

# **How young people make sense of Intimate Partner Violence**

**A discursive analysis**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his/her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

**Aims:** To explore: (i) how young people make sense of relationships, (ii) the arguments young people draw upon to make sense of healthy and unhealthy relationships, (iii) what characteristics young people use to identify intimate partner violence, and (iv) the significance of gender and sexual orientation to this sense making.

**Method.** Following ethical approval, age- and gender-stratified focus groups were conducted with 53 young people (aged 15-24; 26 females and 27 males) in Northern England. Four researcher-generated vignettes, suggestive but not conclusive of IPV, were used to facilitate focus group discussions. Each vignette described identical behaviour but the gender and sexual orientation of the protagonists was changed (i.e. Heterosexual Female target, Heterosexual Male target, Lesbian Female target, Gay Male target). Discussions were transcribed and analysed using Discursive Psychology (Wetherell & Edley, 1997; 1999).

**Findings.** Young people drew on three implicit 'social contracts' to make sense of relationships: (1) Love and Happiness, (2) Trust and Fidelity, and (3) Duty and Obligation. These social contracts referred to constellations of assumed common-sense, non-articulated agreements about how relationships 'work'. This thesis outlines these social contracts, what they tell us about young people's sense making of IPV and explores how social contracts were modified and caveated by characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation of the vignette protagonist.

**Implications.** Findings highlight four main topics to consider for Relationship and Sex Education going forward: (1) tensions in sense making of IPV and relationships between a dominant Heteronormative Frame and universal, genderless constructions;

(2) need for broader portrayals of victims and perpetrators beyond the traditional victim-perpetrator framework; (3) considerations of consent and rights to privacy in young people's digital lives; and (4) avenues for drawing on the Duty and Obligation contract in relation to adult/professional support of young people experiencing serious IPV, and/or IPV in same-sex relationships.

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## List of Abbreviations

IPV	Intimate partner violence
PSHE	Personal social and health education
RSE	Relationship and sex education
SES	Socio-economic status.
UK	United Kingdom

## **Publications and Presentations**

### **Oral conference presentations**

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017, Sep). Gender, Sexual Orientation and Social Contracts: Young people's use of social contracts in sense making of domestic violence, an intersectional approach. Oral presentation at 11th European Conference on Domestic Violence, Porto, Portugal.

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2016, Jul). Gender and Sexuality in Victim Blaming: How young people talk about intimate partner violence. Centre for Sexuality and Gender Studies Summer School, Durham, UK.

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2015, Sep). Oral presentation at Feminist and Women's Studies Association Biennial conference, Everyday encounters with violence: Critical feminist perspectives Leeds, UK.

### **Conference poster presentations**

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2018, Jun). "What have you got to hide?": The significance of technology and privacy in establishing trust and fidelity in young people's relationships. Presented at NSPCC How Safe Are Our Children? Growing up online, London, UK.

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017, Sep). "I'd want to know more about why she hit her": How perpetrator and victim, gender and sexual orientation shape young people's perceptions of intimate partner violence. presentation at National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence, San Francisco

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017, June). How meaningful is gender and sexuality to young people's sense-making of intimate partner violence? Presentation at European Association of Social Psychology Meeting: Gender Roles in the Future? Theoretical foundation and future research directions. Berlin, Germany.

Robson, E., Madill, A & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017, May). British young people's use of 'heteronormative' and 'equality' discourses in sense making of intimate partner violence. British Psychological Society Annual Conference, Brighton, UK.

## Preface

This thesis will explore how young people make sense of IPV using a discursive analysis.

**Chapter 1** is a brief historical review of IPV, or the like. Exploring how relationship violence has been viewed in the past and how laws and societal acceptance has changed regarding relationship violence and same-sex relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the changing nature of relationship violence and outline other ways of considering this phenomenon.

**Chapter 2** outlines present day perceptions of IPV in academia. This chapter explores the prevalence of IPV, how IPV is defined focusing on the significance gender, the importance of intersectionality and the numerous different terms used within academia to refer to IPV.

**Chapter 3** explores the social and political aspects of IPV in young people's relationships. Here, I explore how the importance of family and peers to young people's IPV perpetration and victimisation, highlighting the need to take a social psychology approach to young people's sense making of IPV. The chapter then goes on to explore the political terrain around young people, IPV and Relationship and Sex Education.

**Chapter 4** outlines the methodology of the thesis, providing detail to the single-gender, age-stratified, vignette-based focus groups used in the study and the discursive psychology analysis. The analysis outlines young people's use of Social Contracts to make sense of relationships and IPV.

**Chapter 5** briefly outlines the origin of Social Contracts and their relevance to intimate relationships.

**Chapter 6a** outlines the Love and Happiness contract used by young people to make sense of relationships and IPV. This chapter explores the significance of love and happiness to relationships and young people's reliance on a gendered, heteronormative frame in sense making of relationships. It also explores the implications of this in legitimising and delegitimising victims of IPV. The chapter also explores a contrary universal, humanist approach of 'abuse is abuse' to sense-making of IPV.

**Chapter 6b** outlines the Rough Patch diagnosis and young people's measures of relationship worth, and how these are employed by young people to judge if a relationship is abusive, or temporarily unhealthy (i.e. going through a rough patch).

**Chapter 6c** draws on the complexities of the Love and Happiness contract and young people's exploration of the importance and limitations of love and happiness in determining relationship worth and IPV. This chapter also explores discussions around rationality and access to truth of those within and outside of abusive relationships.

**Chapter 7** outlines the Trust and Fidelity contract. The chapter draws on the three principles of trust: Monogamy, Trust in Fidelity and Openness and Sharing. The chapter explores aspects of young people's digital lives and whether young people think it is acceptable to check their partner's phone, drawing on the competing notions of one's right to privacy and one's right to ensuring monogamy. The implications of this for construction of IPV and unhealthy relationship behaviour are explored.

**Chapter 8** describes the Duty and Obligation contract and its use in identifying IPV and supporting those seeking help for relationship problems such as IPV or unhealthy

behaviours. This Social Contract was unique in that it comprised of two sub-contracts: (1) the Duty and Obligation contract which outlined the roles and duties of those in a relationship to make a relationship work, and (2) the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract which placed those outside of the relationship (such as peers and adults) with a responsibility to support young people experiencing IPV or relationship issues, and to help make relationships work and keep help-seekers safe.

The chapter outlines three stages of help-seeking for relationship problems, which may include IPV: (1) talking to peers; (2) talking to one's partner, and (3) seeking help from an adult or professional. These stages are discussed in relation to the couples' and peer's accountabilities and highlight the private/public aspect of relationships and help-seeking.

**Chapter 9** summarises the present study's research findings and draws similarities to other research. I outline the novelty of the present research in contributing to the academic knowledge of how young people make sense of IPV, and the use gender and sexual orientation in this. The chapter then discusses four main themes that emerge from the data and their implications for RSE: (1) heteronormative frame, generally, and then specifically in relation to men's rights and LGBT rights, (2) constructions of victimhood and perpetrators of IPV, (3) technology and consent, and (4) the Duty and Obligation contract. The research strength and limitations are also discussed here.

**Thesis Terminology.** There are numerous terms used in the field to refer to violence in intimate relationships. Each bring their own assumptions and problems. In this thesis, I will use '**Intimate Partner Violence**' (IPV) as the generic, preferred term. Reasons for this are, firstly **IPV** is specific to intimate romantic relationships (i.e. intimate partner), secondly the broadness of the term 'partner' is inclusive of same-sex, gender non-conforming relationships. Thirdly, it is felt that the term 'domestic' is less relevant to

young people's relationships as it evokes ideas of marriage and cohabitation. In this way **IPV** seems more relevant to the, assumed, non-cohabiting nature of young people's relationships. Lastly, **IPV** is a term used in UK, and international research contexts in research amongst young people and adults. I believe these reasons position the term **IPV** as more suitable than others to this study.

Yet, during the research period (2014-18) the term **Domestic Violence and Abuse**, introduced by the UK government in 2014, has gained currency amongst UK academics and schools, arguably due to the political relevance of IPV in young people's relationships and recent progressions within the UK government on Relationship and Sex Education. For clarity when referring to, or discussing policies and certain papers I may use the term used in the paper this will be denoted by an asterix (\*).





## Chapter 1: Historical Literature Review

In the book *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, Marianne Hester presents a historical analysis of witch hunts in 1500-1800 in England. Hester, argues that this analysis can provide valuable insights into how men as a group maintain power over women valuable to how we consider and theorise gender relations and power today. Although the present study takes a discursive psychology approach power is integral to sense-making of IPV so it seems relevant to draw on the work of Foucault to begin to consider issues of power.

As outlined by Dean, (1994) Foucault's work investigated the history of truth and the "embeddedness of [...] discourse in institutional practices and power relations" (Dean, 1994 p. 2) and subjectivities. Foucault explored "how it is possible to think a certain way and how far a specific language can be used" (p. 2). This practice of looking to history is termed Genealogy, it provides "an intrinsic critique of the present [...] the conceptual tools to understand how their being [concepts and discourses are] shaped by historical forces" (Crowley, 2009 p. 2). Akin to discourse analysis, this methodology allows one to consider the boundaries, possibilities and liberated aspects of experience and knowledge (Foucault 1978). In taking a discursive approach to IPV, I believe that a good place to begin is to explore the construction of IPV, to consider how violence in intimate relationships (i.e. IPV) has been constructed historically and evolved over time.

The purpose of this review is to: (a) outline and highlight the mutability of the concept of relationship violence; and (b) draw attention to assumptions that seemingly ground, or are relevant to, our current conceptualisation of relationship violence and its surrounding discourses. Although, there is a wealth of literature on this historical topic, it is not within the scope of the review to explore all sources. Thus, sources referenced

focus on accomplishing the above aims. Arguably, one of the main opportunities for IPV, specifically men's violence against women<sup>1</sup>, are the patriarchal societal structures as this section will first explore.

### **1.1 History of Relationship Violence 1800 BC – 1800 AD**

I will begin by outlining broadly how 'relationship violence' was understood in the historical timeframe of 1800 BC – 1800 AD.

#### **1.1.1 Patriarchy**

As a working definition, patriarchy can be defined as "social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, ... [and] the control by men of a disproportionately large share of power" (in Merriam Webster Online, n.d). In the ancient Mesopotamian era of 1800 BC, the Code of Hammurabi (a Babylonian King) decreed that a wife should be subservient to her husband, and a husband could inflict any punishment he deemed appropriate on any member of his household (Women's Safe Net, 2011). This wifely duty stemmed from the belief that women were subordinate to men and, as lesser beings, could be owned by them (Lerner, 1986).

The idea of women as property is also seen in Ancient Rome (circa 509 BC- 29 BC) where women's needs and identities were subsumed and absorbed by men and women's legal power always possessed by a man: either her father or husband (Ashmore, 2015)<sup>2</sup>. For example, as property, a husband could claim compensation for

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<sup>1</sup> However, it should be noted that the focus of IPV throughout this paper is not gender specific, however for the purposes of this section there is a primary focus on men's violence against women as this is reflected in the majority of the literature. Other kinds of violence are seemingly invisible because the current focus of research looking at the past result of patriarchy, with feminism. With the agenda to demonstrate why we should subvert women's oppression within a patriarchal. With a focus on gender, politics and power, rather than psychology and well-being, or legality (Fineman & Mykitiuk, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> Upon marriage, a woman's legal right were not always transferred to her husband this was dependent on the type of marriage. There were two types of marriage procedures which either

their wife's injury should it affect her ability to work (Ashmore, 2015). In this way, all legal actions a wife wished to exhibit had to be through her husband, making her reliant on him. It is argued in some theories that women's subordination within patriarchy is, in part, due to the exchange of women to men outside of the clan to avoid incest (Rakoczy, 2004). Levi-Strauss labelled this the '*Alliance Theory*' where male clan members' avoidance of sexual relations/marriage with their sisters (i.e. incest) was beneficial as it allowed for the marriage of their sister into another family – and the marriage of another man's sister into his family - consequently creating social bonds between men. In this way, women are commodities of exchange with the value of 'women's sexual and reproductive capacity' the rate of exchange for developing alliances with other families/clans (Lerner, 1986: 213 cited in Rakoczy, 2004). Hence, Levi-Strauss (1995) demonstrates how patriarchal systems enable power to pass through women to men (i.e. from their father to their husband) without women ever actually possessing this power.

Lerner (1986) argues women's subordination rests on two founding beliefs of the symbol systems of western civilisation: first, that God is male, positioning men as superior to women; and second, Aristotelian philosophy that "women are incomplete and damaged human beings of an entirely different order than men" (Lerner, 1986, p.10). Patriarchy became intertwined with Christianity, resulting in women's subordination being seen as 'natural'. For example, the Household Codes in the New Testament placed men at the top. Patriarchal structures for religious believers were seen as sanctions and ordained by god (Rakoczy, 2004). Moreover, Rakoczy outlines how the rise in Greek Philosophical concept of 'Duality' gave further force to patriarchal hierarchies within Christianity. Men's superiority over women was reinstated through

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granted a woman's rights to her husband - a cum manu marriage - or left them with her father - a sine manu marriage (Ashmore, 2015).

the perception of men as being the 'mind and spirit' and, thus, inherently superior to women who were seen as the 'matter and the body', their purpose being to serve men through their ability to procreate.

### 1.1.2 Relationship Violence

As time progressed, men's deemed superiority to women enshrined the right of a husband to chastise his wife for transgressions and a husband's role to ensure his wife behaved appropriately continued. As outlined in 1400 AD by Friar Cherubino of Siena's *Rules of Marriage*, it was a husband's religious duty to "scold [his wife] sharply, bully and terrify her. And if that does not work... take up a stick and beat her soundly... not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul" (cited Browne, 1987, p.165 in Quinn, 2007). Such attitudes normalised, what we would today term as, IPV during the period of the Restoration (1660-1700) to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Within these times violence was seen as "an acceptable way to resolve disputes and settle the balance of power in marriage" (Foyster, 2005. p. 8). However, not all use of violence was condoned. Men were expected use only 'reasonable correction' in proportion to their wife's misbehaviour (*Laws Resolution of Women's Rights* cited in Amussen, 1994, p. 71). Chastisement seen as excessive or without love was viewed as tyrannical and deemed 'cruel' (Fletcher, 1995) and could be tried in court.

In court, a woman did not contest her husband's use of physical violence per se. Instead the focus was solely on the excessive or inappropriateness of the violence<sup>3</sup> (Foyster, 2005). Yet, due to the importance of the institution of marriage, acceptance of marital violence and general prevalence of physical violence in this period, the preferred solution of courts was for the husband to apologise and for the marital relationship to

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<sup>3</sup> Foyster, (2005) highlights that on some cases of Cruel Violence tried in court witnesses would emphasise the cruel nature of violence testifying that the wife had miscarried emphasising the violence's severity. It was also common for witnesses, or wife, to report bruises visible on the miscarried foetus

continue. Relationship violence was also a way for both husbands and wives to ensure their partner adhered to their role (Foyster, 2005) - and men and women were seen to have clear roles within specific, separate spheres. Women occupied the private sphere, looking after the children and the home and seen to have innate characteristics that suited this. In contrast, men occupied the public sphere being active in politics and the workforce. Women and men's adherence to gender roles was interrogated in court and used by husband and wife to highlight ill treatment, or bad behaviour which justified their **chastisement**. In this way, adherence to gender roles were policed by such court proceedings, meaning claims by individuals who had not adhered were belittled making them vulnerable to punishment (Foyster, 2005).

Interestingly, fulfilment of gender roles could provide temporary relief to women in that a wife could refute her husband's use of violence by demonstrating she had kept to her role in maintaining the house, providing a woman a way to leave an abusive relationship (Foyster, 2005). However, this only privileged women who adhered to their gender role which, in many ways, was to women's structural disadvantage. For example, characteristics of patience, mildness, willingness to please and forgiveness - as an extension of piety - were viewed as 'feminine characteristics' reinforcing women's subordination and resulting in the expectation that a 'good' woman would return to her abusive husband. Moreover, femininity was constructed to place a moral responsibility on women to reform their husband through her own example. Hence, husband violence was situated in a culture of female self-blame in which a wife was encouraged to check first her own behaviour and use her innate femininity to placate his masculine aggression (Foyster, 2005).

## 1.2 Recent Historical Changes Post 1800s

### 1.2.1 Changes to legislations: 1800-1880.

In the 1800s, perceptions and legislation around relationship violence began to change. A preference for non-violent conflict resolution emerged. This ensued in a societal distaste of physical violence in marital relationships (Foyster, 2005), with relationship violence termed 'barbarous and brutal crimes' (*Hansard*, 12 March 1856 col 24- 28). Consequently, in the 1853 *Act for the Better Prevention and Punishment of Aggravated Assaults upon Women and Children*, this act and the 1828 *Offences Against the Person Act* raised further awareness of relationship violence within the UK (SurrIDGE, 2005). In 1857 the *Matrimonial Causes Act* marked a shift in the perception of marriage from a religious sacrament to a primarily legal contract. Women suffering relationship violence had sufficient grounds to divorce but this incurred a financial cost and thus was an option only open to wealthy women. In 1878, a further amendment allowed more women experiencing relationship violence to be divorced and entitled them to the rights of a *feme sole*<sup>4</sup>.

Although British legislation made positive steps toward gender equality, the rights of women suffering relationship violence remained limited. Wives who left their husband before receiving an official court order could be charged with desertion and denied all custody of their children under the 1878 amendment (Murdoch, 2014). Further the 1828 and 1853 acts were minimal deterrents to men who abused their wives and children (Steiner-Scott, 1997 cited in Hearn & Parkin, 2001), with the common *Law of Coverture*<sup>5</sup> holding full sway in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Zaher, 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> A *feme sole* refers to a woman who is unmarried either by virtue of never being married, being divorced, or being widowed. Women who were granted an official separation from their husband gained the same rights as a single or widowed woman.

<sup>5</sup> The Common Law of Coverture says, once married a husband becomes legally responsible for the actions of both his wife and children, and therefore is entitled to physically and verbally chastise them to control their behaviour.

### 1.2.2 Changes to legislations: 1880-1960

In 1882, the *Married Women's Property Act* allowed women's property and money earned to remain their own (Isaac, 2014) with marital violence presented as a primary, easily communicable reason for this bill (e.g. Swanwick cited in Dyehouse 1989, p.23). However, disapproval of marital violence remained. In 1885, a *Curfew on **Wife Beating*** was enforced as a City of London Byelaw, due to noise disruption, evidencing both a societal distaste and legislative acceptance of **Wife Beating**. In 1895 the amended *Matrimonial Causes Act* improved married women's rights, permitting women experiencing relationship violence to apply for a separation *after* leaving their husband. Magistrates were often unwilling to approve separations, showing little sympathy for victims blaming them for abuse and being lenient when punishing convicted **wife beaters**. Thus, divorce remained "largely inaccessible to working-class couples until after World War I" (Murdoch, 2014, p. 12). In 1918, women were granted the right to vote but it was not until 1956 that the *Sexual Offences Act* was passed, defining **rape** (Isaac, 2014). It did not, though, include **marital rape**. Despite the above milestones providing benefits to women, rejection of relationship violence was slow, with the above examples highlighting legislative negligence of the needs of those – particularly women – facing relationship violence, and victim blaming by law enforcers.

### 1.2.3 Changes to legislations: 1960-1990

In the 1960's, the feminist movement began its second wave and, once again, public consciousness began reawakening to relationship violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Many feminists, broadly speaking, took a radical perspective arguing that the oppression women faced, including '**wife beating**', was due to patriarchal society that privileged men's needs over women's.

Chisick Women's Aid (now Refuge) opened the first internationally recognised safe house for **battered women** and children (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Public interest for

**battered women** continued and in 1974 the first UK *Select Committee on Violence in Marriage* was established. In 1975, they published their first report recommending at least one family refuge place for every 10,000 people - a huge step forward in provision for women facing relationship violence (Isaac, 2014). Although the report recognised men's victimhood, women were the primary focus, seen as most vulnerable due to their presumed "inadequate means [...] dependent children and need for advice" (Twining & Miers, 2010, p. 88). The report asked for further research into relationship violence and highlighted persisting apathy towards **marital violence** within government. In 1976 the *Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act* was passed the first legislative act dedicated to stopping marital violence (Isaac, 2014), and women and children at risk of **marital violence** were granted state-funded temporary accommodation under the 1977 *Housing Act* (Isaac, 2014).

In the 1980s the first British Crime Survey (BCS) estimated at least 10% of assaults were **Domestic Violence** (BCS, 1982). Despite this, many police officers wanted to shed responsibility for policing **domestic violence**. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner stated, "**domestic violence** and stray dogs" were "rubbish work" for police officers (Stanko & Radford, 1991). These attitudes were met with public scrutiny around the treatment of **domestic violence** and rape victims. This resulted in police reforms in the late 1980s with **domestic violence** ascending the police agenda resulting in police training and **domestic violence** policing teams (Stanko, 1996).

