interview?'

"Are you comfortable talking about this?"

"Are you feeling ok?"

"Would you like to carry on or would you prefer to end the interview?"

"It is ok, we can end this interview at any stage."

Appendix K – Sample of BDC panel

(George) notes from panel discussion 29th June 2020.

Sample of BDC panel (George) notes from panel discussion 29th June 2020.			
	BDC	Panel Hypothesis	My thoughts
1970s	George's father served in the military in the war between South Africa and Angola	<p>What race is George? The father's military background meant he learned to fear for his life, defend himself, and be brave. Racist with his views of his children? He is very strict with his children. Was his father a violent man? Soldiers are trained to be very strict and live by the rules. This left George feeling insecure, not being loved or valued or appreciated as a child</p>	<p>Military background linked to violence. Sets the scene for childhood. Unresolved issues with father?</p>
1984 +	George grew up as a sensitive child with a controlling father. The father was a heavy drinker	<p>George, as a child, had no control or zero control. George lived in fear. Uncertainty, feeling unsafe, The father drank to numb the pain or unsee the bad images from war. 'Living in South Africa during troubled times. George is not of a violent nature because he is gay. You need to be manly or masculine to be violent. Is George uncomfortable about being gay? His father, a military man, would be appalled. George is in the closet back then. He is hiding his sexuality.</p>	<p>The father's drinking is consistent with the drinking culture in the army. Violence in the home Repeating a cycle The word control suggests George had no control. His father controlled everything</p>
2006	George finished university and moved back home. He realises his father is aware that he is gay.	<p>Surprised that George moved back home. He had a taste of freedom and independence. It is tough for George to move back home. It is difficult for George as his father now knows he is gay. The cat is out of the bag. It would have stifled his growth, blossoming of his confidence, his ability to me himself. George went back into his shell. There was animosity between George and his father. George's father is watching him all the time. Was it George's choice to move back home? Was he under pressure? He felt the family honour and needed to come back home.</p>	<p>University represented a safe space. College friends, dating George found himself Was returning back home a choice? How did George's father come to</p>

		<p>The father controlled his education and had him educated in whatever business the father was in.</p> <p>What type of gay person was George?</p> <p>Normal gay people, or does he act in a very cliché way, such as speaking in a feminine way.</p> <p>The fact that George's father is aware that he is gay, he can finally be himself. He no longer needs to hide.</p>	<p>terms with his son's sexuality?</p> <p>How did he find out?</p>
2018	<p>At the age of 34, George meets his new partner who is 21. Having chatted online, they go on date on three days later.</p>	<p>The is an age gap. The older person in the relationship is in control, younger man easier to control.</p> <p>George is flattered by going out with someone so young.</p> <p>George has his own business, George is over the last relationship.</p> <p>The age might not have anything to do with George feels more confident in himself and is more optimistic.</p>	<p>New chapter in his life</p> <p>New beginnings</p> <p>George feels comfortable to go on a date three days later.</p> <p>Modern dating,</p> <p>Fast trajectory</p> <p>He points out the age gap, it must matter</p>
2019	<p>George realised his partner has aggressive and violent tendencies. The partner screamed and called him names.</p>	<p>This is due to his terrible confidence and really bad upbringing. He was very sensitive and controlled by another man. This time it's not his father.</p> <p>This is all almost expected. He is drawn to it. He is drawn to aggressive personalities. Women marry men like their fathers; why can't gay men?</p> <p>George's future is very insecure, with depression and anxiety.</p> <p>He feels let down again, let down again by men (father first partner, now second partner)</p> <p>He has the business and the money. Why does he not put an end to it? He has control.</p> <p>George is shy and withdrawn. He grew up to be the opposite of his father. He went into bullying relationships and controlled him.</p> <p>From a business point of view, he is confident and in control, opposite of his father.</p> <p>He moved faster in the relationship because he was craving love in his life that he never got from his father.</p>	<p>'Tendencies' speaks to more than one incident</p> <p>Is this the first incident?</p> <p>Turning point</p> <p>George is aware of the abuse</p>
2019	<p>George convinced his partner to quit his job because he was having problems at work.</p>	<p>George is caught up in the relationship. The young man is unhappy in his job, that's why he is being violent with George.</p> <p>He hopes that if his partner quits his job, his behaviour will improve.</p>	<p>'convince'</p> <p>George is attempting to gain control over the situation</p>