#### **1.2.4 Changes in Legislation: 1990- Present Day**

Despite increased police engagement with relationship violence, uncertainty remained. Many officers were frustrated and unsure about how best to intervene in **marital violence** incidents. Moreover, victims felt police dealt with incidents ineffectively, disbelieving their account or not taking injuries seriously (Bourlet, 1990). In 1991 pressure was put on local governments to find ways of alleviating violence against



women (Stanko, 1995). In the same year, **marital rape** was criminalised in the first legislative recognition of marital sexual abuse. In 1996 police were granted automatic powers of arrest in cases of **domestic violence** (actual or threatened) following the *Family Law Act IV*<sup>6</sup>, providing victims with greater protection.

In the last 15 years, victims of **domestic violence** have benefited from additional governmental changes, with increasing recognition of other victims of **domestic violence** such as children, men, elderly people and siblings. In 2003 and 2004, the UK government began collecting data on the scale of **domestic violence** and use of services via an inter-ministerial Group on Domestic Violence (Isaac, 2014) and the addition of modules to the British Crime Survey collecting data on incidents of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking - exemplifying recognition of the multiple versions of relationship violence<sup>7</sup>. In 2004, the government passed the *Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act* which provided additional legal protections for victims and new rules for trials. In 2005, the Home Office published *Domestic Violence: A National Report* documented official plans for dealing with **violence against women** including financial commitments to support agencies in their 2010 *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*: the government's first commitment to dealing with domestic violence through policy, i.e. creating a strategic plan to combat **violence against women** (Isaac, 2014).

In 2011 campaigns for recognition of men's victimhood resulted in £10,000 being pledged by government to *Male victims of **domestic and sexual violence***, and a further £500,000 in 2014 (Ministry of Justice, 2014). This separate fund marked

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<sup>6</sup> In 2004 Police were granted rights to immediately arrest some suspected of Common Assault following the *Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act*, meaning victims were no longer left with perpetrators while an arrest warrant was obtained (Isaac, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> This terminology was expanded even further in the 2011 BCS by Osbourne (2011)

governmental recognition of male victims of relationship violence, who until this point had been neglected. Further, **domestic violence** remained a high public concern. In 2012 *Clare's Law*, a domestic violence disclosure scheme (granting individuals the 'right to ask' or the 'right to know' about their partner's past violent offences) was piloted as an alternative way to manage **domestic violence**<sup>8</sup>. Following a report commissioned by the NSPCC (Barter et al., 2009), the government began to acknowledge young people's victimisation, commencing the 'This is Abuse' campaign in February 2011 to raise awareness of **domestic violence** among young people aged 13-18 years. They also began consultations with an NSPCC young people's panel to inform the government about their concerns. The following year the UK government implemented a new working definition of **Domestic Violence and Abuse**:

"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to... psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional [abuse]." (Home Office, 2013a)

This new definition is the first to include **psychological abuse** and relationship violence amongst 16 and 17 year olds. The change highlighted the government's acknowledgement of a range of academic research into young people's experience of IPV and wider societal concern for young people (discussed in next section). Despite not being legislative, this change recognises **Domestic Violence and Abuse** as happening outside of the marital home, and the need of young people experiencing relationship violence to be supported by 'domestic' violence services<sup>9</sup>. In 2017 Relationships and Sex Education was declared compulsory for all schools to teach,

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<sup>8</sup> Clare's Law has been criticized due to its reliance on reporting of relationship violence which is low potentially resulting in false assurance (Coles, 2014) and its reliance on records of relationship violence contradicting its prevention positioning (see Duggan, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Previous to this change young people experiencing relationship violence were referred to Social Services and Child Protection.

including academies, as per Section 34 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, changes to be implemented by September 2020.

Although positive progress towards combating domestic violence has been made, domestic violence services are reliant on government funding and have lost £2.4 million in funding following the economic downturn of 2009 (Walby & Towers, 2012). Cuts have resulted in competitive government tender between private non-specialist organisation and IPV charities. Further pressures on the government to provide **domestic violence and abuse** support to men has meant many women's charities running women-only refuges were not able to bid (Laville, 2014), creating further tension in the debate around male victims of IPV. Fortunately, in March 2015, the government announced an allocation of £10 million of funding over two years to support domestic violence refuges (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). However, the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2015) criticism of a lack of domestic policy - a promised in the 2010 *Ending Violence Against Women Strategy* - remains.

### 1.3 Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender history

In parts of the world, the rights of LGBT people have made much progress since about the 1960s and the following section will briefly outline these developments with the context of the UK, with some notable events in the USA, and with a focus on those of relevance to IPV.

- 1967: Sexual Offences Act was passed decriminalising private sexual acts between two, consenting men over the age of 21 in England.
- 1969: After a police raid on a gay bar in New York began the six day Stonewall Riots, a catalyst for the gay rights movement in the United States and the UK.
- 1972: London's first Gay Pride event took place. In the 1980s the HIV/AIDS epidemic took hold and devastated the gay community (see, Madeley, 1987).
- 1980 and 1982: The Sexual Offences Act, permitted private sexual acts between two consenting men over the age of 21 was passed in Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.
- 1982: Gay London Police Monitoring Group (GALOP) was formed in response to the unaccountability of the police in arresting and intimidating the LGBT community. GALOP aimed to 'expose the systematic harassment of the gay and lesbian communities by the police and to educate them about their rights.

- 1988: Section 28 of the Local Government Act which stated that ‘a local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality’ or ‘promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’ (Local Government Act 1988, p. 27).
- 1989: “Stonewall” was founded as an organisation in resistance to Section 28.
- 2003: “Stonewall” were approved charitable status and became a central LGBT support organisations for various issues such as hate crime, lobbying government for equality and campaigns against anti-LGBT bullying in schools.
- 2004: Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act included same-sex adult relationships as entitled to the same protections as heterosexual couples.
- 2004: The Civil Partnership Act was passed in the UK allowing same-sex couples to be recognised under law and have similar rights to heterosexual married couples such as next of kin rights, employment benefits, parental responsibilities, state pensions for both partners, etc.
- 2010: Equality Act 2010 made it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on protected features, such as gender identity and sexuality.
- 2013: In July 2013, the Marriage (same sex couples) Act was passed through UK parliament to allow same-sex marriage, giving same-sex couples the option to become legally married.
- 2017: Following the liquidation of Broken Rainbow (the previous, and only, national provider for support for LGBT victims of IPV in the UK), GALOP became the national provider for support for LGBT victims of domestic violence in the UK.

Notably, much of the progress on LGBT rights outlined above has been towards fighting for, and sustaining, equality with the rights awarded heterosexual couples. However, much less legislation has focused on the rights of, and protection for, people in same-sex relationship about IPV and, arguably, much anti-IPV legislation assumes and applies to victim/survivors in heterosexual relationships and, as documented by people such as Catherine Donovan, IPV in same-sex relationships is often overlooked and normalised (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Similarly, the past CEO of Broken Rainbow commented that, compared to heterosexual relationships, awareness of IPV in LGBT relationships is at the stage of the women’s movement in the late 70s, early 80s (Guardian, 2016).

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to introduce the concept of violence in intimate romantic relationships as something that is not fixed. Often it can be assumed that such violence is something that exists, reasonably and unproblematically in the world, independent of

history, values or gendered subject positions. However, as this chapter highlights this is not the case, the concept of violence in intimate romantic relationships, irrespective of the specific term used (wife beating, domestic abuse, IPV), has changed over time. As this chapter has demonstrated, societal tolerances of violence in romantic intimate relationships has gradually reduced, with laws making such behaviour a crime. However, it is noted that the emphasis is largely heteronormative, recognising and punishing men's violence against women. Over time, violence in intimate romantic relationships has become more of a public issue with increasing involvement by the UK Government in supporting victims of IPV. Yet violence in intimate romantic relationships is a persisting issue with many people still affected by it.

Despite the predominant heteronormative focus around violence in romantic intimate relationships there has been increased recognition of this phenomena in same-sex relationships or relationships where men are the victims. From the 1980's rights of LGBT people have been won and there has been increased recognition of same-sex relationships. However, focus on IPV in the LGBT community is slower and seems to have only begun in 2000. Recognition and safeguards to prevent violence for LGBT people in intimate romantic relationships is often subsumed within general legislative changes to prevent IPV. Young people are more likely to experience IPV than any other age group but governmental recognition of this is relatively recent; however, this arguably due to the difference of young people's relationships in present day compared to the past. Further, IPV support service funding is dependent on government and subject to change. Hence, more research into young people's needs and experiences is needed to ensure money is spent where it can have the most positive outcomes for young people.

Taking a historical perspective on IPV allows one to appreciate the temporal nature of its construction, that the behaviour that IPV, or similar terms, refer to change based on

where they are situated in history. This historical reflection allows one to consider how IPV, and the like, could be constructed differently and why, e.g. in relation to the laws, rights of types of people, societal perceptions of relationships, etc. The next section will further outline the prevalence statistics on IPV, explore IPV as a concept and the various terms used in the field and some of the current debates in this area of research.

## **Chapter 2: Prevalence, Definitions and Assumptions**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In March 2014, an EU wide survey of 42,000 women across EU states found 1 in 3 women had experienced physical, sexual and/or psychological violence since the age of 15 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Research shows IPV is a prominent issue affecting 1 in 4 women and 1 in 5 men in their lifetime (Crime Survey for England and Wales 2013/14 in Office of National Statistics, 2015) and killing one woman in England and Wales every three days (Office of National Statistics, 2015). Intimate Partner Violence affects many people regardless of their age, gender or sexual orientation. Yet, the prevalence of IPV amongst these groups is not equal (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Young people aged 16-24 are more likely to experience IPV than their older counterparts (Office of National Statistics, 2014). Moreover, young people in same-sex relationships are more likely to experience IPV than their heterosexual counterparts (Barter, McCarry, Berridge & Evans, 2009).

#### **2.1.1 Limitations of Statistics**

Yet statistics can present an overly simplistic view. For example, Baker, Buick, Kim, Moniz and Nava (2013) suggest statistics on same-sex IPV are a rough estimate at best as they may exclude certain groups of LGBT people. For instance, formal statistics from authorities (e.g. the police) exclude victims of abuse who are reluctant to: a) contact authorities, b) make formal complaints, or c) come forward due to fears of being outed, unfair treatment of them or their partner, or complaints reflecting negatively on the LGBT community (see also Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Walters, 2011). A similar case is put forward for figures of IPV prevalence in heterosexual relationships (Barter, 2014).

There is also variation in the reported prevalence of IPV amongst young people, with reports of prevalence rates from 39% (Bryant & Spencer) to 50% (Bethke & DeJoy, 1998). Barter (2014) argues such discrepancies are due to variations and “incompatibility” (p. 66) in samples across studies, e.g. age of the samples, and inconsistency in definitions of “sexually aggressive acts” (p. 66). Freer, Sprang and Chen (2013) make a similar case, arguing that definitional variance can result in unreliable prevalence rates.

Barter (2014) and Freer et al. (2013) raise an important point: there are many terms used in the field to refer to IPV which present various difficulties when it comes to measuring the prevalence, and sense making of IPV. As this chapter will highlight the significance of IPV definitions go beyond the effects on prevalence but have connotations as to: a) *what* IPV is; b) *who* is and is not affected; and c) the *assumptions* attached to such IPV constructions. This chapter will outline a) terminology, definitions, prevalence and intersectionality; and b) assumptions within IPV and young people’s recognition and identification. This critical review of IPV will allow us to scrutinise and explore how IPV is characterised and the wider societal norms and values of IPV in the UK. Chapter 3 will focus specifically on young people outlining: a) young people: social influence of family and peers; b) government policies and the role of schools; and lastly c) language.

### 2.1.2 Overview of terminology

There are a variety of terms used within the field such as **Domestic Violence, Inter-Personal Violence, and Intimate Partner Abuse** to mention a few. Such a plethora of terms is both positive and negative for the research and prevention of IPV, allowing research and definitions to be more targeted and specific but also fragmenting and potentially marginalising some types of violence, as I will outline.



**Domestic Violence** is a globally used term referring to violence and abuse<sup>2</sup> in intimate relationships (World Health Organisation, 2013). **Domestic Violence** is an umbrella term referring to relationship abuse occurring within a variety of relationship types, e.g. in a romantic relationship, child to a parent, sibling to sibling, parent to child - with many other variations. Although used by public services, the UK Government (herein abbreviated to Government) and some academics, the term **Domestic Violence** for some is too broad. Instead the term **IPV** is used to denote relationship violence (e.g. WHO, 2013 and the current research), or **Teen Dating Violence**<sup>10</sup>, or **Adolescent Dating Violence and abuse** with the term 'dating' resonating with young people's often transient and more informal relationships and more recently specific terms such as **Technology-Assisted Adolescent Dating Violence** (Stonard, Bowen, Walker & Price, 2015) relating to abusive relationship behaviours occurring in young people's digital lives. Yet all these terms have some shortfalls.

In recent years, academic and public focus has shifted from physical violence to other forms of '**abuse**' such as emotional, psychological and financial abuse. These abusive behaviours are often presented as indicators of, and increasingly tantamount to, IPV (Refuge, 2015). Renzetti (2015) outlines that feminist criminologists have broadened definitions of violence beyond the legal definitions, constructing violence against women within a 'continuum of unsafety' (Stanko, 1990) defining '**violence**' as:

"Any act – physical, sexual, or verbal – that is experienced by an individual as a threat, invasion, or assault and that has the effect of hurting or degrading that individual and/or depriving that individual of her or his ability to control contact with the other individual" (Renzetti, 2015 p. 133)

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<sup>10</sup> There is a lot of research that has been undertaken in the USA meaning that **Dating Violence** is a prevalent term within the literature. However, **Teen Dating Violence** is a more popular term in the UK (Wood, Barter & Berridge, 2011).

Renzetti (2015) further outlines that this approach is clear that **violence** can cause injury without physical assault and that **violence** includes stalking and psychological and emotional abuse. Despite many such as Renzetti, and myself, defining **violence** in this way, some researchers, practitioners and charities express concern that the word '**violence**' in terms such as **IPV**, **Dating Violence** and **Domestic Violence** hinders recognition of non-physical forms of **abuse** (Bent-Goodley, 2004), a preference also expressed by young people (McCoy, Jones & Quigg, 2011). Evidence for this position is presented in a case of a woman experiencing verbal IPV from her partner. She was denied the right to emergency housing by her council due to their assumption - as later ruled by a court judge as incorrect - that IPV was contingent on the presence of physical violence (Cumber, 2011).

Lack of recognition of non-physical abuse presents an issue as studies amongst survivors highlight that, for some, non-physical abuse was the most distressing aspect of IPV (O'Keefe & Triester, 1998; O'Leary, 1999). To overcome this difficulty, the word '**abuse**' is used in many terms within academia and practice to highlight non-physical relationship violence as harmful and unacceptable such as **Intimate Partner Abuse** and **Domestic Abuse**. Arguably, these are similar in definition to their '**violence**' counterparts, i.e. **IPV** and **Domestic Violence**. However, due to the virtues of linguistics, the terms implication of physical and non-physical behaviours raises awareness of 'abuse' i.e. non-physical violence, (Walker & Gavin, 2011). Definitions of relationship violence remain convoluted, with terms containing **abuse** and/or **violence** frequently used interchangeably, or referenced together side-by-side (e.g. Walker & Gavin, 2011; Nicolson & Wilson, 2004; Helfrich, Lafata, MacDonald, Aviles & Collins, 2001; Izzidien, 2008).

Many of the above terms are used within academia, rather than to raise awareness amongst the general population. However, the UK government recently adopted the

term **Domestic Violence and Abuse**, presumably – in part – to raise public awareness about non-physical abuse. Arguably, this terminology – like the term ‘**violence against women and girls**’ provides a number of benefits in that it: highlights non-physical abuse and is broad enough to pass legislation and write policies covering a range of abusive acts in a range of relationships. However, it seems reasonable that a drawback of such broad terminology is various types of violence such as IPV, child abuse, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation are all grouped under this term making interventions and research less targeted to the specific requirements of each of these pressing issues.

So, are these terms advantageous or not to the field of research? Renzetti (2015) argues that feminists “seek to encompass a wide range of behaviours in their theorizing and research, arguing that narrow definitions do not adequately capture violence victimization experiences, especially those of women” (p. 133). In which case, such proliferation could be a hindrance to research whereby numerous terms may exclude or fragment some women’s experiences.

Similarly, Radford (2003) highlights that the multi-agency nature of IPV means a coherent definition across fields is needed. Further, as with most specific terminologies, they can be inaccessible to those not within the field of research, notably lay people and victims, limiting the impact of IPV research (Walker & Gavin, 2011). On the other hand, such variety of terminology provides academics with freedom to select different terms and use these to indicate the different foci of their research, investigating individually and in-depth the specific motives, contexts and meanings of each type of violence.

The number of terms is not the only issue. Donovan (2015) argues that these terms, or at least their definitions, are not specific enough often “overlooking salient distinctions” of the “motives, impacts, meanings and context of violence and abuse” (p.

170). Donovan argues this lack of specificity can cause confusion within the field whereby different types of violent relationships such as **common couple violence, intimate terrorism** (Johnson, 1995; 2006), **coercive control** (Stark, 2007) are grouped together creating an inaccurate picture of IPV, its prevalence, “impacts, meanings and contexts” (p. 170; also see Stark 2007). So, although such diversity of terms could be beneficial to research and its impact, the current use of terminology and definitions within the field is likely a hindrance until greater coherence across studies is achieved. This incoherence raises a question that, although I cannot answer, is worth highlighting: ‘what has caused this incoherence and how can it be resolved?’

To conclude, there are a variety of terms used within academia and practice today to reference problematic behaviour in ‘romantic’ relationships. Definitions and terms are of utmost importance in any discourse and constantly evolving as highlighted by Radford (2003):

“Names provide social definitions, make visible what was invisible, define as unacceptable what was accepted; make sayable what was unspeakable’ (Radford & Kelly, 1991) [...] Feminist definitions, grounded in the experiences of women and children, were never fixed but developed with the growth of knowledge, research, experience and understanding.” (Radford 2003, p. 33)

This idea of developing and growing knowledge and understanding is reflected in this section, with research into IPV and women’s and men’s experiences of it allowing adaption of terminology. For example, to include the term ‘**abuse**’, use of the terms **(Teen) Dating Violence** to correspond with young people’s more casual relationships, or the use of the term **Domestic Violence and Abuse** to incorporate multiple types of abuse by the UK Government.

With the development of knowledge, experiences and terminology around IPV there seems a need to further understand how young people make sense of IPV. For

example, there is evidence that young people may be relatively accepting of IPV, sometimes downplaying its significance and romanticizing its occurrence through calling it 'drama' (Martin et al., 2012). Such minimisation is echoed in the British Crime Survey (Walby & Allen, 2004) which found that 64% of female victims of IPV did not deem the incident(s) to be a crime.

Further, as I have highlighted, there is much work to be done on how we tackle the numerous terms within this field. Many academics agree that the lack of consistency in terminology and definitions in IPV research is a hindrance to the field either by excluding some experiences or by not being specific or well enough defined (Barter, 2014; Donovan, 2015; Walker & Gavin, 2011). From a discursive perspective, it is argued that when violence in romantic relationships is spoken about – using whichever term – constructions vary, even when the same term is used. In other words, the meanings, implications and contexts of talking about **IPV** in one instance are likely to be different to those in another, depending on the audience, motives and context of talk. As such, from a discursive perspective one could argue such variety of definitions and terms merely reflects the variety of assumptions and meanings assigned to violence in romantic relationships in different types of talk and discourse.

## **2.2 Prevalence and Intersectionality**

When the above is taken into consideration, it seems of the utmost importance to further investigate *how* and *what* people (e.g. the general public, those with and without experience IPV, bystanders, etc.) recognise and identify as IPV. However, one first should address the empirical question of: '*what* is IPV (or domestic violence/abuse)?' This question has proved difficult for researchers and policy-makers to pin down (as explored in the Historical Literature Review). I will argue that one of the primary difficulties of this task is that IPV is not an objective *thing*, rather it is something constructed through talk and changing over time and space. In other words, every time

IPV/Domestic Violence is spoken about/ constructed in talk, it can be constructed differently. To provide some context I will begin this section by outlining my working definition of IPV.

### **2.2.1 Thesis definition**

Intimate Partner Violence is the act- or threat- of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression, committed by a current, or former, partner regardless of gender or sexuality (Diaz & Hayes, 2012), and independent of ability.

### **2.2.2 The Importance of Intersectionality**

Despite many researchers and practitioners recognising that IPV can affect anyone, regardless of their demographics, often constructions and experiences of IPV carry with them sexist (Baker et al., 2013; Gutman, 2005), homophobic (Baker et al., 2013; Hill et al., 2012), ageist (Hightower, 2010; Gutman, 2005), class-ist (Hill, Woodson, Ferguson & Parks, 2012), racist (Bent-Goodley, 2004; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, Riger, 2004; Hill et al., 2012) and able-ist (Leeds Inter-Agency Project, 2005; Trotter, Radford & Harne, 2006) assumptions (see also Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

These assumptions are most often not separate but intersecting with one another. Considering this, this thesis takes an intersectional approach to IPV. That is, I acknowledge that multiple factors (such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, ability, etc.) affect one's life experience and one's experiences and risks of IPV, sadly sometimes with compounding affects. In recognition of this, I will outline research investigating these factors in this area. However, the focus will be predominantly on young people (whom are the focus of this thesis) and rates of prevalence and challenges faced by these groups. I will begin with the demographic of age.

Age. Constructions of IPV are often ageist. For example, the term *domestic violence* carries with it age-specific connotations of *marital violence* and *wife beating*. Ageism can have negative outcomes for those old and young. Beginning with the former, a systematic review of research of *Elder Abuse*<sup>6</sup> found 1 in 4 older people (i.e. aged over 60/65<sup>11</sup>) had experienced abuse from a caregiver, partner, or family member, yet Hightower (2010) suggests the Elder Abuse Model risks overlooking domestic violence faced by older people.

Older women experiencing IPV face ‘triple jeopardy’ with ageism and sexism placing them at a further disadvantage to meet their basic needs e.g. lack of access to adequate quality of life, income, shelter and health care (Gutman 2005, p. 23). With some of these women having experienced abuse and control throughout their life, in their past (i.e. a parent, partner), or present (e.g. partner, adult child; Hightower et al., 2001). Moreover Mezey, Post and Maxwell (2002) argue that older women face similar rates of psychological abuse to young women, but less physical violence, suggesting that, with age, the exertion of power and control is exercised through the use of psychological violence. Thus, although older people are not a focus of the thesis it is acknowledged that IPV faced by older people is a serious issue.

On the other side of the age spectrum, lifespan studies suggest that IPV is particularly common in adolescence compared to adulthood (Johnson, Manning, Giordano & Longmore, 2015). In the UK, young people (aged 16 -24 years) are most likely to experience IPV compared to all other age groups (Office of National Statistics, 2014):

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<sup>11</sup> Elder abuse is defined as a: ‘violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by another person or persons’. Such abuse can be ‘physical, psychological, sexual, financial, discriminatory... [and] neglect’ (Cooper, Selwood & Livingstone, 2008 p. 151), the definition of ‘elder’ varies across studies from ages 60+, 65+ (Cooper et al., 2008) and 66+ (O’Keeffe, 2007).

findings reiterated by numerous studies warranting concern for young people's well-being in intimate relationships (e.g., Arias & Johnson, 1989; Bethke & DeJoy, 1998; Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Hird, 2000).

This is perhaps unsurprising as 15-17 years old is when many adolescents have their first romantic and sexual relationships and begin establishing dating norms (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). Despite this high prevalence, research into IPV has neglected the demographic of young people in the UK (Barter et al., 2009) even though adolescence has been identified as a crucial stage during which to implement IPV prevention (Schutt, 2006). Further, some argue that the 'adult framework' of IPV does not adequately capture young people's experiences (Mulford & Giordano, 2008).

The focus of the present research is on how young people make sense of others' relationship problems. I am defining young people as those aged 15- 24 years old<sup>12</sup>. This is with reason. For example, longitudinal research by Johnson et al. (2015) found that IPV victimisation and perpetration peaks in early twenties and greater experiences of IPV were associated with continuation of IPV perpetration or victimisation (although, it should be noted that the authors used the Conflict Tactics Scale as their measure, which does not differentiate self-initiated abuse from that of self-defense).

Research into young people and IPV is unique in that it is investigating IPV from a population (i.e. young people) at a pivotal time where many are establishing their first norms and expectations of romantic relationships (Connolly, Furman & Konarski, 2000), having their first serious romantic relationships (see Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009 for

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<sup>12</sup> There is no definitive age range for a 'young person' adhered to within IPV research. Age varies by study.



a review) but also at a time when lack of relationship experience can mean communication is more difficult increasing the likelihood of physical and verbal aggression (Fredland, Ricardo, Campbell, Sharps, Kub & Yonas, 2005; Laursen & Collins, 1994). Peers also have a major influence over norms for acceptable and unacceptable relationships and relationship behaviours, which make this age group of further interest as will be explored in greater detail in a later section.

*Gender.* Both men and women experience IPV, and this topic is covered extensively throughout the thesis. Yet, women are four times more likely to experience IPV than men (Mankind, 2015). However, figures vary as to the extent of men and women's victimisation with some authors arguing that IPV is a gender-neutral phenomenon in that men can be, or are equal, victims of IPV (Straus, 2010). Others argue this seeming equality of victimisation is merely an artefact of methodological confounds failing to consider the context of violence, e.g. women perpetrating violence in self-defense against their abusive partner (O'Keefe, 1997). They instead argue that IPV is gender specific, or a *gendered* phenomenon, in that women are the only - or predominant - victims of IPV (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000)<sup>13</sup>. Further, Canon, Lauve-Moon & Buttell (2015) assert that evidence of equal prevalence rates of IPV amongst men and women does not evidence equal rates of perpetration as they fail to consider, at structural and interactional levels, the relationship between perpetration and gender.

An intersectional approach is beneficial here. As highlighted by Baker et al. (2012) the inclusion of same-sex IPV challenges the common rhetoric or assumptions that men are perpetrators of violence and women are victims, highlighting instances (i.e. same-sex relationships) where (lesbian) women are perpetrators

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<sup>13</sup> The term 'victim' rather than 'survivor' is used generally in this thesis as it is suited to represent someone experiencing IPV as opposed to someone who it is no longer.

and (gay) men are victims (see also Canon, Lauve-Moon & Buttell, 2015). Here we see gender and sexuality as intertwined. However, Baker et al. (2012) argue although incidences of IPV in same-sex relationships evidence IPV to affect men and women, it does not go so far as to evidence IPV as a gender-neutral phenomenon. Stark (2007) highlights that within this debate there is a lot at stake for all.

In this thesis, gender<sup>14</sup> is mapped closely to sex. Gender is defined as male/masculine and female/feminine, however, it is acknowledged that gender and sex can be defined beyond binaries of male/masculine and female/feminine, e.g. gender queer, intersex. This is something acknowledged in some prevalence studies which use Bem's Sex Role Inventory (see Canon et al., 2015 for an overview).

In relation to research amongst young people, interestingly it has been found that, converse to patterns of abuse amongst adults, young women report higher rates of physical and psychological IPV perpetration (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Sears, Byers & Price, 2007; Swahn, Simon, Arias & Bossarte, 2008) and young men non-physically violent victimisation (Holt & Espelage, 2003; Molidor & Tolman, 1998). However, these figures may not present an accurate picture (Watson, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf and O'Leary, 2001; Jackson, 1999<sup>15</sup>).

*Sexuality.* Intimate partner violence is also a pressing issue in LGBT relationships (Barter et al., 2009; Jones & Raghavan, 2012; Porter & Williams, 2011). The National Violence Against Women survey found that, of men and women in

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<sup>14</sup> Specifically, the gendered indicators that are use in the vignettes used in data collection,

<sup>15</sup> These academics argue findings which suggest gender parity in IPV victimisation and perpetration use measures (e.g. the Conflict Tactics Scale) that do not consider the importance of context (e.g. they do not differentiate violence enacted in anger from the enacted for self-defense or fear), see Hester (2013).

same-sex relationships, 21.5% and 35.4% respectively had experienced physical violence, rates considerably higher than those in heterosexual relationships (men, 7.1% and women 20.4%, figures from the USA Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Similarly, a UK survey found 22% of lesbians and 29% of gay men had experienced IPV (psychological, physical or sexual) from their partner (Henderson, 2003).

Identification of IPV in LGBT relationships can be hindered by social norms and assumptions around IPV. For example, McKenry et al. (2006) found lesbian and gay victims often do not identify their relationship as abusive despite reporting physical violence. These norms also negatively impact help-seeking, with many support services, including the police, failing to recognise abuse in same-sex relationships or, if identified, view it as less severe than IPV in heterosexual relationships (Gallopini & Leigh, 2009; Kay & Jefferies, 2010; Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003).

The intersectionality of sexuality and gender also effects understanding. For example, Brown (2008) suggests gay men are less likely to identify as victims, possibly due a perceived challenge to their masculinity. Similarly, within the context of the social ideal of women as non-violent, some lesbian victims report a pressure from their lesbian community to conceal experiences of IPV (Elliott, 1996; Ristock, 2002; Walters, 2011). Many of these issues link to assumptions of heteronormativity in constructions of IPV, which exclude the experiences of those in same-sex relationships, discussed further later.

*Socio-Economic Status.* Within the literature Socio-Economic Status (SES) has been linked to IPV. Studies, predominantly undertaken in the USA, have found that factors arguably associated with SES are also associated with IPV such as: poor housing (Minhas, Hollows & Kerr, 2002), living in a poor neighbourhood

(Benson & Fox, 2004), unemployment or unstable employment (Benson & Fox, 2004; Kyriacou et al., 1999), low income (Benson & Fox, 2004), drug and alcohol use (Kyriacou et al., 1999), low school achievement (Cleveland, Herrera & Stuewig, 2003; Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, Kupper, 2001; Kyriacou et al., 1999), single-parent households (Foshee et al., 2008), and low parental education (Foshee et al., 2008).

Moreover, other research suggests increased prevalence of IPV amongst lower SES groups (Wilt & Olson, 1996; Jones et al., 1999). Socio-economic status has also been found to increase young people's likelihood of experiencing IPV (Collin-Vézina et al., 2006; Manseau et al., 2008; Jonson-Reid, Scott, McMillen & Edmond, 2007). There are several theories as to why this is the case.

Jewkes (2002) outlines the perspective that the relationship between IPV and SES is due to the stress associated with poverty and unequal households (i.e. where the woman is the breadwinner) which results in a failure of men to live up to masculine ideals. This failure can mean men use alternative ways to assert their masculine identity such as IPV. In contrast, Campbell (2002) contends that people are affected by IPV regardless of SES and the relationship between SES and IPV is instead due to economic and education resources enabling women to escape or end abusive relationships relatively more easily rather than making them less likely to be abused.

*Ethnicity.* Research into IPV highlights some differences in experiences of IPV based on ethnicity, although much of this research is from the USA. Questionnaire studies amongst university students have found racial ethnic minority<sup>16</sup> students were three times more likely to be experience sexual violence and twice as likely to experience

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<sup>16</sup> Porter and Williams (2011) grouped all ethnic minority students together rather than looking at victimisation for each ethnicity.

sexual abuse (Potter and Williams, 2011). Help seeking can also be affected by ethnicity (Cuevas, Bell & Sabina, 2014; Black and Weisz; 2003) and ethnicity can interact with sexuality presenting a double bind (Gonzalez-Guarda, De Santis & Vasquez, 2013).

Bent- Goodley (2004) found women experiencing IPV faced barriers to help such as difficulty due to location, lack of money for transportation, or referrals made to services which were too full to accept them. In the UK, women from ethnic minorities can face additional barriers such as waiting longer to be rehoused (Mama, 1989 cited in Nicolson & Wilson, 2004; Dhillon-Kashyap, 1994) racism from support services, rejection from their communities (Rai & Thiara, 1997; Gill 2004), language barriers (Humphreys, 2009), abuse also being enacted by family members (Minhas et al., 2002; Gill, 2004; Raj et al., 2006) and encouragement from family and friends to stay in the relationship (Gill, 2004).

Other studies have found experiences of IPV by ethnic minority women can be exacerbated by poverty and social isolation (Anitha et al., 2008; Minhas, et al., 2002). With 90% of ethnic minority women unable to access refuges due to the immigration condition of No Recourse to Public Funds (abbreviated to NRPF, Anitha et al., 2008; Roy, 2008; Thiara & Gill, 2010). Burman, Smales and Chantler (2004) argue that 'culture' can present a barrier to help seeking for women from ethnic minority groups, with IPV in minority cultures sometimes excused or overlooked due to 'cultural reasons' or victim's reluctance to come forward due to fear of reflecting negatively on their race or culture (also see Minhas et al., 2002). A review by Lewis and Fremouw (2001) has reported some of these findings as inconsistent, yet overall these findings suggest ethnicity can affect one's experiences and likelihood of experiencing IPV. Although ethnicity is an important factor in prevalence and experiences of IPV within this thesis ethnicity is not explored further.

*Disability.* Another factor affecting definitions and recognition of IPV is disability.

Ableism and ableist views are the:

'Ways in which ideas/beliefs are organized and supported ... based on the belief that the 'able-body' is favoured/preferred over the 'disAbled' body ... it is the socially constructed characteristics of disAbility that positions people with disAbilities as an inferior group to non-disAbled people.' (Odette, 2013 p. 3)

Research suggests disabled men and women were more likely to experience IPV (ONS, 2014). Yet little research has been undertaken into disabled women's experiences of IPV (Hague, Thiara, Magowan & Mullendar, 2013). Of that which has been undertaken disability has been shown to have a complex, circular relationship to IPV, with disability exacerbating and exploiting the existing disability (e.g. greater injuries for those who are immobile or frail) and vice versa (Hague et al., 2013). Further disability is a barrier to help and help seeking, due to ableist attitudes, lack of practitioner knowledge, the medical model of disability etc. (Leeds Inter-Agency Project, 2005; Radford, Harne & Trotter, 2006; Trotter, Radford & Harne, 2007). Due to limits of time, this thesis project will not investigate disability, however it is recognised as an important research area.

To conclude these variables are of important consideration to IPV research. As such taking an intersectional approach to research into IPV can allow us to highlight the effects of these characteristics on the prevalence and experiences of IPV and even the interactions between them. This thesis will focus specifically on age, sexuality and gender. Justifications for this focus are now presented.

### **2.3 Assumptions about IPV**

As highlighted briefly above characteristics such as gender, sexuality or ability can affect identification of IPV as well as prevalence. This will highlight how some of these characteristics (gender and sexuality) affect assumptions within IPV.

### 2.3.1 Victim – perpetrator framework

The ‘Victim-Perpetrator Framework’ (VPF) is in many cases a central assumption within IPV (Brenner, 2013)<sup>17</sup> in which there is believed to be one partner (usually male) who is ‘empowered’ and ‘possesses agency’, and who is abusive to the other ‘passive’ and ‘disempowered’ (usually female) partner (Brenner, 2013 p. 503). As outlined by Brenner (2013) the VPF is *overly simplistic*, overlooking the role of power in sexual violence and failing to include different experiences and perspectives of sexual violence and IPV.

Brenner highlights that such simple accounts of sexual violence, and IPV, can disempower victims. To explain, in instances where there seems to be either a) no clear ‘perpetrator’, b) a blameless ‘victim’, or c) a ‘perpetrator’ who does not ‘fit’ the criteria (e.g. denying the act, adamant intercourse was consensual, had harm inflicted upon them by the ‘victim’, etc.), the account of victims of rape or IPV can be presumed false or disbelieved, an experience that can re-traumatise the victim. The VPF can often undermine rather than empower those who have experienced rape or IPV by failing to account for the complexities of such situations because the aim is often to find the *one objective truth*. This approach fails to consider the possibility that accounts of an event can be different *and* both true. In addition to the above, there are many common ways of constructing and understanding blame in IPV with regards to gender, sexuality, culture etc., which can be harmful to some groups of people e.g. LGBT people, victims/survivors, perpetrators (for further limitations of the criminal justice framework for IPV see Westmarland, 2015<sup>18</sup>). However, trying to account for everyone’s experiences can be difficult.

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<sup>17</sup> Although Brenner’s paper was about rape and the victim-perpetrator framework there remain a number of parallels with IPV, not least because IPV also includes rape and sexual assault.

<sup>18</sup> That the criminal justice system can fail victims who do not fit a stereotype of innocence due to their behaviour or characteristics.

### 2.3.2 Physical violence and IPV

Physical violence has been shown to be central to constructions of IPV. For example, although the definition has changed since, the significance of physical violence to constructions of IPV is seen in the Home Office's 2003 definition Domestic Violence defined as:

'Physical violence [which] *may* be accompanied by other forms of intimidations such as degradation, mental and verbal abuse, humiliation and deprivation [...] [including] keeping women without money and in isolation), and may also include systematic criticism and belittling' (p. 3, emphasis added).

In this definition, physical violence is presented as the central feature of Domestic Violence which 'may be accompanied by other forms' of abuse. Definitions of physical violence are negotiated using social and cultural norms (Freer, Sprang & Chen, 2013). Thus, what is defined as physical violence and IPV is dependent on these social and cultural norms.

Arguably, this has two outcomes for constructions of IPV. First, in many instances social and cultural norms construct physical violence as an undesirable behaviour, following a cultural move in the 1800s to a preference for verbal resolutions of disputes (Foyster, 2005). This contextualises the centrality of physical violence to constructions of IPV and the cultural norms that position physical violence as an undesirable behaviour. Yet, second, social and cultural norms can construct physical violence as acceptable; for example, this is an explanation put forward for why individuals perpetrate IPV. I will discuss both issues respectively over this and the next chapter. This chapter will explore social and cultural norms around IPV. Chapter 3 will then discuss the wider context around IPV, e.g. social influence, RSE and policy.

As demonstrated in the Home Office (2003) definition above, physical violence is constructed as problematic, often a central premise of IPV. Ansara and Hindin (2011) highlight that much research into IPV and health outcomes focuses on



physical violence. Similarly, Stark (2007) goes as far as to suggest using physical violence alone to define IPV - with its clear link to injury, suffering and pain – is beneficial providing a straightforward index of prevalence for making comparisons.

The significance of physical violence to IPV is further evident from the use *incidents* of physical violence and abusive behaviours which incur the most harm and injuries to identify IPV (Stark, 2007). In keeping with this, studies have found young people characterise physical violence as central to IPV relying on overt sexual or physical violence (Cyr, McDuff & Wright, 2006; Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013) while mental and verbal abuse were less likely to be identified as abusive (Smith, Winokur & Palinski, 2005) and in some cases constructed as acceptable and normal (Cyr, McDuff & Wright, 2006).

However, there are limitations to this focus on physical violence to define IPV. Stark (2007) highlights that such restricted definitions of IPV leave many acts of abuse undetected by support services and by the general population, as demonstrated by Smith et al. (2005). Likewise, there is a growing consensus amongst academics and policy-makers that a broader definition of IPV that goes beyond physical violence to encompass psychological, sexual and financial abuse is beneficial, as I will now discuss.

### **2.3.3 Abuse/ Non-Physical Violence and IPV**

*Justifications.* Inclusion of non-physical violence reflects victim's experiences of violence. Westmarland (2015) argues recognition of non-physical violence as IPV presents a more representative picture of IPV by accounting for the constant and recurrent nature of IPV which single *incident* reporting is less able to capture (Westmarland, 2015). Similarly, Piipisa (2002) – in a survey of Finnish women – found IPV may 'evolve' from physical abuse to verbal abuse and mental cruelty in

long-term abusive relationships, suggesting recognition of psychological abuse is important particularly for those in long-term abusive relationships who have experience several years of abuse.

*Academic research on the non-physical violence and IPV.* Research amongst young people indicates support for the inclusion of psychological abuse, sexual abuse and coercion in constructions of IPV. Interestingly many of these examples are from participants in the same studies stated above (Smith et al., 2005; McCoy, Jones & Quigg, 2011; Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012). In a study by Sears, Byers, Whelan and Saint-Pierre (2006) psychological abuse was central to young people's constructions. Further within the field findings that young people's constructions of IPV do not go beyond physical violence is met with concern again highlighting the social norm of non-acceptance of violent relationships. For example, McCoy, et al. (2011) express concern that young people do not identify subtle forms of abusive behaviours such as IPV. In some cases, they found young people saw behaviours akin to IPV as positive. However, in complete contrast to this view there is the argument that only *specific types* of physical violence are IPV, considered next.

#### **2.3.4 Specific Types of Physical Violence Constitute IPV**

*Justifications.* Some authors contend that only specific types of physical violence are IPV. As outlined by Stark (2007), when faced with data reflecting equal, if not greater, rates of women's violence against men there became a crisis within the field (see Stark, 2007). In response to this, academics such as Johnson (1995; 2006) and Stark (2007) made efforts to disentangle physical violence from IPV. To do this, they defined IPV as a *pattern* of behaviour which includes coercion and control. Further, they highlighted that although IPV *can* include physical violence it is not contingent upon it. Likewise, women and couples who engage in physical violence are not necessarily experiencing IPV but instead Common Couple Violence/ Mutual Partner

Violence. This definition successfully disentangles physical violence from IPV allowing physical violence as self-defense, or mutual couple violence to be differentiated from that intended to intimidate and coerce, i.e. IPV (DeKeseredy, 2006).

Similarly, at the other end of the scale, although inclusion of non-physical violence is beneficial to the field, there became a need to set limits to maintain the integrity of the construct of IPV. For example, Radford (2003) outlines that broad definitions of IPV which include psychological abuse – particularly that which is non-threatening – denies gender power relations and can minimize the issue of IPV by including ‘arguments’ and ‘quarrels’ as IPV.

Thus, despite it seeming reasonable to argue all violence (physical and non-physical) is abusive the exclusions of this approach have some merit in that it enables *non-abusive* relationship violence to be differentiated and identified from *abusive* violence. It also offers something above a ‘one size-fits all’ approach. This approach may also pose a culturally nuanced definition, preventing classes and cultures where corporal punishment is condoned from being marginalised, which for some definitions is raised as a concern (Freer, Sprang & Chen, 2013). This differentiation seems sensible as, as demonstrated by Johnson and Ferraro’s (2000) review, IPV can happen in a variety of contexts.