		<p>George is trying to make his partner more reliant financially, George wants to take care of him. To be a sugar daddy.</p> <p>Again, the cliché rich guy wants the boyfriend all to himself. George wants to hold on to the relationship, despite the abuse.</p>	<p>If the partner has no more work more time on his hands</p> <p>More time with George</p> <p>Sense of foreshadowing</p>
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Appendix L: Explanation of ‘Text Structure Sequentialization’ (DARNE)

Explanation of ‘Text Structure Sequentialisation (DARNE)	
Categorisation of textsort	Explanation of text sort
Description	The participant offers information about a person or situation, typically in a vague and timeless manner, describing certain characteristics of entities without delving into historical or contextual details. This narration lacks a storytelling element and is presented in a standalone form, often disconnected from the specific content of the narrative.
Reporting	The participant presents a sequence of events, experiences, and actions in a concise but distant manner. This is usually an overview of a range of events and may cover a significant period of time.
Narrative	The participant shares their story, immersing themselves in the narrative and vividly reliving their experiences. The storytelling is characterised by a rich level of detail, offering a more immersive and in-depth account rather than a brief and factual report.
Evaluation:	The participant imparts the moral of a global story, which can be extracted from either a concise report or a detailed narrative. This moral is explicitly stated as such, typically before or after the sequence of events being discussed.
Particular Incident Narratives (PIN)	The participant provides an account of a specific experience they have lived through, immersing themselves back into this historical context. It is evident that they are partially reliving the experience as they recount it.
Generic Incident Narratives (GIN)	The participant recounts an abstracted story of what always happened. These many include sweeping statements of many events as opposed to reliving or recounting one single event.
Typical Incident Narratives (TIN)	The participant emphasises the consistent recurrence of events in their stories, with statements such as "X always happened: whenever I did Z, he would do W." These are powerful statements which emphasise the persistence of events, where there are few exceptions or changes.

Appendix M: Email Exchange From Tom Wengraf

The notions of a TIN (Typical Incident Narrative) and a GIN (generic incident narrative) - both as opposed to a PIN (particular incident narrative) – emerged as a way of noting that sometimes interviewees would say "X always happened: whenever I did Z he would do W" (GIN) and sometimes... the interviewee would say "Well the sort of thing he would usually do when I did Z was that he would do W". The notion of "usually" or "typically" or "much more often than not"..... whether using those phrases or something else made me think that it would be useful to mark these separately. So that led to me in the training suggesting those two 'coding-labels': GINs and TINs.

When somebody says in the interview that "he always did X", this is such a powerful statement allowing for no exceptions and no thinking about exceptions that for lots of sorts of interactions it is unlikely to be statistically correct. Consequently one might interpret any statement like "you always..." Or "You never..." as indicating a powerful wish to deny that there could ever be any exceptions and perhaps an over-impassioned insistence on one thing and denial of another. The same is much less true of a TIN: the judgement that "more often than not, she would do X" suggests to me a less powerful passion and perhaps a more realistic approach to complex and contradictory histories' (Wengraf, 2021 Email)

Wengraf (2021). Email to Aisling Callan, 26 February 12th November.