*Academic research on specific types of violence as IPV.* Not all physical violence in relationships is abusive for example play fighting. The issue of ‘play fighting’ is raised by Redhawk-Love & Richards (2013). They found young people made a distinction between ‘play fighting’ – seen as acceptable physical violence – and unacceptable, abusive physical violence. With the former constructed as playful and not intending to cause harm, and latter intended to cause harm. In this instance, a restricted definition

of IPV seems beneficial to young people by seeming to allow them to exercise more nuanced constructions of IPV not based solely and indiscriminately on physical violence.

The acceptance of some types of physical violence in relationships and not others could be challenging for young people when it comes to identifying abuse. For example, Redhawk-Love & Richards (2013) noted there was a fine line between young people's differentiation of physical violence in 'play fighting' from that in IPV. The authors outlined such differentiations relied on specific behaviours (e.g. intensity of male aggression, laughter, use of vulgar language) some of which were very subtle (e.g. eye contact, facial expression).

A focus group study by Fredland et al (2005) found discriminating between types of physical violence presents other problems. They found physical violence described by young people as 'playing' was used to describe both acceptable and unacceptable violence. Young people used the term 'playing' to denote acceptable violence in their relationships, but when discussing violence in their parent's relationship 'playing' was seen to be used by parents to disguise or excuse unacceptable, abusive behaviours. These findings highlight that 'playing' or 'play fighting' could disguise or excuse unacceptable abusive physical violence as that which is normal or acceptable.

Sears et al (2006) found young people defined physical violence through context. Acts of physical violence (such as hitting and shoving) were only viewed as abusive if there is a threat of physical harm, and the behaviour is repeated, otherwise it demonstrates love and care (i.e. that acting in such ways could indicate that one cares a lot about the relationship) or 'joking around'. These findings could be read as highlighting young people's ability to differentiate abuse from unhealthy relationship behaviours, which is

arguably empowering to young people enabling them to recognise abusive behaviours whilst allowing for a contingency of immaturity due to their age.

However, as Fredland et al.'s (2005) study suggests acceptance of some physically violent acts can lead to wider normalisation of violence and acceptance of violence as a means of conflict resolution, or a last resort. For example, one young person argued 'if you can't talk it out, you have to fight' (p. 106). There is a balance to be struck between: a) ensuring that IPV is not normalised; b) not enforcing middle class values of non-violent behaviour inappropriately on others<sup>19</sup>; and c) being careful not to over-regulate behaviour so that only *the best* behaviour is viewed as acceptable.

To conclude, physical violence is losing some of its prominence in constructions of IPV, with a focus on non-physical violence and/or specific acts of physical violence. Yet, physical violence remains of varying importance to constructions of IPV. Gender and sexuality are factors, which also influence constructions and identification of abuse, as I will now discuss, beginning with the significance of gender.

## **2.4 Heteronormativity: the significance of gender and sexuality**

### **2.4.1 Gender**

Research amongst young people finds IPV is imbued with assumptions about gender. Men are most likely to be viewed as perpetrators of IPV and women as victims (Gallopín & Leigh, 2009; Redhawk-Love & Richards 2013; Reeves & Opinas, 2012). This gendered construction is robust, reflected in studies amongst young people (Gallopín & Leigh, 2009; Reeves & Opinas, 2012) and adults (Akers, Yonas, Burke & Chang, 2011; Insetta et al., 2014).

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<sup>19</sup> Batchelor (2005) suggests that women from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to view physical violence as an acceptable self-protection response.

The significance of gender to men's victimization is interesting. George (1994) terms men's IPV victimisation as 'the Great Taboo'. Research finds young people are less likely to regard women's perpetration, and men's victimization, as abusive (Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013; Reeves & Opinas, 2012), and are more likely to see it as humorous (O'Leary et al., 2008) and trivial (Adams & Williams, 2014; Black and Wiesz, 2003).

In one study a young person explained: 'girls ain't stronger than men' (Redhawk-Love & Richard, 2013, pg. 3350), in another a young person said: 'he [male victim of IPV] probably deserves it' (Gallopín & Leigh, 2009, pg. 17). Perceptions of victims' help-seeking behaviours are also gendered, with women who seek help identified as strong and brave, and men as weak and failing to adhere to their gender role (Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013). Studies have found perceptions of types of relationship violence are gendered, with women seen as more likely to be perpetrators of psychological violence and men physical (Gallopín & Leigh, 2009).

*Gender Neutral Definitions.* These understandings of gender and IPV illustrate that gendered social norms amongst young people change how abusive relationships are viewed and suggest that gender-neutral definitions, or definitions applicable to both men and women could be useful in ensuring all victims of violence are recognised and supported. However, one needs to tread carefully here as outline by Radford (2003). Radford expresses concern about gender neutral definitions of IPV and how male victims are recognised. She argues that a gender-neutral definition ignores the gender power dynamics within IPV and that reconstructing male-victimhood through the guise of equal opportunities both, reduces the seriousness of the crime of domestic violence/IPV (for example by men equating nagging to verbal abuse) and marginalises female victims.

Renzetti (2015) highlights that the social construct of gender is a central aspect of our social lives, thus when researching phenomenon, such as IPV, we must consider the effect of gender on its occurrence and manifestations. Renzetti also highlights other factors, such as age and sexuality, intersect with gender and 'these intersections produced *qualitatively different* life experiences' (p. 132). However, Williamson (2014) argues more research into understandings of men's victimisation is needed.

#### **2.4.2 Sexuality and heteronormativity**

Much research and lay understandings construct IPV as a purely heteronormative phenomenon, that fails to consider IPV that occurs within same-sex relationships (Baker et al., 2012). This heteronormative framework (namely presenting a male perpetrator and a female victim) is apparent within wider discourse around IPV and will be explored throughout this thesis. In such constructions there is a strong link between assumptions and constructions of gender (e.g. women as harmless and non-violent) and that of sexuality (e.g. negation of IPV in lesbian relationships, Canon et al., 2015; Walter, 2011).

Heteronormative discourse is damaging. Research by Lombard (2014) with young people (11-12yrs) found rigid constructions of heterosexuality led to assumptions about gender which enabled justifications of IPV in relationships. Lombard found heterosexuality defined, and was assumed in, most relationship beliefs. When alternative relationships were discussed young people seemed to have few experiences or scripts to draw upon.

Lombard illustrates that young people's a) naturalisation of masculinity, b) lack of identification of men's power to command women's behaviour (e.g. telling their girlfriend what to wear) and, c) the expectation of women to behave in relation to these

commands rather than the man behaving in relation to the woman's commands, all enable abusive and controlling behaviours to be excused as acts of care, protection or worry. She contends that these assumptions are based in young people constructions of heteronormativity - a core characteristic of hegemonic masculine identities. Thus, whilst heteronormativity remains central to IPV, constructions of violent masculine identities will be also.

Heteronormativity is also damaging to same-sex relationships in that it can reduce identification of IPV in same-sex relationships. For example, a study by Walters (2011) interviewing four lesbian survivors of IPV found friends, family and the lesbian community, and/or the victims themselves were often in denial about the abuse. In many cases constructing IPV as dependent on a physical power difference. This meant IPV was only possible with a "male component" (p. 258) in the relationship (i.e. a male perpetrator).

Likewise, reliance of men in a relationship in constructions of IPV meant lesbian relationships were constructed as harmonious and "immune" (p. 258) to IPV. The interviews also found lesbian victims faced multiple barriers to help seeking, such as disregard from police authorities (e.g. failing to respond to calls or assuming violence as mutual) and denial from the lesbian community which heterosexual women are less likely to experience. These findings are supported by a similar study undertaken by Hassouneh and Glass (2008). These studies highlight the significance of sexuality of interpretations of IPV and raise concerns for recognition and help-seeking for IPV in same-sex relationships, especially as research shows the prevalence of IPV is higher amongst LGBT individuals (Dank, Lachman, Zweig & Yahner, 2014; Robinson et al., 2013).



## 2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined that various terminology is used by young people to describe violence in romantic relationships. In the field of research into IPV, young people and education there has been a shift to recognise and raise awareness about non-physical forms of violence such as emotional abuse and coercion. The variation of terminology is important to allow research to connect and reflect real-world experiences of violence in romantic relationships and numerous and varying constructions of violence and IPV.

However, the plethora of terminology has drawbacks. It can be confusing and cumbersome for academics reviewing literature and working within the field, and it is argued that there needs to be specificity in the definition of these terms. Research into IPV has begun to take a greater intersectional focus and the literature outlines how characteristics such as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender can affect an individual's experience of IPV. It is argued that these characteristics need to be considered when deciding how best to tackle and prevent IPV.

Focus on physical violence, debates about the relevance of physical and non-physical violence, rigid perceptions of victims and perpetrators, and heteronormativity are all factors at play in how we construct and identify IPV in research and the real world. As outlined in this chapter the significance of these concepts to identification and definitions of IPV are not fixed, but debated and challenged. That said, IPV is real, it is something that affects peoples' lives. As outlined in this chapter young people are the age group most at risk of experiencing IPV. It is important that we educate young people about IPV and healthy relationships.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I will use the terms "healthy relationships" and "unhealthy relationships" in the analysis. It is recognised that ideas of 'healthiness' and 'unhealthiness' are tied to ideas of virtue and good,

Arguably with the various debates happening within academia, and outside of it, young people will need clarity on what IPV is. Much like the ongoing debates in academia, young people will have their own debates and their own ways of making sense of these issues. It is important that educators and academics are aware of these and acknowledge young people's perspectives of this important issue. The next chapter will outline social influences on young people's perceptions of relationships and IPV, and the political context of IPV prevention education in schools.

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shame and disgust (e.g Lupton, 2013; 2014; 2015). However, this term has been chosen because it reflects current discourse around RSE where the aim is 'to help build healthy relationships' (Department for Education, 2018b) and the impact of harmful relationships on health and well-being (NSPCC, 2018; RSE Hub, 2018; Young Minds, 2018). These terms are also used within IPV and RSE research. Constructing relationships as healthy also places relationships and IPV within the context of public health which some IPV (e.g. Abramsky et al., 2011; Divine, Spencer, Eldridge, Norman & Feder, 2012). Although the research is not public health focused given that terms of relationship health are used prevalently within the field of IPV research, RSE curriculum and policy this is the term the research will adopt.

## **Chapter 3: Social influence, government policy and Relationship and Sex Education**

As highlighted in Chapter 1, lack of relationship experience, stages of development (i.e. beginning to form initial romantic relationships) and prevalence of IPV make young people's experiences of IPV an important topic of research. This chapter will build on Chapter 2 focusing on: a) social influences (such as family and peers) and the significance of peers; and b) the role of government and schools, specifically the education available to young people around healthy relationships and IPV.

### **3.1 Social Influence**

Many argue IPV is influenced, normalised and encouraged through wider society. For example, Social Norms Theory (Sherif, 1936) argues that explicit – or implicit – rules about beliefs, values and behaviours deemed acceptable – or unacceptable – by a group have an influence on behaviour (Witte & Mazheruddin, 2012). This suggests that acceptance and normalisation of IPV within young people's family, peer and cultural contexts will influence young people's ability to identify IPV as such. It would also influence their likelihood to perpetrate, and/or experience, abuse - and research supports this. A review by Jewkes (2002) in *The Lancet* identified the following as key to primary prevention measures for IPV, a) challenging norms of women's inequality in relationships and wider society, and b) challenging acceptance of violence towards women. Other research finds, multiple external factors such as experience with: school violence, community violence, neglect, as well as gender and age are found to be significant predictors of young people's acceptance of violence (Black et al. 2015). Moreover, acceptance of violence is significantly related to young people's perpetration of IPV (O'Keefe, 1997).

These studies support ideas that family and peers play a key role in conveying, endorsing and ratifying norms and values to young people, affecting how they understand IPV. Yet, Adelman and Kil (2007) argue that third parties, such as family and peers, are often overlooked in IPV research and so need to be acknowledged for the key role they play in how IPV is inflicted, played out and resolved.

Following this argument, this section will discuss the significance of family and peers in perceptions of IPV. However, it should be noted not all conflict is bad. In several instances, conflict in relationships amongst young people, and adults, is normal and constructive allowing social norms to be challenged or questioned. Similarly, the influence of third parties can be both positive and negative (Adelman & Kil, 2007). I will begin with the importance of family.

### **3.2 Family**

Parents, carers and families play a key role in IPV amongst adolescents (Murray, King & Crowe, 2016<sup>21</sup>). It is estimated that 1 in 7 children and young people witness IPV in their parents' or carers relationships (Radford, Corral, Bradley, Fisher, Bassett, Howat & Collishaw, 2011). Prior exposure to IPV in the parental relationship can normalise violence, meaning that it is more likely to be accepted by teenagers in their own relationships (Murray, King & Crowe, 2016). Such exposure to violence can result in IPV being perpetuated in families over generations, known as Intergenerational Partner Violence. The finding that children and young people's exposure to parental IPV can increase the chances of IPV in their own romantic relationships is supported by numerous studies (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Fredland et al., 2015; Gonzalez-Mendez, Yanes & Ramirez-Santana, 2015; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003; Paat & Markham, 2016; Sims, Dodd & Tejada, 2008).

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<sup>21</sup> Defined by the authors as 13-19 years old.

However, Simon et al. (1997) outline how the relationship between parental and young people's IPV is of greater complexity than some findings might suggest. They argue that children and adolescents are not as passive as might be implied and, based on Social Learning Theories (Bandura, 1973, 1977), Simon et al. (1997) assert that adolescents do not merely imitate the behaviours of others – such as their parents – but plan their actions, enacting those which incur positive outcomes (such as attention, power and self-esteem).

In support of Social Learning Theory, a study by Kahn and Rogers (2015) found personal experiences of violence can normalise such violence in subsequent situations. Moreover, Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) found attitudes and perceived social norms around IPV are mediated by the effects of male adolescents' exposure to parental IPV. Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) also found gender differences, with parental IPV not affecting female rates of IPV perpetration. This gendered affect has been found in other studies (Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009; O'Keefe, 1997; Sims et al., 2008).

Additional mediators have been found between exposure to parental violence and perpetration of IPV in adolescence such as: empathy (McCloskey & Lichter, 2003), strong relationships with a parent or caring adult (Holt, Buckley & Wheelan, 2008; Pinna, 2015; Simon et al., 1997), depression (McCloskey & Lichter, 2003), and adolescent's partner preference<sup>22</sup> (Gonzalez-Mendez, Yanes & Ramirez-Santana, 2015). Hence, despite their being no clear consensus on the mechanism for the

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<sup>22</sup> To explain, it was found witnesses who had preferences for 'loving' partners (romantic and affectionate) were less likely to experience or perpetrate IPV and those with preferences for 'risky' partners (partners who love risk, like to break the rules, rebellious, jealous, and controlling) were more likely to experience IPV.

transmission of intergenerational violence (e.g., social learning [Bandura, 1973, 1977]; legitimisation of IPV; or a wider pattern of anti-social behaviour amongst families [Simon et al., 1997]), the evidence supports a link between exposure to violence in childhood and subsequent IPV perpetration. Similarly, the significance of gender is unclear as gender differences are not found in all research (Markowitz, 2001; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003; Paat & Markham, 2016). These studies suggest not all young people exposed to parental violence will perpetrate IPV in their own relationships. Rather, the indications are, that it is only those who hold attitudes which accept or normalise such behaviours who are more likely to act in abusive or violent ways.

### **3.2.1 Limits of family influence**

Research comparing the influence of family compared to peers on young people's perpetration of IPV suggests that peers have a greater influence over adolescent's behaviour than parents. For example, Gage (2015) found perceived peer tolerance of IPV was related to numerous factors amongst Haitian adolescents. The study found that perceived peer IPV tolerance was strongly correlated with IPV perpetration. Similarly, perceived peer tolerance mediated the effect of witnessing parental IPV on adolescent perpetration. For females, perceived peer tolerance was the only factor correlated with perpetration of psychological violence.

This study, like others (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Reed et al., 2011), highlights the importance of peer influence compared to family influence on IPV perpetration and victimisation. Yet few parents seem concerned about the influence of peers on IPV (Akers et al., 2011; Insetta et al., 2014). It could be the case that this pattern of selecting peers with similar IPV acceptance is an outcome of parental or familial norms towards IPV (Williamson & Silverman, 2001) or specific to gender (Reed et al., 2011). However, regardless, the larger influence of peers on adolescents' IPV acceptance,

normalization, perpetration and victimization – over that of parents – presents the influence of peers as a key aspect to consider in the prevention of IPV.

### **3.3 Peers**

Peers play an important role in the lives of young people, establishing what are appropriate and inappropriate relationship behaviours (Adams & Williams, 2014; Mulford & Giordano, 2008). For example, Williamson and Silverman (2001) suggest that peers have a direct influence on perpetration of IPV amongst heterosexual young men. They found that young male university students who associated with peers who endorsed IPV verbally and/or behaviourally were more likely to be perpetrators of IPV.

Peer influence was found to mediate additional risk factors such as values (communal orientation i.e. how much they were concerned with meeting the needs and expectations of others, and the needs and expectations others placed on them). Even those with high risk values, perpetration of IPV was less likely if the peer group did not endorse IPV. Likewise, a longitudinal study by Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found that young people (12-17 years old, median age 13) with a friend in an abusive relationship at Time Point 1 were, themselves, significantly more likely to be in an abusive relationship six-months later at Time Point 2. Much the same, Witte and Mulla (2013) found a link between IPV perpetration and perceived peer norms, finding that student perpetrators of IPV were significantly more likely to overestimate the number of peers they thought were also perpetrators, suggesting that perpetration of IPV is linked to peer perceptions of such violence.

Although, such correlations do not show causality, these findings support the Social Norms Theory that peer acceptance of IPV has an important effect on young people's acceptance and normalisation of IPV in their own, and others', relationships. Baker et al. (2012) reiterate this point, arguing that sense-making of IPV and relationships is

influenced by ideological and social frameworks. In some cases, young people are aware of the influence peers have in encouraging and normalising IPV (Lavoie, Robitaille & Herbert, 2000). This raises the question of how likely is it that IPV-related behaviours will be normalised. Given the influence of peers on young people's social norms and acceptance of IPV, it is perhaps, not surprising that many young people would confide in their friends about potentially problematic relationship behaviours.

### **3.3.1 Peer help-seeking and tolerance of IPV**

Although in some cases young people prefer not to seek help from their peers – usually among Black and Latino groups –due to perceived lack of expertise (Black & Weisz, 2003), or to avoid ridicule (O'Campo et al., 2007; Sears et al., 2006), victim blaming or judgement (Sears et al., 2006), many young people choose to confide in their peers. In fact, young people, both who have and have not<sup>23</sup> experienced IPV, are more likely to seek support from their friends than from parents or formal support agencies (Ashely & Foshee, 2005; Barter 2014; Barter et al., 2009; Weisz et al., 2007; O'Campo, Shelley & Jaycox, 2007; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders & Black, 2007).

Peers are perceived as more likely to understand, maintain confidence, to not overreact and not to judge them or take the situation into their own hands as other forms of support may (O'Campo, 2007). Statistically, in relation to different types of violence, Jackson, Cram and Seymour (2000) found 68% of males and 89% of females spoke to their friends about emotional violence, 41% female and 8% male about physical violence and 53% female and 43% male about sexual violence and coercion. Considerably high

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<sup>23</sup> For those who have not experienced IPV help-seeking, preferences are gathered from hypothetical discussions.



percentage when the study found that many young people told no one about the violence they had experienced<sup>24</sup>.

Despite many young people preferring to confide in their friends<sup>25</sup>, young people can demonstrate a high tolerance and normalisation of IPV (Lacasse & Mendelson, 2007). This suggests that there may be a difference in young people's help-seeking behaviours based on different cultural values however there are some characteristics of the sample which may instead determine these differences, e.g. age difference between samples, previous behavioural problems, and strength of relationship with parents. Although an extreme example, in a focus group study by Silverman et al. (2006) with abusive American males aged 13-20, participants showed little empathy for victims of IPV stating that girls who had been raped should 'get over it' or 'move on'. They also expressed no regret for the trauma their actions caused. For example, one participant said, "being a rapist is almost as traumatic as being someone who is the rape victim" (Silverman et al., 2006, p. 723).

Research has found that peers can be involved in incidents of IPV. For example, Lavoie, Robitaille and Herbert (2000) found violence young people (aged 14-19, representing various contexts of violence<sup>26</sup>) experienced in relationships included being avoided or ignored by one's partner or peers, spreading rumors, turning friends against them,

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<sup>24</sup> The study found 29% of males reported speaking to no one about emotional violence, 55% of females and 45% of males about physical violence and 46% of males and 46% females about sexual violence and coercion.

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that Black and Weisz (2003) found African American girls who experienced more incidents of violence in the past 6 months were more willing to turn to friends *and* their parents for help, more likely to seek help from adults (i.e. family members, school counselors) than peers. However, this differs to data on European American youth who are less likely to seek help from their parents.

<sup>26</sup> Participants were recruited from a drop-in centre and some had experienced drug-addiction, been involved in prostitution or been in gangs.

disclosing personal information to peers and/or threatening to enact these behaviours. As such, young people were fearful of such negative social consequences of leaving abusive relationships. Peers can also encourage those experiencing IPV to stay in an abusive relationship to preserve friendship groups (Leadbeater, Banister, Ellis & Yeung, 2008).

Peers can also contribute to IPV through jealousy. Adams and Williams (2014) found that jealousy was an important and normalised part of young people's relationships and that it could be an antecedent to IPV, in many cases leading to aggression and then violence within the relationship. They found that peers could play a role in creating a 'culture of jealousy' in which definitions of infidelity were loose (e.g. talking to someone from the opposite sex). Peers could spread rumours of infidelity and physical violence was constructed as an escalation of anger rather than an effort to maintain control and dominance over one's partner.

O'Keefe (1997) found that jealousy was the third most common reason given for violence enacted by young men and women (O'Keefe, 1997). Jealousy was used by some young people to blame victims for violence: that is, for acting in ways which might induce violence from their partner (Lavoie, Robitaille & Herbert, 2000). Further, Adams and Williams (2014) found peers also contributed to IPV, enabling the abuser through surveillance – made even easier through technology such as mobile phones.

Similar findings are reflected by Barter (2014) who found that perpetrators of sexual or domestic abuse against young women used peer networks to enhance their 'continual surveillance' (p. 67) and control of the victim. Some perpetrators manipulated the victim's friends to report where she was and who she was with (see also Baker & Carreno, 2016; Havard, 2017; Lavoie, Robitaille & Hebert, 2000).

These studies illustrate how peers and peer culture can both contribute to, and increase tolerance of IPV. On the surface, this paints a dire picture, suggesting that young people endorse, or fail to recognize IPV. However, these are complex situations and the solutions are also not easy. To explain, in Lombard's (2014) study, one of the vignettes depicted a situation in which a boyfriend tells his girlfriend not to wear a top, presents young people with the dilemma: 'What should she do?' The instant reaction from many is for the protagonist to do what she wants and 'wear the top'.

However, Lombard found that some young people did not advise this despite recognising the girlfriend's autonomy to wear what *she* wants. Rather, responses illustrated a dilemma of navigating difficult issues such as: 'Are the boyfriend's intentions positive?', 'Is the girlfriend dressing appropriately? Is the top too revealing?', 'What is an appropriate compromise?'. These questions illustrate how judging acceptable and unacceptable behaviours involve many perspectives and ways of thinking for young people, and even adults.

Kelly and Radford (1990) argue that such dilemmas are, in part, due to a wider culture of normalization and minimisation of violence against women which requires people (I would argue regardless of gender) to negotiate conflicts and tensions between what *feels* wrong – such as being coerced – and what is known to be *illegal* – such as physical violence. To explain, Kelly and Radford (1990) found that many women's descriptions of rape, sexual harassment and IPV was 'nothing really happened'. At first glance, this description or caveat to such events seems to minimise the seriousness or damage inflicted by the event, but the women's descriptions went on to highlight a disparity and tension between women's experiential knowledge of violence (e.g. acts of violence where women felt something *had* happened) and legal definitions of such, which illegitimise this experience and dictate that *nothing really* happened.

That is, although these women felt they had experienced sexual harassment, assault and IPV, they would state that 'nothing really happened' as the violence they experienced was normalised in the eyes of the law and/or they felt their account would not fit with common definitions and narratives of such crimes. Thus, despite women experiencing such events as abusive or violent, it can take adults a long time to name violence and abuse as such due to their experiences not fitting dominant accounts or characterizations of sexual harassment, assault, IPV in law.

Experiences of IPV may be denied or trivialized within dominant cultures presenting a risk of rejection when voicing their distress. Likewise, it seems reasonable to assume that violent behaviours a young person initially sees as unacceptable are often normalised by peers and their concerns silenced through fear of ridicule and/or rejection (McGeeney & Hanson, 2018; Noonan & Charles, 2009; Sylaska & Walters, 2014) - particularly since young people often have a strong desire to fit in (Fredland, 2005). I will now discuss findings on young people's advice giving.

### **3.3.2 Peers' inadequate advice**

A questionnaire study of 373 young people aged 16-18 in New Zealand (Jackson, Cram and Seymour, 2000) suggests peer advice on IPV can be unhelpful and prolong abuse. They found that victims who sought advice from peers were less likely to leave abusive relationships compared to those who sought other forms of support.

The authors explained that this could be due to students only seeking advice from friends when relationships are not so problematic. However, it could be due to cultural acceptance of, or young people's lack of identification of, abusive behaviours. In support of the latter explanation, studies with adult populations have also found that peer-advice can be unhelpful, with friends encouraging victims to stay in relationships when they otherwise might have left (Mahlstedt & Keeny, 1993), or seeing IPV as a private matter

in which they should not intervene (Bui, 2003). These findings were reflected in O'Campo et al.'s (2007) study with adolescents in which participants stated that peer assistance was limited to: emotional support, advising the victim to leave, and being their confidante.

Such a role could present a stressful situation for young people as peers. The situation could be improved by peers encouraging victims to seek advice and support from professionals such as teachers, youth workers or charities. However, research by Weisz et al (2007) found young people were more likely to give supportive nurturing advice to peers who disclosed when the issues were minor. When more serious relationship issues were disclosed peers were most likely to give an avoidant response. Similarly, O'Campo et al. (2007) found young people felt unable to give practical advice on how to seek support or to leave their abuser, many believing that only the victim could provide solutions (see also, Noonan & Charles, 2009). This highlights a need for young people's greater education on IPV which I will discuss in the next section.

Young people in same-sex relationships are also often discouraged from leaving abusive relationships. Studies have found that lesbians are particularly unlikely to report IPV due to pressure from the lesbian community to maintain the ideal of female-female relationships as harmonious and non-violent (Walters, 2011; Ristock, 2002; Elliott, 1996). Further Hassouneh and Glass (2008) found that idealised and gendered assumptions about lesbian relationships inhibited identification of abuse by survivors, peers, and professionals, with some peers and professional services viewing same-sex IPV as less problematic and less abusive than in heterosexual relationships (see also Brown, 2008; Kay & Jefferies, 2010; Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). Findings that even service providers can misadvise victims, demonstrates how problematic advice-giving can be for professionals, let alone children and young people.

In summary, research supports the influence of social norms amongst family and friends on young people's IPV perpetration and victimisation. Although family are important, the evidence suggests that peers are more influential on young people's. Many young people prefer to seek advice from their peers who, although often a useful confidante, can normalise IPV - and some do not tell anyone. This can prevent victims identifying IPV, and seeking help from professionals and formal organisations with greater experience and expertise.

In light of this research demonstrating young people's lack of understanding of IPV, a logical solution would be for young people to encourage their peers to seek help from an adult or professional service. McCoy, Jones, and Quigg (2011) found that young people are often unaware of IPV services expressing a lack of knowledge about *where* to go or, if aware, were put-off seeking help from a stranger and, instead, preferring to seek help from someone with whom they were more familiar. These findings highlight the important role of adults in schools and other organisations serving and working with children. The next section will focus on the role of government and schools in helping young people affected by IPV.

### **3.4 Government and Schools**

As highlighted in the historical literature review in Chapter 1, IPV is now a public health issue. Although parents and family have a role in tackling IPV, as outlined above, research shows adults and parents often feel awkward and ill-informed about these topics, and avoid discussing them with young people (Akers, Yonas, Burke & Chang, 2011; Insetta et al., 2014). Yet, many parents are keen for their children to learn about healthy relationships (Akers et al., 2011). The UK Government and schools play a key role protecting young people from IPV through legislation and policy, awareness raising campaigns and education – particularly as the government has a large influence over schools and their curricula and responsibilities.

### 3.4.1 Government

The UK government has a key role in the prevention of, and protection from, IPV amongst children and young people. The government's role is constantly evolving as documented in the Historical Literature Review in Chapter 1. It is worth listing the recent changes that the UK government has made around IPV prevention. This context is important when considering the role of schools in IPV prevention, discussed in the following section.

A role of UK government is to protect vulnerable people. For around 300 years the UK government, in varying ways (i.e., policies, laws and committees), has tried to deal with IPV (as summarised in the Historical Review). For much of this time the focus of government and legal intervention has been to protect vulnerable people - particularly children - from domestic violence\*. Contemporaneously, Prime Minister David Cameron has reiterated that social responsibility remains a core British value (Cameron, 2014).

In the last 15 years, victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse\* have benefited from governmental changes, with increasing inclusion of male, lesbian and gay IPV victims as we move closer to present day. In 2003 and 2004 the UK government began collecting data on the scale of domestic violence and abuse and use of services via an Inter-ministerial Group on Domestic Violence. In 2004, the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims act received Royal Assent in November 2004 [not approval date], and was introduced to increase the protection, support and rights of victims and witnesses (Save the Children, 2006).

In 2005, the Home Office published Domestic Violence: A National Report, which documented official plans for dealing with Violence Against Women\* including financial commitments to support agencies in their 2010 Ending Violence Against Women and

Girls Strategy: the government's first commitment to dealing with IPV through policy (Isaac, 2014). This was attempted through economic provision to IPV services, partnership working, improving justice outcomes and improving risk reductions (Home Office, 2011). A specific example is Clare's Law.

In 2011, campaigns for recognition of men's victimhood resulted in a men's victim of domestic and sexual violence fund, awarding individual charities up to £10,000 (Home Office, 2013b). In 2012, £225,000 was pledged by UK Government to Male victims of domestic and sexual violence and a further £500,000 in 2014 (Home Office, 2012a; Ministry of Justice, 2014). Although initially a small amount of money allocating this separate fund marked governmental recognition of male victims of IPV who until this point had been seen to be neglected.

Today, IPV remains a high public concern. Following a report commissioned by the NSPCC (Barter et al., 2009) the government began to acknowledge young people's victimization. This commenced with the 'This is Abuse' Home Office campaign in February 2011 to raise awareness of IPV among young people aged 13-18 years and later in 2016 the 'Disrespect Nobody' campaign. In 2013, the UK government implemented a new working definition of **Domestic Violence and Abuse**, the first to include relationship violence amongst 16 and 17 year olds<sup>27</sup> (Home Office, 2013a). Despite not being legislative, this change highlights governmental acknowledgement that **Domestic Violence and Abuse** happens *outside* of the home, in young people's relationships and the need for young people experiencing relationship violence to be supported by IPV services<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> This new working definition also included *psychological violence* not before included.

<sup>28</sup> Previous to this change young people experiencing relationship violence were referred to Social Services and Child Protection.



The government have been working to prevent IPV and increase recognition of IPV in different types relationships (i.e. young people's, where men are victims). Yet there remain some criticisms. First, IPV prevention campaigns can be subject to accusations of sexism and heteronormativity through failure to reflect male victims and abuse in same-sex relationships. Second, some organisations and individuals make a case for people younger than 16 years old to be included in the government's working definition of **Domestic Violence and Abuse** (Home Office, 2012b).

Finally, although a positive change, the new working definition of **Domestic Violence and Abuse\***, is not a law. On the other hand, the absence of a change in law is likely due to there being no specific criminal offense for IPV or **domestic violence\***. To expand on this briefly, **domestic violence** incorporates a range of criminal acts such as common assault, grievous bodily harm, rape, murder, infanticide and stalking. As highlighted by Westmarland (2015), in 2003 the government did consider making **domestic violence** a criminal offense, but decided against taking this step arguing that the status quo was key to ensuring that domestic violence is seen as seriously as other types of violence. However, Westmarland (2015) highlights that the introduction of '**coercive and controlling**' behaviour as a criminal offence – which the Government implemented in December 2015 (Home Office, 2014; 2015) - will aid prosecution in IPV cases.

The change in definitions of IPV to include young people aged 16-17 years and the criminalisation of **coercive control** are all positive steps towards the prevention of IPV. However, the guidance is unclear as to who (e.g. social services, charities, schools) is responsible for looking after young people affected by IPV. This means due to cuts in funding, understaffing and high demand that in many cases only those young people most in need are given support (Personal Communications, Professor Marianne Hester, 2015). Further, it is these cuts that, more generally, are placing service providers

(charities and councils) under major strain. To give a brief idea of the scope of these cuts in 2012 domestic violence services, reliant on government funding, lost £2.4 million in funding following the economic downturn of 2009 (see Walby & Towers, 2012) – an average of 70% for some councils and 52% for major Independent Domestic Violence Advisors in 2011 (Towers & Walby, 2012).

To conclude, IPV awareness campaigns and definitional changes highlight some of the efforts the government is making to address IPV and other types of exploitation amongst young people. However, there is a lack of long-term planning and funding for the provision of some of these new initiatives. Ellis and Thiara (2014) argue that the government is not doing the most it can to fulfil their role in treating and preventing IPV. For example, unlike the Scottish government, the UK does not have a strategy for reducing IPV. This means the work of practitioners is leading the way for effective prevention strategies in other parts of the UK. The role of the government also links with that of schools who also play a major and invaluable role in this, as the next section will discuss.

### **3.5 Schools**

Prevention of IPV amongst young people is the dominant approach to dealing with IPV, with education and schools at the fore. Khambalia, Dickinson, Hardy, Gill and Baur (2011) outline that schools are well placed to provide anti-IPV education because interventions can access many children and young people over short periods of time. Moreover, there is scope for such programmes to be integrated into the curriculum, so making them sustainable. In March 2016, the Government pledged £80 million to tackle violence against women and girls (made available in 2017) to place greater onus on early prevention rather than crisis responses (Children's Commission, 2016).

Young people are educated about IPV in schools as part of Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) which is part of Personal, Social, Health and Economic education curriculum<sup>29</sup> (PSHE). It is argued by many that this education is of the utmost importance (Johnson et al., 2015; Formby, 2012; Pound, Langford & Campbell, 2016; Strange, Oakley & Forrest et al., 2003). The primary aims being to increase children and young people's awareness and knowledge around IPV and equip them with the skills to change or prevent abusive behaviour. Such education also aims to encourage disclosures from, and provide help and support for, young people affected by IPV (Tutty, 2014). This section will outline the role of schools in tackling IPV amongst young people, beginning with an outline for the need for young people specifically to be educated and the challenges of this. The chapter will then go on to explore types of education including the bullying curriculum as avenue for intervention and lastly the importance of messages and languages. From herein the term RSE will be used to refer to IPV prevention education in schools.

Adolescence is a key time for such educational input. It has been shown in a longitudinal study that incidence of IPV increase in adolescence (13 – 17 years), peak in young adulthood (18-25), and decline in the late 20s (i.e. 26 and above Johnson, Manning, Giordano & Longmore, 2015). Johnson et al. (2015) suggest this decline is due to relationship partners changing or relationship quality increasing or getting 'healthier'. These findings suggest that IPV may occur in several adolescent relationships due to lack of: education, understanding, knowledge of how to act in healthy ways and to resolve conflict. Thus, providing appropriate RSE to young people could reduce, or prevent, this increase of IPV in adolescence.

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<sup>29</sup> Also known as Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship and Economic Education (PSHCE)

### 3.5.1 Young people's desire for RSE

In addition to young people's need for RSE, young people also have a desire for it. Young people report wanting more information about the warning signs of IPV, help developing skills for dealing with relationship conflicts, recognising signs of IPV and help developing healthy relationships (Sears, Whelan, & Saint-Pierre, 2006). Young people placed importance on learning about RSE topics such as IPV, healthy relationships, consent and sexual identity, saying that schools were the best places for these topics to be taught (Girl Guiding Report, 2015 [aged 7- 21]; McCoy, Jones & Quigg, 2011 [aged 16-17]). Even the government recognises the 'vital role' schools play in educating and safeguarding children and young people. The 'A call to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Action plan' (HM Government, 2014) committed to 'continue to identify ways to engage with schools and support the education of young people in healthy relationships and raise awareness around consent' (p. 11). Further, a Government White paper (Importance of Teaching, 2010) states:

'children need high quality sex and relationships education so they can make wise and informed choices... we will work with teachers, parents, faith groups and campaign groups ... to make sure sex and relationship education encompasses an understanding of the ways in which humans love each other and stresses the importance of respecting individual autonomy (p. 46).'

Despite, the need for RSE, there are a number of challenges to be faced. The RSE curriculum in England (Scotland and Wales have different curriculums) has contended with: a lack of government support for RSE, timely delivery and too narrow curriculum – which I will now explore.

### 3.5.2 Government and parliamentary support for RSE

In 2014, the time of starting this research, local authority maintained schools (i.e. not independent schools) were *obliged* to teach the RSE curriculum, however the biological aspects, i.e. reproduction and puberty, were the only compulsory elements (House of Commons, 2016). Additional topics such as healthy and sexual relationships, consent,

sexuality etc., were not a compulsory part of the curriculum. Yet, research suggest young people want to learn about these things (Girl Guiding, 2015). Many reseachers argue that RSE – beyond biological education – is essential to ensuring young people have safe, healthy and fulfilling lives and relationships. As such since 2008 there have been discussions and lobbying of the Government and parliament for PSHE – which includes RSE – to be made compulsory.

In brief, this began with the review of PSHE in 2008, followed by the *Children Schools and Families Act* in 2008 and 2010, and the National Curriculum review in 2013, for none of which PSHE was mandated to the school curriculum. This issue was made more pressing following the OFSTED report in 2013 outlining that RSE in many schools ‘required improvement’. Yet despite further trying through: an amendment to the *Children and Families Bill* (2013); private bills by Caroline Lucas’ MP, and later Diana Johnson; Shadow Secretary support in 2015 (Lucy Powell); and an enquiry into PSHE and recommendation for PSHE to be made a statutory component of the curriculum by the Department for Education committee (2014), all unsuccessful.

In February 2016, the (then) Education Secretary Nicky Morgan – although previously strongly supporting the RSE lobbyists – announced that, again, RSE would not be made compulsory (House of Commons, 2016). With recurring decisions, not to make PSHE – and thus RSE – a compulsory part of the curriculum the Government’s commitment to this important issue was been questioned on numerous occasions. For example, the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) highlighted that lack of commitment from the Department of Education leaves RSE and the prevention of IPV at the will and motivation of individual schools in England (EVAW, 2013).

In March 2017 Justine Greening, then Education Secretary, successfully made RSE compulsory, as provided in Section 34 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. This

act outlines that relationship education to primary *and* secondary school children is compulsory for all schools. This education should include: 'learning about safety in forming and maintaining relationships, the characteristics of healthy relationships, and how relationship may affect physical and mental health and well-being' and finally that the education is suitable to the student's age and religious background (Children and Social Work Act 2017, p. 24).

In December 2017, the government opened a three-month consultation with parents to collect views on what the new RSE curriculum should cover and consulted with charities such as the PSHE Association, NSPCC, EAW, and Barnardo's. Compulsory RSE education was planned to be rolled out next September (2019). However, due to delays in setting the curriculum this has now been delayed to September 2020. In addition to these challenges, it is also important to outline some other relevant, documented short comings of RSE curriculum around healthy relationships and IPV, namely: (i) timely deliver, (ii) narrow scope, and (iii) lack of consideration of Lad Culture.

### **3.5.3 Timely delivery**

Alongside challenges of mandating RSE another issue is *when* to deliver RSE. The Fixers report (2016) found young people, from the age of 12, felt under 'massive pressure' to behave in sexual ways and have sex, and many believed that young people needed RSE education from a young age (i.e. year 8, aged 12-13 at the latest) without this young people would learn about sex from pornography. Studies suggest that receiving RSE prior to young people's engaging in sexual intercourse was beneficial for lesbian students decreasing reports of pregnancy, increased birth control use in bisexual women (Bodnar & Tornello, 2018) and decreased the likelihood of young women having intercourse before the age of 15 (Mueller, Gavin & Kulkarni, 2008).

Many academics argue that a lack of sufficient RSE has resulted in many young people looking to pornography to learn about sex and relationships (e.g. Barter, 2017). This can have negative effects such as exposing young people to extreme and violent sex which can normalise violent and objectifying sexual behaviours, and lead to beliefs that such material reflects real-life or an ideal (Banyard, 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 2 IPV affects people of all ages, including children. Two-thirds of refuge residents are children (Refuge, 2016). Similarly, a report by the NSPCC suggests 12% of children under 11 and 17.5% aged 11-17 have been exposed to IPV amongst their parents, and 3.5% and 4.1%, respectively, reported having witnessed severe violence, i.e. a parent being kicked, choked or beaten up (Radford et al., 2011). Unsurprisingly, children's exposure to parental IPV can have several negative outcomes, of relevance here are negative educational (Baldry, 2003; Fantuzzo, & Mohr, 1999; James, 1994; Guy, Feinstein & Griffiths, 2014), social outcomes (Children's Commission, 2016) and behavioural issues such as withdrawal and bullying (Baldry, 2003).

These findings present a strong case for RSE to be given to children as young as possible for them to seek support and to re-affirm that IPV is wrong and learn non-violent conflict resolution (UNICEF, 2006). Child abuse has also been put forward in substantiating the case for RSE in schools at a young age. Children who are abused are three times more likely to have witnessed parental IPV (Radford, et al., 2011). Similarly, prevention of child exploitation for young people secondary school age has also been used to highlight a need for age-appropriate RSE. Lisa Nandy MP outlined that young people's inadequate understanding of consent and healthy relationships means young women are being exploited and groomed by men they think are taking care of them (House of Commons, 2016) a case put forward by numerous others

(House of Commons, 2015). The absence of such topics in RSE feeds into another short fall of the current RSE curriculum: it's narrow scope.

#### **3.5.4 RSE curriculum as too narrow**

In 2013 an OFSTED report into RSE entitled *Not Yet Good Enough* outlined that over a third of schools required improvement to their RSE provision (OFSTED, 2013). A primary limitation, was the curriculum placed too great emphasis on biological aspects of reproduction and too little on other essential aspect such as, healthy relationships, dealing with emotions, sexuality, safety online and the influence of pornography on students.