Appendix N: TSS for Sam

TSS for Sam

Topic: Sam begins a new relationship.		
Page/line No. in transcript	Summary of Structure	Brief indication of content: the gist.
1-6	Description	‘So I was with this guy for about two years, I think it was just under two years, and for the first I suppose year and a bit it was more so long distance because he was in college and I was back at home where I am from which is about a two-hour drive away. So, I would only see him maybe every now and then. We would speak on the phone and stuff, and it was all wonderful’
	Argumentation	‘you know, there was no alarm bells at any stage’

Topic: Controlling behaviour		
Page/line No. in transcript	Summary of Structure	Brief indication of content: the gist.
13-25	Description Argumentation Generic incident narrative	And I noticed he was becoming more controlling over how I was spending my time and who I was spending my time with and he would have lots of comments about the people I would have around me.
	Evaluation.	And I suppose I felt that was my fault at the time, I just wanted everyone to get along and be friendly. These were people that I didn't know as long as I knew him so I did put him first in that situation.
	Description Argumentation Generic incident narrative	I made, I don't know any more if it was a decision that I made but I remember him saying to me if you spend more time with me in the evenings I don't mind what you do during the day with your friends and stuff. And I'd say, 'that is fair enough, grand'. Then it became a case of I had to spend every single evening with him and any evening I had decided, 'oh everyone is going out or we are going over to this person's house this evening I might see you tomorrow'. He would say, 'that is fine no problem'. But then he would ignore me until the following day, if not two or three days, he would just completely ice me out. So then I felt, I suppose I went into a shame spiral then because I was like, oh no I have hurt this person or I did this wrong, oh no. And I would do everything I could to appease that for him and make him feel better

Topic: Sam's partner punches him		
Page/line No. in transcript	Summary of Structure	Brief indication of content: the gist.

48-63	Particular incident narrative Description	And then it was after we had dinner that evening we were kind of washing the dishes and I kind of stepped outside the back of his house for a cigarette and he was like, 'are you going to dry the dishes?' And I said, 'yeah, I am just having a smoke first and I will dry the dishes for you then'. And then he came outside and said, 'look there are loads of dishes, will you just dry them?' And I was like, 'there are two plates and a pot, I will get to it in a second'. And then he struck me to my face and I was really taken aback and I was like, 'what the hell was that about?' And he was like, 'I was only messing'. And I didn't know what possessed me at the time to minimise it immediately but I went, 'oh it wasn't even sore anyway, I get you, very funny'. It is a big joke we are all in on.
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Appendix O: Merging of lived life and told Story process for George

Merging of lived life and told Story process for George		
Lived life	Told Story	Merging of both: Thematic Field Analysis
<p>Childhood beginning of lived life:</p> <p>1970s: George’s father served in the military in the war between South Africa and Angola</p> <p>1984: George is born in South Africa</p> <p>1984+ George grew up as a sensitive child with a controlling father</p>	<p>‘I grew up with a father who was very controlling and very aggressive person and violent sometimes’.</p>	<p>The participant appears non-emotional and factual when describing his father’s turbulent relationship. The addition of the term ‘sometimes’ is arguably a way for minimise his abuse. The participant correlates IPV perpetration to his father’s military service, mirroring the high prevalence of violence among veterans and military personnel.</p>
<p>Early adult marks the middle of his lived life</p> <p>2006: George finished university and moved back home. He realises his father is aware that he is gay.</p>	<p>‘I try not to poison the water too much. I wouldn’t say that he is against my sexuality, I think he just sees it as a weakness, and he looks at me almost like there is something wrong with me’.</p>	<p>While circumventing any emotional narrative depth, the biographer offers two contradictory statements. He argues that his father is not against his sexuality but asserts that his father views his sexuality as a weakness. The participant arguably positions his sexuality as the ‘poison’ in the water, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of growing as a gay man.</p>
<p>2018: two days after his friend moves in, George joins Grindr</p> <p>November 2018: At the age of 34, George meets his new partner who is 21. Having chatted online, they go on date on three days later.</p>	<p>‘we were talking every day but we didn’t have any direct connection I guess, which was maybe the big mistake, but anyway’.</p>	<p>The participant depicts the rapid trajectory of their relationship, yet subtly hints at the this was a big mistake before swiftly transitioning to a different topic. This foreshadowing suggests that his future experiences might involve a downfall in his life. This implies that his fast courtships might serve as a potential indicator or warning sign of abusive dynamics.</p>
<p>2019 George convinced his partner to quit his job because he was having problems at work.</p>	<p>So, I convinced him to go and start seeing a therapist, which he did later, who also gave him a psychiatrist. He went onto medication’.</p>	<p>The participant enumerates a series of events orchestrated by themselves with the intention of assisting their boyfriend.</p>