Research suggests that young people's want RSE that goes beyond biological factors of reproduction highlighted in many studies (Fixers, 2016; Girl Guiding, 2013, 2015; Sex Education Forum, 2008). The trouble with... *Sex in Schools Report* by the Fixers (2016; a youth charity) highlighted that young people faced several issues such as sexting<sup>30</sup>, lad culture<sup>31</sup> and schools not taking incidents of sexual harassment seriously. The findings of this report highlight two key areas RSE – as well as schools and society – need to tackle: 1) young people's use of technology to access sexually explicit material, 2) cultures that accept sexually abusive or exploitative behaviour. A press release by the Department for Education in July 2018 outlined that issues such as these (i.e. consent and keeping safe online and LGBT issues) will be covered in the new RSE guidance (Department for Education, 2018a).

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<sup>30</sup> Sexting is when mobile phone or social media are used to send sexual images to one another, however these images are shared amongst peer groups and even schools without the sender consent, resulting in humiliation, ridicule and bullying.

<sup>31</sup> **Lad Culture** is defined by the National Union of Students (2012, p. 28) as 'a group or 'pack' mentality residing in activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption, and 'banter' (i.e. joking around) which was often sexist, misogynist and homophobic'.



*Sexting*. In a report prepared for the NSPCC sexting is defined as: “not [...] a single activity but rather to a range of activities which may be motivated by sexual pleasure but are often coercive, linked to harassment, bullying and even violence. There is no easy line to be drawn between sexting and bullying” (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone & Harvey, 2012 p. 7). The Fixers report (2016) found the prevalence of sex and sexualisation amongst young people meant many were sexting. Sexting was characterised as problematic only when young people felt: pressured, forced to sext someone too early in the relationship, or when they were ‘too young’.

Acceptance of sexting in other circumstances other than these may seem a problematic stance, however young people asserted that social norms of sexualised behaviour amongst young people was something adults and schools needed to face up to, to guide young people through this new and potentially exploitative landscape. To illustrate this point, a survey by Ditch the Label (2012; an international anti-bullying charity) found 30% of 15 year olds had sexted someone on at least one occasion. Others argue that RSE needs to adapt, rather than vilifying and shaming those who sext RSE should help young people to cope with these new sexual pressures - fuelled and exacerbated by new technologies and social media - by educating them on effective decision-making and ways of acting towards, and with, their peers (Fixers, 2016). These findings support others who argue that RSE should be sex positive (Allen & Carmody, 2012; Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan, 2014; Hirst, 2012; McGeeney & Kehily, 2016; Tolman, 2002).

Although, education around sexting and young people’s use of technology are important there are limits to their impact as illustrated by one participant in the Fixers report who said:

“I think sexting is about peer pressure. Nobody wants to send a photo of themselves. They feel they should. They’re seeking love, not thinking about how

unprotected you are when you send sexting pictures. They're trying to fit in.” (p. 9)

This participant alludes to the relationship between sexting and a broader issue also highlighted by Henry and Powell (2015). Henry and Powell contend that sexting – and the more harmful extension of revenge pornography<sup>32</sup> – are often framed as an issue arising from a naïve victim, in which case education is a reasonable solution. However, they make a strong case that sexting and more importantly the exploitation of such images is due to gender-based violence. A case illustrated by the fact that *adult* women are also negatively impacted by sexting and revenge pornography (McGlynn & Rackley, 2015). Academics position revenge pornography on the continuum of violence against women and girls (McGlynn, Rackley & Houghton, 2017; Salter & Crofts, 2015) which links into the second wider issue facing RSE: Lad culture.

### 3.5.5 Lad culture

Lad culture is a recurrent issue around violence against women and girls, and it is argued that lad culture and the sexual objectification of women is an antecedent of sexual violence including IPV (Coy & Hovarth, 2011; Hovarth, Hegarty, Tyler & Mansfield, 2012). Lad culture has been recognised as a significant concern by many university students, so much so that in 2012 the National Union of Students conducted research into women students' experiences of lad culture in higher education (NUS, 2012). The NUS research reported many female students had experienced sexual harassment and molestation while at university in their friendship group, and felt unable to challenge it and unsure where to seek help (NUS, 2012, p. 29)<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> The UK Government defines Revenge Porn as: ‘the sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person, without their consent and with the purpose of causing embarrassment or distress.’ Ministry of Justice, 2015

<sup>33</sup> Notably, the research outlined that men did not engage in ‘laddish’ behaviour all the time, likewise some men did not act this way at all. However, for some participants lad culture seemed to dominate aspects of university life.

Universities are different to secondary schools and sixth forms in many ways, thus it is interesting that – as well as academics, practitioners and university students – adolescents themselves feel affected by this issue as found by the Fixers report. The report found young people believed the prevalence of Lad Culture normalises the sexualisation of young people and endorses violence and sexual harassment against women. Further such sexual harassment and objectification of women in schools was often trivialised and dismissed as ‘banter’ by peers. Young people expressed concern about school’s lack of commitment to these issues. Participants reported that teachers and staff would often excuse threats, or incidents, of sexual harassment as due to the young age of students, presenting a stark picture.

Counter to this culture of seeming collusion, or acceptance of, sexual harassment young people stated a preference for a greater openness to discussing these issues in safe spaces. In the hope of acquiring the skills and empathy to understand pressures they, and their peers, face to behave sexually and *how* to talk about it. For RSE more specifically, young people outlined that the simplicity of RSE encouraged lad culture, ‘banter behaviour’ and men’s entitlement to women’s bodies. As such broader coverage was preferred covering topics such as: consent and risk, sexual pleasure for men and women, different genders and sexualities, and what constitutes a healthy relationship – notably the latter being a recurrent finding (Bodnar & Tornello, 2018; Fixers, 2016; Girl Guiding, 2015; Hirst, 2012).

For RSE to be effective it needs to address the above issues and concerns young people face (Hovarth, Alys, Massey, Pina, Scally & Adler, 2013). The Girl Guiding Report (2015) found many young people relied on RSE in schools to provide this wider knowledge. However, Ellis and Thiara (2014) highlight that teaching about IPV in

schools is led by teachers, and some schools and teachers providing inadequate support (Ellis & Thiara, 2014).

### **3.5.6 Bullying**

Given the shortfalls and challenges RSE faces, it has been proposed that RSE be linked into the bullying curriculum. There are many parallels between IPV and bullying behaviours for example sexting and cyberbullying (Ringrose et al., 2012). Similarly, IPV and bullying are violent behaviours, thus, in this section I will discuss the idea of IPV being incorporated into the bullying curriculum, how it could address same-sex relationships, and the feasibility of this all.

Liz Kelly's (1987) theory of the Continuum of Violence presents all violent acts on a scale across both the type of violence (physical, emotional, psychological, financial), and the level impact (individual, group and structural). In this way bullying behaviour is seen by some as an early form, or an extension, of IPV and other forms of violence against women (Tutty, 2014). Tutty (2014) highlights that many school-based bullying prevention programmes, e.g. Expect Respect, also include aspects around sexual harassment, demonstrating the two curricula may already be somewhat integrated. Another potential benefit of incorporating parts of RSE into the bullying curriculum is incompatibility to educate young people about same-sex relationships and accompanying issues such as homophobia. This is of particular note as young people report lack of information about LGBT relationships and sexual identities in RSE (Bragg, Renolds, Ringrose & Jackson, 2018; Girl Guiding, 2015; McGreeney & Hanson, 2018). In the bullying curriculum homophobia is a major issue in schools and its centrality within bullying agenda may make it easier to address.

In contrast, there are several reasons why RSE and the Bullying curriculum should be separate. The first is that aspects of RSE in the bullying curriculum can often be shielded

away from and not fully explored (Tutty et al., 2014). This finding is similar Formby's (2012) study which found some teachers felt uncomfortable teaching RSE. This may suggest that rather than adding aspects of RSE into the bullying curriculum the task is in fact to increase teachers' ability to adequately explore RSE issues. Also, exploring and discussing homophobia does not guarantee teaching about different genders and sexualities. A study by Land (2003) suggests young people would benefit from the topics being taught separately. Second, Formby (2015) argues that dominant bullying discourses fail to adequately capture the issues and experiences LGBT young people face. Payne and Smith (2012) reiterate this perspective highlighting that the use of bullying discourse to understand homophobia reduces the problem to individual bullies, and fails to address wider issues such as our heteronormative or gender normative culture and issues of gender policing in schools (Pascoe, 2013; Payne, 2007; Ringrose & Renold, 2010).

Within this line of argument, Brown, Chesney-Lind and Stein (2007) contend that the term bullying should not be used to address issues such as sexual harassment for two main reasons. Firstly, they argue subsuming sexual harassment into a bullying framework, de-genders and psychopathologises sexual harassment. Secondly, that this shortcoming means the bullying framework fails to adequately incorporate a rights rhetoric. That is, as exemplified in Brown et al's article, if in practice issues of sexual harassment or gendered violence in schools are dealt with under a bullying framework, female victims would be stripped of their legal rights and their claims trivialised. This could result in even serious cases of sexual harassment being dealt with by school administrative staff, or ignored (Brown et al, 2007).

Ringrose and Renold (2010) highlight that the bullying discourse fails to consider other complex intersectional factors, in addition to gender, such as race, class and sexuality. Thus, the bullying discourse as it stands does not provide adequate practical tools or

symbolic resources to deal with everyday gendered violence in schools as gendered violence is positioned outside of 'bullying' by being considered as 'normal' or 'natural' behaviour (Ringrose & Renolds, 2010). An example of which can be seen in the Fixer's report where sexual harassment of students was often brushed off by teachers (Fixers, 2016). Thus, there seems agreement that to adequately educate and protect children the curriculum for RSE and Bullying should be kept separate.

### **3.5.7 Whole school approach**

Rather than incorporate RSE into one curriculum (i.e. bullying) there is a case to incorporate RSE into *multiple* aspects of school. This is known as the 'Whole School Approach'. For the many who see IPV and violence against women as resulting from macro level social and cultural factors, challenges to school culture are viewed as the way forward (Ellis & Thiara, 2014).

This approach feeds into the growing onus of looking at the 'bigger picture' in relation to IPV. For example, many IPV support agencies are now offering 'wrap-around' provision, where an organisation is a gateway to various types of support, including support to children. Many studies have highlighted that RSE which is short-term or a one off are insubstantial or ineffective in the education and prevention of IPV amongst young people (Dusenbury, Flaco, Lake, Brannigan & Bosworth, 1997; Flood & Pease, 2009; Nation, et al., 2003). Further, a Whole School Approach is an important consideration when many prevention programmes can be short lived and inconsistent due to short-term, or lack of, of funding. It has been put forward that IPV prevention programmes with greater integration into the curriculum have greater longevity than those that do not (Ellis, Stanley & Bell, 2006).

### **3.5.8 Importance of messages & language**

Some research highlights that young people feel RSE is not relevant to them. A study by Chambers, Tincknell and Van Loon (2004) into peer regulation of teenage sexual identities found the official discourse of sex education did not relate to the student's lives. As outlined above young people posit that they want more information about consent, healthy relationships and different sexualities (Fixers, 2016; Girl guiding, 2015). Flood et al (2009) argue that good interventions are those informed by the knowledge of their target groups and local contexts. Without this knowledge Ellis and Thiara (2014) argue that interventions risk being irrelevant, rejected by the target group, or may even be perceived as discriminatory. In this way, it is important that RSE considers young people's perspectives.

Research by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2014 cited in House of Commons, 2015) found young people could describe what consent meant in 'theory' but found it hard to identify non-consensual sex in a real-world context. Likewise, research by Fox, Hale and Gadd (2014) that explored young people's (10-15 years) views of IPV prevention education in the UK, France and Spain found young people struggled to understand aspects of power and control in abusive relationships. A report by the House of Commons (2015) entitled Life Lessons: PSHE and RSE in schools. Fifth Report of Session 2014-15, outlined that language was as an important factor. It was argued that young people did not have the language to articulate or describe abuse to people such as the police. Young people's lack of awareness of abuse compounded difficulties accessing language about abuse and IPV. This made young people vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. These findings suggest that RSE needs to consider how young people think about relationships and the grey, or absent, areas in young people's relationship understanding. This knowledge would help to ensure young

people are in healthy relationships and are able to identify abuse, including IPV, and seek support.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

As shown in this chapter, there are a number of positive changes occurring such as the increased government attention to dealing with domestic abuse, RSE being made compulsory, and RSE being updated and tailored to the needs of young people today. As outlined schools and peers play a vital role in how young people think about relationships and identification of IPV. The later part of this chapter also highlights the importance of language to young people's abilities to identify and disclose IPV. These studies suggest that it would be useful to have a study that provides insights in to how young people make sense of IPV in relationships and how they think about abuse in same-sex relationships.

The current study will explore how young people make sense of relationships, what relationship characteristics they attend to in identifying IPV and grey-areas of understanding, or areas where understanding is lacking. As outlined in Chapter 2 the heteronormative discourse around relationships, RSE and IPV is a dominant discourse. Therefore, the present study will explore how sexual orientation of potential victims or perpetrators of IPV could affect sense making of relationships. That is, is IPV more likely to be identified in heterosexual relationships – and if so why?

Valuable insights can be gained from research with young people demonstrated in many studies outlined in this chapter. This chapter highlights the numerous influences on young people's lives and relationships, from the personal level of parents and peers, to broader societal level of policy, law and education and young people's seeming desire to want to be involved in improving RSE. This research will outline some of the issues young people of today face. Specifically, how young people make sense of



potentially abusive relationship scenarios which draw on everyday issues such as use of social media and mobile phones, emotional abuse, physical violence, role of peers, social norms and the significance of gender and sexual orientation to making sense of these issues.

### **3.7 Research Aims**

This thesis aimed to explore how young people make sense of IPV to inform Relationship and Sex Education. The thesis explored: (i) how young people make sense of relationships, (ii) the arguments young people draw upon to make sense of healthy and unhealthy relationships, (iii) what characteristics young people use to identify IPV, and (iv) the significance of gender and sexual orientation to this sense making.

With a growing emphasis on RSE there is a need for evidence on young people's perspectives of relationships and what this education needs to cover. This research is novel in that it aimed to capture how young people identify IPV, the arguments they draw on and grey areas, all in young people's own words.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

This thesis aims to contribute to research into young people's understanding of IPV, particularly how gender and sexual orientation of potential victims and perpetrators affects sense making. As outlined in the introductory chapters, definitions of IPV vary based on various factors such as cultural period, geographic location, and age of relevant persons. This thesis aimed to explore: (i) how young people make sense of relationships, (ii) the arguments young people draw upon to make sense of healthy and unhealthy relationships, (iii) what characteristics young people use to identify IPV, and (iv) the significance of gender and sexual orientation to this sense making. As such I situate my research within a critical realist epistemology (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002; Willig, 2008).

A focus group approach with a semi-structured interview schedule including vignette trigger material was used to elicit participant talk about acceptable and unacceptable relationship behaviours. Four vignettes were used as stimuli for the focus group discussions (Appendix 1) to draw out the range of arguments and discourses young people use when making sense of IPV. The four vignettes discussed were almost identical but the gender and sexual orientation of the main character was changed, e.g. a woman in a heterosexual relationship, a man in a heterosexual relationship, a woman in a lesbian relationship, and a man in a gay relationship. This method of generating material has been demonstrated as useful in a discourse analytic study on 'sense-making' in relation to rape (i.e., Anderson, Beattie & Spence 2001). Data analysis used Wetherell and Edley's (1997; 1999) version of Discursive Psychology, which is a variant of Discourse Analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Two closely-related studies were conducted. Study 1 involved undergraduate university students (aged 18-24 years) and Study 2 involved Year 11 and Year 13 secondary school pupils (aged 15-18 years), a total of 53 young people aged 15-24 took part in the research. The study methods will be described in detail and I will note where the methods differed slightly across the two studies. Due to differences in recruitment and data generation, the two studies are described separately in these respects. However, as the data were analysed as one data set, the method of analysis and analytic procedures are described in one section at the end of chapter (4.4: Analysis of material).

#### **4.1 Feasibility study**

This work builds upon a feasibility study I conducted as part of my MSc in Psychological Approaches to Health the year prior to commencing this PhD research. In this prior study, I piloted the focus group method and use of vignettes with university students (n=18; 8 males; 10 females; aged 21-25 years). Three mixed-gender, vignette-based focus groups were conducted to generate material. This study found the vignettes to be successful in promoting discussion and was confirmed by participants to be realistic, understandable, and non-offensive or emotionally-troubling. It also demonstrated that the method could generate rich and relevant material for analysis.

The feasibility study found the presence of 'pushing' to be a major criterion for identification of IPV. Hence, to investigate this further in PhD Study 1 the vignette was presented in two parts: part one described physical violence in the form of pushing, and part two described physical violence in the form of hitting. However, due to the length of the focus groups using the two-part vignettes, this format was not feasible for secondary school data collection. Hence, in PhD Study 2 vignettes were condensed into one passage.

Study 1 was also informed by further observations and findings from the feasibility study, namely the order by which the vignettes were presented. The feasibility study found that, despite counter balancing the presentation of the vignettes, discussions of the first vignette, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the main character, oriented to the heterosexual female situation. Hence, presentation of the vignettes to participants was counter balanced across the groups, except for the heterosexual female protagonist vignette which was always presented first.

#### **4.1.1 Ethical approvals for PhD research**

Both studies adhered to the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009). For Study 1, approval from the School of Psychology, Faculty of Medicine of Health, Research Ethics Committee at the University of Leeds, was awarded on 03/11/2014 (reference 14-0219; with subsequent amendment 14-0315 – 13/12/2014). Ethical approval was obtained for Study 2 on 02/07/2015 (reference 15-0171; with subsequent amendments: 15-0241, date: 02/10/2015; 15-0389, date: 06/01/2016; 16-0110, date: 12/05/2016).

#### **4.1.2 The Researcher**

I am personally invested in this research as a young woman in my mid-20's who identifies as a feminist. I have had experience of relationship violence through my family, friends and some personal experiences. Inevitably, my experience and investments will influence my involvement in data generation and analysis. However, I take the position that there is no neutral perspective from which to approach social research. There is an obligation on me, however, to remain aware of my investments, always to ground my analysis in the data, and to take a critical and reflexive stance towards my own subjectivity throughout the process of research.

## 4.2 Study 1: University Students (18-24 years)

### 4.2.1 Recruitment and participants

*Inclusion Criteria.* Study participation was restricted to: (a) undergraduate students aged 18-21 years initially, however, due to difficulty in male recruitment, age was extended to 24 years; (b) those who had lived in the UK for the past 5 years; (c) can speak fluent English.

*Recruitment procedure.* Recruitment of undergraduate students was staggered using: face-to-face recruitment and posters on one university campus, emails to the university societies, advertisements on the School of Psychology participant pool (with a reach of approximately 600 students) and advertisements on social media (Appendix 2).

*Informed Consent.* A study information sheet was given to all potential participants prior to consenting which outlined the study (Appendix 3). Participants were given at least 48 hours to decide if they wanted to take part in the study. After this period, a time convenient for a group of participants was agreed for a focus group to take place.

The information sheet defined IPV in the following way: 'Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs between two people who are in a romantic relationship – who are 'partners' - and can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, and punching) and/or psychological (e.g. sustained denigration and undermining)'. The information sheet made clear there would be a discussion of IPV in relation to hypothetical scenarios about relationship difficulties. Potential participants who had experience of IPV were advised to take part only if they felt comfortable discussing the topic. Throughout the process participants could ask questions and the researcher ensured participants had no remaining questions before the study began. Hence, before signing the consent form (Appendix 4) any questions participants had, were answered.

*Avoidance of harm to participants.* For Study 1 all discussions were based around hypothetical scenarios depicted in vignettes. Disclosure of personal experience was therefore not sought, nor encouraged. However, where relevant as part of the discussion, participants were asked about their own or a friend's experiences of IPV, or of 'unhealthy' relationships; it was made clear that such disclosure was optional.

The study information sheet, the researcher's ground rules and verbal instruction (see Appendix 5) made the following clear: (a) the researcher would stop the focus group if a participant felt distressed, giving them time to collect themselves or leave the group; (b) the remaining participants would also be asked if they would like to continue; (c) all participants were reassured they could leave the study at any time, without question and without having to give a reason; (d) after the focus group the researcher would check on the well-being of any participant who had left early; (e) links to support for IPV and sexual violence were given to participants on the study information sheet. Lastly, (f) it was anticipated that some participants might reflect on their contribution after the focus group and feel guilty or distressed about 'harsh' responses. As such, participants were reassured that the vignettes were designed to generate discussion and did not necessarily reflect how they would react in real life.

*Participants.* The sample for Study 1 included three female focus groups, one male dyad discussion, and two interviews with single males. Effort was made to collect as much data through focus groups but, due to difficulties recruiting male participants, interviews and dyadic discussions were also used and no all-male focus groups were conducted (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1.** *Study 1: Researcher reflections on male participant recruitment.*

Recruiting men to take part in Study 1 was a challenge. This has been documented in other studies (Hester et al., 2012; Walby & Myhill, 2001). I was interested to hear what men themselves thought and why they had chosen to take part. Male participants cited two main barriers to men participating in the study: (1) relationship issues being deemed feminine, (2) sensitive nature of the IPV, worry about saying the 'wrong thing' and sparking disagreements about such a sensitive and emotive topic. Upon reflection, there seemed a facilitator to men's participation: a personal connection to the issue. Many of the male participants who took part in this study, reported that they had somehow been affected by IPV or violence/abuse, either directly as victims/survivors in their own relationships or families, or indirectly through a friend or partner).

An additional factor may have been my identity as a researcher. That is men may have felt more comfortable discussing this topic with another man. For example, an interview with a male undergraduate was particularly challenging. I had to prompt the participant for more detail as his responses were often short and at times he was unable to answer and looked slightly uncomfortable. At the end of the interview he said he found the vignette depicting a man potentially being abusive to a woman particularly difficult as he 'did not know what to say'. This was the final male interview I conducted but I took this feedback and experience on board for male focus groups in Study 2. I endeavoured to be especially conscious of how men felt in these discussions. I also did not probe more than twice if participants responses were limited, in recognition that they may not want to answer.

A total of 14 participants (10 female and 4 male) aged 18-24 years took part in Study 1. By chance, participants within each data collection session were recruited by the same

method of recruitment (see Table 4.1). All discussions and interviews were vignette-based, audio recorded, and conducted in the School of Psychology. Groups and interviews were single-gender, focus group duration was as follows: Focus Group Pilot (18-21, FGP) – 86 mins 1:26; Focus Group 1 (18-21, FG1)- 1:26; Focus Group 2 (18-21, FG2) – 1:26; Male Dyad (18-21, MD)- 1:32; Male Interview 1 (18-21, MInt 1)- 1:25; Male Interview 2 (18-21, MInt 2)- 1:25.

**Table 4.1. Study 1 - Participant recruitment, data collection methods and participant experience of IPV**

Session Code	Session Type	Group Gender	Means of Recruitment	No. of Participants	Participants experience of IPV/abuse
18-21 FGP	Focus Group	Female	Psychology Pool	3	3 ND
18-21 FG1	Focus Group	Female	Psychology Pool	4	1 N, 3 ND
18-21 FG2	Focus group	Female	Psychology Pool	3	3 ND
18-21 MInt 1	Interview	Male	Face-to-face	1	1 P
18-21 MInt 2	Interview	Male	Face-to-face	1	1 ND
18-21 MD	Dyad	Male	Social Media	2	1 O, 1 F
Notes: Personal (P), relative, friend or partner (O); Friend of a friend (F); None (N) No disclosure either way (ND) <sup>34</sup> .					

#### 4.2.2 Data Generation

##### *Vignettes.*

The vignettes from the feasibility study were adapted for use in Study 1 to ensure they were age relevant and appropriate. Vignette construction drew upon common features

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<sup>34</sup> Information regarding participants' personal experience of IPV was gleaned by the question: 'Have you, or somebody you know, had a similar experience to that in the vignette?' This question was asked at the end of discussion and participants were reassured that they did not have to answer the question if they did not wish to.



of IPV identified in the literature, e.g. psychological abuse (e.g. Barter, McCarry, Berridge & Evans, 2009; Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013), fear of seeking help (e.g. Hester et al., 2012; Wood, Barter & Berridge, 2011), public and private instances of abuse. From participant feedback and reflections raised in the analysis allusion to the following implications were included: (a) the influence of peers; (b) pressures to smoke and drink; (c) self-doubt and concerns about abuse being normal behaviour; and (d) the protagonist feeling they lacked knowledge about relationships. Content from the feasibility study vignette that were deemed less relevant to relationships between adolescents were removed (e.g., the partner not doing housework) because most adolescent couples will not live together and their parents are likely to be perceived to have such responsibilities. The revised vignettes were passed-by two IPV prevention practitioners who had worked with young people to check that they appeared acceptable and realistic for an adolescent demographic.

Example of a vignette – Study 1.

Vignette 1: Heterosexual female concerned about male partner's behaviour:

“Your friend asks for your advice. She has been in a relationship with her boyfriend for a year and is beginning to feel unhappy, but she's not sure what to do. She says that her boyfriend is very critical of her - something you have also noticed. She says that he makes her feel bad about wanting to spend time with her friends, telling her that she is self-centered and immature, and she recently found him checking her texts and Facebook.

She tells you that he shouts at her, and on occasions he has shoved her in an argument. He also asks her to do things with him that she is not sure about, like smoking, or drinking. She tells you that he has hit her on a couple of occasions and she is worried that it will happen more often. You believe her. She says her boyfriend doesn't want to talk about their relationship.

She says that there are times when he is really affectionate towards her, and that she usually feels happy with him. She doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and she isn't sure if she is being unreasonable and whether she just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships.”

For Study 1, and adopting the method tested in my Masters work, four vignettes were presented in total. The content of each vignette was identical with two key exceptions: the gender and sexuality of the protagonist and their partner. Vignette 1 described a

woman in a heterosexual relationship potentially experiencing abuse from her male partner; vignette 2 a man in a heterosexual relationship potentially experiencing abuse from his female partner; vignette 3 a woman in a lesbian relationship potentially experiencing abuse from her female partner; and vignette 4 a man in a gay relationship potentially experiencing abuse from his male partner (see Appendix 1).

To encourage discussion, potentially abusive behaviours in the vignettes were not identified as such to participants in the vignettes, information sheet or verbally by the researcher; rather, they were described as potentially 'problematic'. The behaviours were only defined to be of an abusive pattern of behaviour as per current guidelines in the debrief. However, if participants identified the behaviours as abusive during the discussion, the researcher probes reflected this wording. In these ways, the vignettes were constructed to contain enough contextual information to promote discussion but were ambiguous enough to draw out multiple explanations during discussions as recommended by West (1982 cited in Barter & Renolds, 2010). These are presented in Appendix 1.

#### *Focus Group Moderator Questions.*

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 6) was created to ensure that key areas and topics were addressed: (a) identification of problematic and non-problematic behaviours; (b) bystander's perception of the situation; (c) possible solutions; and (d) barriers to advice seeking. Questions were informed by the literature and consultations with IPV support organisations (i.e. Behind Closed Doors, IDAS, Cambridge City Council). A list of prompts (Appendix 6) were also generated consisting of open-ended questions and additional themes considered relevant to: (a) encourage discussion of particular areas; (b) encourage comparisons across and between vignettes; and (c) aid discussion. Finally, probes were identified to provide neutral invitation to extended reflection. An example of a question, prompt and probe was as follows:

- 1) Question: To what extent do you think your friend's the unhappiness is justified?
- a) Prompt: To what extent is your friend's partner behaving badly?
  - (i) Probe: Why do you think this?
- b) Prompt: Which aspects of their partner's behaviour are justified?
  - (i) Probe: Why do you think this?

*Study Procedure.*

Participants were seated in a classroom in the School of Psychology. The researcher introduced the study and all participants were given name badges. The researcher then read the ground rules (Appendix 5), asked participants if they had any questions, and participants then completed the study consent forms during which any emerging questions were answered. The researcher began audio-recording and handed out a printed sheet of the vignette to each participant. The researcher opened the discussion by reading the vignette scenario aloud. The researcher then commenced discussions guided by the interview schedule and, where relevant, the additional prompts and probes. Although asking all questions to participants was an ideal aim, given the time constraints priority was given to participant's own direction of discussions. That is, if talk went off topic the researcher would use the questions or vignette to draw discussion back to the study. However, in some cases not all questions were asked to allow participants more control over the discussion.

In Study 1 the vignette was presented in two parts (see Appendix 7). Once part 1 (psychological abuse) of each vignette was discussed and participants had no additional comments to make, part 2 (physical abuse) was read. Initially the interview questions were reiterated for part 2 however, due to its repetitiveness, this procedure was revised to simply ask participants if, given the new information, their thoughts, reactions, or advice would change. To begin with, the researcher guided discussions through allocating roughly the same time to the discussion of each vignette given the time available for the focus group. However, as data collection progress, it was found that the heterosexual relationship vignettes generated more talk than the same-sex

vignettes. As such, more time was allowed for discussion of the heterosexual relationship vignettes to more effectively use the session time.

In Study 1 at the end of each interview, provided there was enough time, participants were asked how they would label a relationship like the ones presented in the vignettes and about their recognition, and definition, of terms such as Intimate Partner Violence, Domestic Violence, and Domestic Abuse. Participants were also invited, if they felt comfortable, to share any experience they had had of IPV. Due to the sensitive nature of this question, participants were assured that they did not have to answer and the question, when it was asked in a focus group, was never directed to a specific person but to the group. Participants were then debriefed, asked by the researcher if they had any remaining questions, thanked for their participation, and reminded of obligation to keep confidential (personal) information shared in the group.

### **4.3 Study 2: Secondary School Pupils (15-18 years)**

#### **4.3.1 Recruitment of participants**

The recruitment procedure for Study 2 was considerably longer than for Study 1 because there were two gate-keepers - schools and parents – from whom the researcher needed consent as well as from the participants themselves.

*Inclusion criteria: Schools.* The recruitment target was one focus group each of young men and of young women, across year 11 and year 13, in three secondary schools varying in socioeconomic status (SES) intake demographic based on percentage of pupils receiving Free School Meals (see Table 4.2). Single sex focus groups were chosen. Although both same-sex and mixed-sex focus groups have their pros and cons. Single-sex focus groups were deemed more likely to foster a supportive and safe environment to allow participants to freely explore the implications of gender and sexual orientation on relationships for the following reasons: (a) the sensitive nature of the

research topic (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015 p. 111); (b) mixed-sex groups may disadvantage female participants (Gilliband, Robinson, Brawn & Osborn, 1996; Rennie & Parker, 1987); (c) young people may prefer single-sex groups for RSE (Strange, Oakley, Forrest et al., 2003); (d) young men and women may learn about relationships differently (Measor, 2004)

As briefly discussed in the introduction, unlike gender and sexual orientation, SES does not indicate one's likelihood of experiencing IPV. However, SES is sometimes believed to be an indicator of IPV likelihood, specifically that people of lower SES are more likely to experience IPV. This is not a belief of the researcher. However, the research sought a sample of high and low young people so data was not specific to one SES cohort. Free school meal data was used to derive SES (Gorard, 2013, see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2. Study 2 - Socioeconomic status (SES) of schools in Study 2 and gender and age of participants**

School	SES (% of pupils receiving free school meals in Jan 2017 <sup>35</sup> )	No of Focus Groups Conducted	Age Range of Focus Group
School A	HIGH (3.5%)	4	15-18 (M & F)
School B	LOW (15.1%)	3	15-18 (M & F)
School C	LOW (14.7%)	1	15-16 (M)

The age range of 15-18 years was chosen due to the definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse that was relatively recently changed in 2013 to include young people aged 16-17 years. A consultation feedback to the government's change in working definition

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<sup>35</sup> Data from the Department for Education, 2017

of domestic violence and abuse with agencies involved in IPV prevention, and individuals (Home Office, 2012b). Just over half (54%) who responded argued the definition should encompass adolescents younger than 16 years. The primary arguments for this were: a) that in some cases, young people become involved in an abusive relationship before they are 16 years old; b) restricting the definition to 16 years and above may hinder access to specific domestic violence services for under 16s; and c) including young people under 16 years would raise awareness of violence that can occur in the context of young people's relationships (i.e. domestic violence against parents and siblings) and help to prevent domestic violence being normalised amongst younger adolescents. Hence, including Year 11 and 13 pupils in this study enabled data to be captured from a relevant age group, allowed data to flow on from Study 1, and raised the possibility of identifying development changes in understanding of IPV which could provide useful information in relation to age and definition of IPV.

#### *Recruitment of young people.*

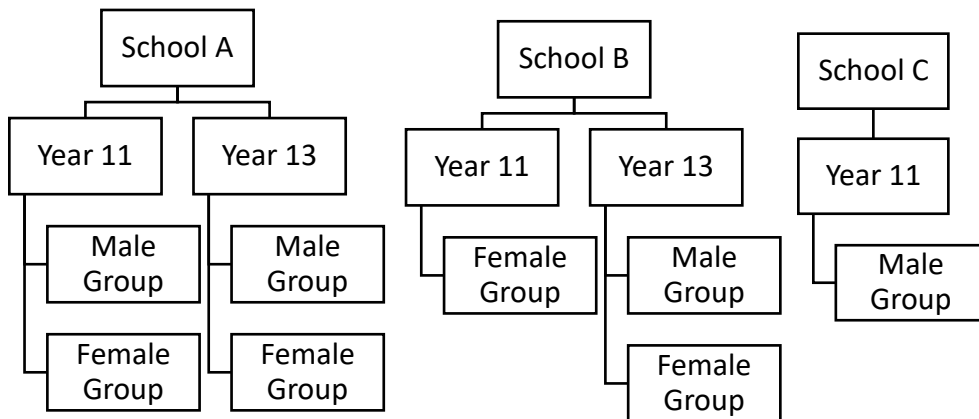
Letters<sup>36</sup> and emails were sent to eligible schools inviting them to take part in the study (Appendix 8). Schools eligible to take part were: (a) secondary schools and/or sixth forms in Leeds; (b) of mixed ability, with Special Educational Needs schools excluded; and (c) had to have most students at the extremes of SES. Schools SES was considered to ensure a range of SES within study's school sample. It was not within the aims of the study to look at differences in sense-making in relation to SES. Socioeconomic status was determined by the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM). A good, although not perfect, measure of SES. This data was retrieved from the Department for Education (Illie, Sutherland & Vignoles, 2017; Taylor,

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<sup>36</sup> To ensure clear communication the term IPV was not used with participants. Instead Domestic Violence/Abuse and Relationship Violence were used in communication with parents, schools and students, as these are more commonly used amongst the general population.

2018)<sup>37</sup>. Two secondary schools, one with high SES intake (SES; School A) and one with low SES intake (School B) were recruited using opportunistic sampling method. A third school (School C) was recruited due to difficulty running the final focus group in School B (See Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2.** Study 2 - Focus groups by school, year and gender.



#### *Recruitment of Young People.*

Study inclusion criteria was restricted to: (a) students in secondary schools and sixth forms in Leeds; (b) aged 15- 18 years inclusive; (c) who speak fluent English; (d) with no significant, known vulnerabilities in terms of behavioural problems at school/college. These inclusion criteria were specified on the study information letter and confirmed at the point of consenting with schools.

Once schools were recruited, potential participants (eight males and eight females) were selected by tutors or heads of year 11 and 13. Selection was initially random (e.g.

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<sup>37</sup> It is hard to find definitive guidelines on how FSM data relates to level of social deprivation, it was decided that schools who had a percentage of FSM above 35.1% were deemed to be of higher indices of deprivation (i.e. high SES), in contrast those with a percentage of FSM between 20.1% and 35.0% were medium and schools with 20.1% or less pupils receiving FSM were deemed to have low (i.e. low SES).

teachers were advised they could pick the nth person on the register, provided the young person fitted the inclusion criteria) however, due to low uptake, engaged teachers invited students and groups of friends they thought would like to take part or who would have a mix of views. The researcher also considered incentivising participation through vouchers but the main school contact seemed uncomfortable with this approach, possibly because it could seem unfair to other students. An information sheet was given to students selected by teachers to take part and their parent/guardians with an *opt-out* parental consent form for over 16s (Appendix 9) and an *opt-in* parental consent form for under 16s (Appendix 10).

#### *Informed consent*

For Study 2, gaining informed consent was the same as for Study 1. However, given the potentially sensitive nature of the discussion a letter with similar information was sent out to parent/guardians of students selected to take part. Parental/guardian opt-in consent was obtained from students under 16 years old, and parental/guardian opt-out consent for students aged 16 years and above. This was deemed appropriate given the increased prima facie vulnerability of the younger students.

#### *Participants.*

Single-gender, age stratified focus groups were used for data collection. Focus groups usually consisted of 4-6 participants however there was a focus group with three participants. In a surprising contrast to Study 1, recruitment of male participants was easier. All male focus groups consisting of five or more students. The total sample was 39 young people (16 females and 23 males) aged 15-18 years old. Table 4.3 below shows the number of participants by school.



**Table 4.3.** Study 2 - Number of participants by school and session.

Session Code	School (A- High SES; B - Low SES; C - Low SES)	Gender	No. Participants in Group
A13F	A	Female	3
A13M	A	Male	5
A11F	A	Female	3
A11M	A	Male	6
B13F	B	Female	6
B13M	B	Male	6
B11F	B	Female	4
C11M	C	Male	6

#### 4.3.2 Data generation

Vignettes.

The vignettes for Study 2 were largely the same as those in Study 1 but with the following changes: (a) the descriptor ‘you have also seen their boyfriend hit them’ was removed; and (b) all vignettes were presented in one part to make data collection more time efficient. The revised vignettes were again checked by staff at a local domestic abuse support service who supported young people to ensure they were realistic and relatable.

*Focus Group Moderator Questions.*

The interview schedule used in Study 1 was shortened for Study 2 to ensure time efficiency. Questions were not asked about participants personal experiences of IPV. Time available for each group was an hour – 30 minutes less than Study 1. Due to their being less time and more participants expected in the groups, the interview schedule

was like that used in Study 1, Stage 2 but with the following questions, prompts and probes prioritised:

- 1) What are your initial thoughts about this situation?
  - (i) Why?
- 2) In what ways, if any, do you think your friend's boyfriend/girlfriend is behaving badly?
  - (i) Why do you think this?
- 3) Which behaviours of your friend's boyfriends/girlfriends are understandable?
  - (i) Why do you think this?
- 4) What advice would you give to your friend?

Prompts and probes were used at the researcher's discretion to encourage discussion so that, in the many cases when discussion was flowing, they were not asked. These questions were chosen due to their broad nature and ability to encompass many of questions and prompts used in Study 1 whilst allowing participants freedom to lead the discussion (see Figure 4.3).

*Avoidance of harm to participants.*

For Study 2, additional measures were put in place to protect participants for harm: (a) the researcher completed a DBS check; (b) personal disclosures were actively discouraged within the discussion as outlined in a set of ground rules established for this study (Appendix 11) and questions about participants personal experiences of IPV used in the Study 1 were removed from the main study; (c) a member of school staff was present, or on standby, during the discussion in case any students became distressed and wished to leave; (d) if a student began to disclose an incidence of IPV they were sensitively reminded of the ground rules which asked that such disclosures were not made; (e) if a student became distressed, the discussion would be stopped and asked if they would like to talk someone about this individually (no students became

distressed in the group); (f) use of a debriefing activity, used by IPV support organisations (Appendix 12) which lists a range of IPV support services; and (g) lastly, any student who disclosed an experience of IPV (either explicitly, implicitly, or who seemed mildly distressed) was asked to stay behind to talk to the researcher, reminded of the support they could receive in their school and from external agencies, and any concerns were passed on to a relevant member of school staff. No student disclosed an experience of abuse. However, one female student in Year 13 did become slightly upset in the discussion. The researcher spoke to her at the end of the session but the participant did not raise any issues or request any support. These concerns were passed on to a member of staff.

To support student safety, the study information sheet and the researcher's verbal instruction (see Appendix 3) made the following clear: (a) the researcher will stop the focus group if a participant felt distressed, giving them time to collect themselves or to leave the group; (b) after the study, the researcher will check on the well-being of any participant who had left early; (c) the remaining participants will also be asked if they would like to continue; and (d) all participants are reassured they could leave the study at any time, without question.

#### *Focus groups and interviews*

All discussions were vignette-based, audio recorded, single-gender and conducted in the participant's school. Focus group duration was as follows: School A (high SES) Year 13 Male (A13M) – 60:00; Year 13 Female (A13F) – 54:21; Year 11 Male (A11M) – 49:44; Year 11 Female (A11F) – 64:00; School B (low SES) Male Year 13 (B13M) – 69:44; Female Year 13 (B13F) – 50:35; Female Year 11 (B11F) 55:47; School C (low SES) Male Year 11 (C11M) – 59:16.

**Figure 4.3** Researcher reflections on focus group facilitation.

As a feminist woman who knows people affected by IPV, I tried to be aware of my own biases and that sharing my views could lead, change or shut down discussions. Thus, it was important to withhold my views and to be aware of my own biases, and reactions to participants, when facilitating the focus group discussions.

I took the nodding dog approach to encourage discussions (Griffin, 1990). I did not challenge any perspectives but adopted the 'talking back' stance to explore relevant areas with openness and inquiry (Griffin, 1990). I gave participants time and space to discuss. I only re-directed discussion when interaction was returned to me (Smith & Osborn, 2003). No participants expressed overtly sexist or homophobic views. Odd moments of humour were taken in jest as research outlines often young people can use humour when they feel awkward talking about relationships and IPV (Forrest, 2007). This allowed participants to have their say but also allowed other participants to challenge any views they did not agree with.

Some male undergraduate participants remarked that men may avoid taking part in the study because IPV is viewed as a 'woman's' topic. Another participant in an interview during the debrief said he had felt worried he would say the 'wrong thing'. Participants (male and female) said they enjoyed the study and the diversity of discussion the vignettes generated. A few secondary school students remarked that the vignettes were repetitive but largely they were seen as a useful device. I was mindful of the diversity of responses to vignettes and subject matter within the group, to ensure all participants were given opportunities to speak.