<p>February to April 2019: George convinced his partner to attend a therapist went onto medication</p>		<p>The narrative primarily centres around their partner's needs and concerns, by which the participant ignores his own.</p>
<p>The beginning of the abuse</p> <p>2019: In those first months of the relationship. George went to the beach house. A friend of his called and George answered the phone. His partner became very angry and grabbed and broke the phone and started screaming.</p>	<p>He obviously grabbed the phone and broke the phone and screaming and screaming'.</p> <p>This was not new I guess and a lot of people, you meet people, and their friends are a bit critical or a bit wary of who you are or try to protect the other person. So, I don't think this was an unusual situation, I think this was just very frightening to him because he felt I am safe but other people might tell me about him or what they thought that he was a bit unsafe for me'.</p>	<p>Despite acknowledging the gravity of the incident, the participant strives to downplay their partner's abusive behaviour and redirects the narrative towards their partner's plight. The participant recounts a specific incident narrative (PIN) where their partner expressed anger over their desire to make a phone call to a male friend. This showcases clear instances of coercive control practices.</p>
<p>The end of the abuse</p> <p>George pack up their belongings. And returned to his hometown.</p>	<p>'I said to him, that is it, he has to leave".</p>	<p>George employs assertive and resolute language, stating that "he has to leave," which underscores the definitive nature of his decision. This marks the end of his abuse.</p>

Appendix P: Questions for lived life and told story panel.

The specific questions informed by Wengraf (2001) utilised in the lived life and told story panel include the following:

Lived life panel:

1. Why do you think he lived his life in that way?
2. How could this event have been experienced in relation to age, personal development, cultural, family development etc.?
3. How could the sequence of events so far shape his future life?
4. What will happen next? What event could be expected later?
5. What could he have done but didn't?

Told Story Panel:

1. Why is the biographer presenting this experience or topic now?
2. Why is the person using this specific sort of text to present it?
3. Is there a hidden agenda?
4. What was the speaker experiencing at this point?
5. Why might the speaker have changed the topic?
6. What do you think of that text/piece?
7. Why might they use those words?
8. Why did he say it in that way?

Appendix Q: Narrative Analysis Document for Tom

Narrative Analysis Document for Tom		
Stage 1: The denouement of the participant's life story.		
<p>Tom endured a six-month emotionally abusive relationship with his gay male partner. Following a physical altercation at a local bar, Tom eventually ended the relationship.</p>		
Stage 2: Life events in chronological order.		
Date	Event	Notes
2012-2014:	Tom was in an established relationship.	
2014:	He was sexually assaulted at a house party.	This emerges as a key event in his life.
2014:	Tom broke up with boyfriend	Tom is currently experiencing a stressful period in his life, which could be influencing his decision-making process.
December 2014-January 2015:	Tom met his abusive partner.	Tom is in a vulnerable state when he encounters his new partner.
2015:	Tom's grandfather becomes ill.	

May 2015:	Tom campaigns for the same-sex marriage equality referendum in Ireland	
June 2015:	Tom agreed to enter a monogamous relationship with his partner.	Could the celebration of the marriage referendum have inspired Tom to become more committed in his relationship?
Timeline unknown	Tom's partner becomes jealous in the relationship.	The decline in the relationship results in additional pressure on Tom
Christmas 2015:	Tom ended his relationship with his boyfriend, only to reconcile a day or two later.	
Timeline unknown	Tom distances himself from his friends.	Relationship continues to decline