My role in discussions was to listen to young people's perspectives and facilitate the discussion. There were times when young people asked questions, such as 'is this behaviour okay?'. At other times participants quoted statistics and facts incorrectly such as men and women are equally likely to experience IPV. In such cases I tried not to answer, or correct participants during the focus groups unless directly asked.

**Figure 4.3.** Continued.

However, in the debrief I raised these questions/issues again and addressed them. From some of these discussions, I modified the debrief to include relevant statistics around IPV that young people might find helpful to consider after our discussion.

#### **4.4 Analysis of the material**

The thesis aimed to explore: (i) how young people make sense of relationships, (ii) the arguments young people draw upon to make sense of healthy and unhealthy relationships, (iii) what characteristics young people use to identify IPV, and (iv) the significance of gender and sexual orientation to this sense making. Discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992) informed by Wetherell and Edley's approach (1997; 1998) was used to explore how young people 'made sense' of the possible relationship difficulties of other people. More specifically, the ways in which observed behaviours were understood to be abusive or otherwise problematic - or not – and the impact – if any – on such sense-making about the gender of the apparent perpetrator and victim within the context of heterosexual and of same-sex relationships.

##### **4.4.1 Transcription**

Focus groups for Study 1 and 2 were transcribed professionally, verbatim to play script standard with inclusion of features which could be relevant to analysis, e.g. laughter; untimed long pauses; clarifications; inaudible speech; emphasis on a word at a level appropriate for discourse analysis (Appendix 13). Transcripts were between 7,236 to 14,658 words. In keeping with the BPS ethical guidelines focus group: (a) transcripts were anonymised giving participants pseudonyms and removing/masking any

potentially identifying details; (b) the information sheet explained the importance of confidentiality after the discussion and participants signed a consent form agreeing they would keep disclosures by other members of the group confidential; and (c) all audio-recordings and signed informed consent forms were stored on the university N:Drive under restricted access only accessible by project supervisors and the researcher. This is in accordance with the University of Leeds data storage protocol. Due to the group nature of the data, if a participant wanted to withdraw from the study, their responses could not be removed. However, they could leave the focus group at any time without having to give a reason. This was made clear to participants in both the study information sheet and the consent form. Transcribers signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix 14).

#### **4.4.2 Discourse Analysis**

The aim of discourse analysis is to examine the ways in which textual materials and talk-in-interaction (i.e., conversations between people) actively construct objects, events, and meanings from pre-existing linguistic resources and the social and political implications of such constructions. That is, '*to gain a better understanding of social life and social interaction from our study of social texts*' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6-7).

Discourse analysis was selected instead of a thematic form of qualitative analysis such as, for example, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, or Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis affords much freedom in analytic approach which might have made it appropriate for the present study. However, the present study concentrates on the ways in which gender and sexual orientation are drawn on in discussions to understand the world and discourse analysis has been a fruitful approach on similar topics (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Naughton, O'Donnell & Muldoon, 2018; Towns & Adams, 2018).

The methodological reasons for the appropriateness of discourse analysis are: (i) the principle that there are multiple truths; (ii) attention to how categorisation and particularisation are used in talk; and (iii) ability to accommodate and analyse opposing or contradictory statements which are commonplace in people's talk – even the same person's talk - about the world (e.g. 'men can't be victims of domestic violence' and 'it's not right people overlook men's victimisation').

Notably there are many variations of discourse analysis such as Conversation Analysis (Schegloff, 2007), Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Parker, 1989), and Discursive Psychology (Potter & Edwards, 1992). Below is the rationale as to why Discursive Psychology as informed by Wetherell and Edley (1997; 1999) was been selected.

Conversation analysis was not considered as a method of analysis for this study due to it being, what Alvesson and Karreman (2000) term, a 'micro-discourse approach.' It, thus, has too great attention to the study of language in and for itself. That is, it focuses on the mechanisms of how conversations get done. Although the present study was concerned with language (namely the action-orientation of talk used in Discursive Psychology) the present study's approach to analysis was akin to 'meso-discourse approach' in which language is considered but the analysis is interested in broader patterns and similar local contexts (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). A meso-approach was deemed the most viable approach to addressing the research questions of the present study.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) was an option considered. FDA would have been well suited to the present study's exploration of gender, sexuality and power: the latter implied by topic of IPV. FDA allows analysis of the detail of the text whilst considering broader social and historical regimes of power/knowledge (Cheek, 2012). Moreover, FDA offers ways to bring into focus and challenge taken for granted notions that may viewed as 'natural' or 'normal', what is possible to say, and what appears to be silenced (Cheek, 2012). Yet, FDA's focus on broader aspects of context and

discourse - what is described by Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) as '*large-scale, ordered, integrated way of reasoning/constituting the world*' (p. 1125) - is not suitable as the primary method for this study. Although the method of analysis used in the present study is informed by Foucauldian thought (Edley & Wetherell, 1997). As Potter (2010) outlines, FDA is usually not applied to the analysis of conversational data such as focus groups used in the present study because it tends to focus on the identification 'grand narratives' – or big D – as opposed to how these are mobilized in talk – or small d – as is also the interest in the current study.

The present study selected Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992) in the direction developed by Wetherell and Edley (1997; 1998). This method of analysis was chosen as it allowed for the examination of both 'little d' discourses and 'big D' Discourses within the data suited to the research question. Discursive Psychology informed by Edwards and Potter (1992) is best suited to naturally occurring data such as everyday conversations (Potter, 2010) and, thus, not the best fit for analysis of focus groups as in the present study. However, Wetherell and Edley's method of Discursive Psychology has been used with focus groups and to explore issues of gender (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; 1999; Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

Moreover, the present study takes a social constructionist epistemological perspective similar to that of Edley and Wetherell (1997) who explain how they "*focus on the constructed and relative nature of talk and [is] interested in how versions of events, including analysts' versions, are built up and worked to become factual, persuasive and presented as 'just the way the world is'*" (p. 206). Similarly, the present study is situated between a top-down (i.e. focusing on issues of power and social processes, subject positions, interpretative repertoires) and a bottom-up approach (i.e. detailed analysis of the structure language and exchanges). Hence, Edley and Wetherell's meso-discourse approach allowed me to hone in on the action-orientation of talk, e.g. criticisms, accusations and mitigations, suited to address the overarching research question 'how



do young people make sense of IPV?’ while situating this within wider social structures of power/knowledge. However, the ontological perspective of the present study is somewhat contrary to a traditional approach to Discursive Psychology as I will now discuss.

#### 4.4.2 Critical Realism

The study took a critical realist epistemological approach contrary to the social constructionist position more usually associated with Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) and Potter and Edwards’ (1992) work. While both social constructionism and critical realism posit truth/knowledge to be '*multiple, localised and contextual*' (Power 2004, p. 859), critical realism incorporates a realist ontology in which ‘things’ and ‘social structures’ are considered to exist in some sense outside of discourse even when their meaning is constructed within language.

In contrast, social constructionism tends towards ‘agnosticism’ ontologically. Due to the subject matter of my work (i.e. IPV), I considered it unethical to remain agnostic about the effects of violence on the bodies and minds of young people and the social contexts and structures which may increase the probability of such violence (e.g., sexism, misogyny, and poverty). Moreover, Cresswell and Smith (2012, p. 620) suggest that the ontological version of discursive psychology can be ‘downplayed’ and seen as unfavourable to a number of discursive psychologists. Riley, Sims-Schouten and Willig (2007) outline how the critical realist stance can be used in discourse analysis.

Some argue this approach to be incompatible with discourse analysis (Speer, 2007), however, Riley et al. (2007) caution that '*the call to do only one kind of discursive psychology [i]s deeply problematic because any such ideological dogmatism shuts down thinking, either because people are afraid of the consequences of thinking differently from the dominant group or because they simply stop thinking differently*' (p. 143). Riley et al. (2007) present the use of critical realism in discursive analysis as

positive diversity within research that allows different research questions to be addressed. This creates breadth and vibrance in approaches to discursive work and so should be encouraged. Notably, the authors here present this argument around examples of Conversation Analysis specifically but it is presented as applicable to Discursive Psychology also.

A critical realist position, allows me to analyse the ways in which the phenomenon of IPV is understood *in and through* talk and language. Hence, adopting a critical realist stance allows me to: (a) appreciate and acknowledge that IPV is a real phenomenon that affects people's lives "out of the realm of language", e.g. through embodiment and lived experience (Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007); (b) recognise that IPV is an 'object' that is constructed, re-constructed, and contested through talk and text; (c) whilst appreciating that IPV is situated within a materiality that participants must also negotiate (Sims-Schouten, 2004; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007) and (d) understanding that talk is not a vehicle to an absolute truth but a medium through which the meaning of the world is constructed, oriented to action (i.e., achieves things in the world, such as validating or contesting a relationship as abusive), and is context dependent; and (e) working from the premise that linguistic resources are historical and cultural and both facilitate and constrain the ways in which phenomena can be discussed and understood (Willig, 2008).

#### **4.4.3 Analytical Procedures**

For Study 1 (University Students) the focus group transcripts were split by vignette so the vignette discussions could be analysed across the focus groups. Although this method of organising the data was helpful, it had drawbacks in that sometimes, multiple vignettes were discussed and compared within an exchange. Often, participants referred to Vignette 1 regardless of what scenario was being discussed. As such, in the analysis of the data generated in Study 2 (secondary school students), transcripts were

organised by focus group and the vignette scenario being discussed was noted in coding.

Analysis was a back-and-forth process. Transcripts were coded for initial themes, social objects, position within arguments and assumptions, which were noted using the comment function in Microsoft Word. For example, the following terms were used: initial themes (burden of proof), social objects (men as perpetrators; women as victims), position within arguments (gender differences in strength impact the severity of violence) and assumptions (men are strong, women are weak).

In the first instance, an effort was made to keep coding as inclusive as possible so that potentially marginal and insubstantial categories and codes were also noted. The researcher considered how else things could be said, what appeared difficult to say, and what conceivably seemed to be omitted from discussion. Transcripts were then re-read and coded for broader themes, with similarities and differences between accounts of the different vignettes noted. This process was repeated at least twice. The identified themes (high order) and categories (lower order) were then noted in a separate word document with an attempt made to simplify the analysis and establish a hierarchy of themes and their categories. At this stage, most themes focused on the gendered based aspects of young people's sense making (Doc 1, Appendix 15).

The analysis was then written and re-drafted using quotes. This process enabled the analysis to go beyond the significance of gender and sexual orientation to explore broader aspects of young people's sense making. This enabled the researcher to establish the central themes and arguments drawn upon by participants, and raised

additional questions to consider for the remaining transcript analysis<sup>38</sup> (see Appendix 16). This hierarchical organisation was then sense checked by inserting quotes to evidence each theme and category and, where necessary, revised to better reflect the data. The hierarchical organisation was then presented to the supervisory team and discussed.

Discussions took place between the researcher and the supervisory team to establish how the analysis should be best presented (i.e. by vignette, age group, or theme). Some of the themes and categories were identified as overlapping, so the researcher created a spider diagram for each main theme to show the finer nuances of the categories and their inter-relationships (see, Appendix 17 for example). At this stage, an over-arching theme was identified which constituted the central concept of the analysis: Social Contracts.

The over-arching theme of Social Contracts applied to four main themes within the data: Love and Happiness, Trust and Monogamy, Communication and Help-Seeking, and a Gendered Contract. The idea of a Social Contract was then tested on the data by the researcher. Here themes of importance of love and happiness were reconfigured into the first Social Contract, Love and Happiness (creating Doc 2, Appendix 18). The concept of Social Contracts worked well to organise the ways in which participants tried to 'make sense' of the vignettes and several different kinds of Social Contract were identified as implied within the participants' talk, although the concept itself was not alluded to directly in the discussions, three Social Contracts became apparent: Love and Happiness, Trust and Fidelity, and Duty and Obligation (Appendix 19). Notably, the 'Gendered Contract' was not given its own chapter. Instead it was split across the other

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<sup>38</sup> Focus group data in Study 2 was collected over a year. Analysis began as soon as the first transcript was received. Thus, the process of analysis involved working through the data I had, and then applying it and amending it when I received more focus group data.

three Social Contracts. This allowed the analysis to explore how gender and sexual orientation created nuance to each Social Contract.

Using this new format, an excel document was created (Excel 1). In this excel document each Social Contract had its own tab. Within each tab was a column for: Social Contract type, theme, category, quotations and their reference in text and notes. This document aimed to '*detail passages of discourse [...] however fragmented or contradictory, with what is actually said or written, not some general idea that seems to be intended*' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 168). That is, great effort was taken so that analysis remained close to participants' talk (see Figure 4.4).

This enhanced and detailed analytical organisation was then presented by the researcher to the supervisory team and sense checked. From this the detailed discursive analysis was crafted around each of the identified Social Contracts. The analysis of each Social Contract was planned in a MS Word document with quotes. The analysis looked for construction, i.e. how social objects and arguments were created, what aspects of talk were foregrounded and backgrounded; and variation in accounts and the rationale participants used to de-problematise these variations or differences, e.g., what behaviour was acceptable in specific relationship contexts and why? The discursive analysis was developed through asking certain questions of the data (see Appendix 20): What 'objects' are being constructed in this text? How are these objects being used and constructed? For example, is the use of the stereotype of 'women as weak' used to legitimise heterosexual women's victimhood? Is this construction of 'women as weak' used to minimise the harm of women's violence and is this always the case?

**Figure 4.4.** Researcher reflections analysis and awareness of biases.

In an effort to recognise my own biases during analysis I did the following. When starting analysis, I evidenced each point with quotes from the transcripts. This was checked by my supervisory team who drew my attention to any points that were unclear or seemed misinterpreted.

A difficulty of the analysis was considering young people's constructions of IPV and unhealthy relationships. Initially, I conducted the analysis labelling all behaviours young people discussed that I had deemed unhealthy/ unacceptable as 'IPV', 'abuse' or 'unhealthy'. However, my supervisors highlighted these terms should *only* be used when constructed as so by participants. There were cases where behaviour was explicitly identified as abusive, however in most cases it was labelled 'unhealthy' or 'not okay'. I relied on the raw data, looking back at the transcripts, to consider the ways behaviours were described and situated. In this way, I ensured I was orientated to participant's understanding and the new problems that emerged (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This allowed me to stay faithful to young people's perspectives whilst also drawing conclusions which were congruent with my knowledge and characterisation of IPV as an adult, feminist woman.

Analysis also asked what was at stake in these situations and which people were empowered/privileged, or disempowered/undermined by such constructions? For example, were *all* women disempowered by constructions of 'women as weak' and 'men as strong'? Which women were not undermined by such constructions? These questions did not just focus on gender and sexual orientation but other factors. For example, as part of the Trust and Fidelity and the Duty and Obligation contacts, the analysis progressed by asking questions such as: Which help-seekers accounts were

privileged? What were the characteristics of a trustworthy help-seeker/partner? What type of person was more blameworthy, and why?

Attention was paid also to how talk could have been done differently and what was not happening within the data. From here the researcher considered what assumptions needed to be in place for talk to be made unproblematic. For example, if relationships are viewed as a *human experience*, regardless of gender/sexual orientation, the same rules and expectations can be applied to all types of relationships. In contrast, if a heteronormative approach is assumed in making sense of relationships, same-sex relationships could be positioned as *different* or *other*.

The researcher reflected on the dominant themes and categories within the data to determine the relevance, potentially, of developmental stage as represented by the different age groups of the participants. Hence, questions were asked such as: Is this theme as pertinent for all age groups? Are the Social Contracts constructed differently depending on the age of the participant? The significance of participant age group to the structure of the analysis varied. In some cases, such as the Trust and Fidelity contract, age differences broadly mirrored two dominant arguments around one's entitlement to privacy and hypervigilance – or not – to infidelity. Here, age difference was prominent in the analysis: that is, the analysis was split in two parts to explore how different aspects of the Trust and Fidelity contract were foregrounded depending on participant age. In other cases, such as the Love and Happiness contract, participant age made little difference to sense-making so participant age did not affect the structure of the analysis.

It was agreed by Study 2 that the analysis would not be conducted by vignette as young people's talk was fluid across the different scenarios. The issues, rationale and arguments young people drew on to make sense of relationships were often applied to

all vignettes. For example, constructions of 'women as weak' were used across all vignettes - even the gay male scenario - as a way of legitimising women's victimhood and men's potential for causing harm. Thus, it seemed more appropriate for the analysis to focus on Social Contracts and the broad arguments within these, rather than be structured by the vignettes.

However, the researcher paid attention to the ways main characters were constructed differently, and held to different expectations, based on their gender and sexual orientation. Due to the recurrent differences here, differences were noted throughout the stages of analysis. Each Social Contract highlights the distinctions within themes and categories around gender and sexual orientation. The size and significance of these differences varied. In some cases, such as the Love and Happiness contract, these differences were themes on their own, in others they were categories within themes, or nuances within categories.

Once the Social Contracts were planned, the researcher chose to present them in the following order: Love and Happiness contract, Trust and Fidelity contract, and Duty and Obligation contract. The Love and Happiness contract was chosen to be first due to its broadness. Split into three sub-chapters the Love and Happiness contract incorporated different aspects of young people's sense-making such as: (i) rules around love and happiness and these constructions in relation to IPV and gender; (ii) constructions of rough patches and young people's differentiation of an unhealthy but worthwhile relationship, from an abusive one; and (iii) complexities around *how* useful, or not, the Love and Happiness contract may be in distinguishing a healthy relationship from an unhealthy or abusive relationships and how love can be used to coerce one's partner. The Love and Happiness contract also outlined the gendered and heteronormative frame apparent in young people's sense making of relationships, and considered issues mostly from the potential victim's perspective.



The Trust and Fidelity contract was presented second as it established young people's relationships in a broader context of insecurity and concerns about infidelity. This chapter discussed the lack of privacy young people could face in their relationships from their partner, varying constructions of such behaviours as abusive, unhealthy or healthy, and how young people negotiated this.

The Duty and Obligation contract was selected as the final chapter because it drew on aspects of the other two contracts. This Duty and Obligation contract drew heavily on the public vs. private facets of relationships. Unlike the other contracts, the Duty and Obligation contract drew outsiders *into* the contractual agreement in how they should help and support help-seekers experiencing IPV.

Each analysis draft was checked by the supervisory team, re-drafted, and checked again with the cycle repeated numerous times until a detailed and polished analysis was produced for each Social Contract.

## Chapter 5: Social Contracts

Social Contracts were used by young people to make sense of relationships and IPV. In this chapter I will briefly outline Social Contract Theory noting its origins, the sexual contract and research that draw relevance of Social Contracts to young people lives and relationships today.

Social Contract Theory originates from the philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes in the 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the time of these philosophers Social Contract Theory served to legitimize government, to rationalise why 'man' would agree to be governed. Although the specifics of classic Social Contract Theory vary by philosopher, the central argument is that within 'modern society' 'man' tacitly agrees to the institution of government and adheres to its laws and moral conventions in return for the safety, security and rights.

Without the Social Contract, it was argued 'man' would return to the 'State of Nature'. The State of nature is 'a relational concept describing a particular set of moral relations that exist between particular people' (Simmons, in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016) where one has unlimited freedom to act as one wishes to meet primal needs. Although this may offer the individual many desirable freedoms, the downside is that others are also able to act as they please:

"What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is civil liberty and the proprietorship of all he possesses. [...] It is in order not to become victim of an assassin that we consent to die if we become assassins." Rousseau (1762, p. 108)

Simply put, it was argued that within the State of Nature individuals have no self-discipline or consideration of the wider good and no organised social sanctions in place to protect the vulnerable, thus as easily as one could be exploit or steal one could have such things enacted against them. The Social Contract indexes an implicit

agreement for individuals to submit to government or other wider social authority that impose a moral order. Thus, despite removing some individual freedoms the subjection of Social Contract allowed individuals look beyond immediate gratification to consider the wider social context of their actions and contribute to the greater good of society. Rousseau argued that this made individuals more autonomous and human.

### **5.1 The Marriage Contract**

Carole Pateman (1988) criticizes traditional Social Contract theorists. Taking a feminist perspective, Pateman argues that traditional Social Contract Theory overlooks the private realm and the 'patriarchal right' in which men have rights over women – specifically a husband over his wife and a father over his daughter - which she terms the 'patriarchal social order' (p. 1). Pateman outlines that the *fraternal patriarchy* subordinates women to men as a collective group as part of a 'fraternal pact'. She describes the fraternal pact as the way in which men through birth-right gain access to women's bodies, and give other men access to women's bodies. That is, the oppression of women is not merely to the patriarchal political practice. Pateman argues that the 'male principle' unites men in their subjugation of women. For example, a woman as the property of her father and then husband and historically disavowed her from owning property in her own right.

In her book *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman outlines how rights to property oppressed women in the Marriage Contract. Pateman re-theorises the Social Contract in, what she terms a 'story of freedom', as the *Sexual Contract* which she describes as a 'story of subjection' (p. 2). Pateman's work draws into focus how Social Contracts also apply to romantic relationships. She outlines the interface between the two seemingly opposite realms of (a) romance and intimacy and (b) the law and wider social and moral codes.

### 5.1.1 Principle of social association

Pateman (2002) outlines that the Social Contract does not refer to policies or doctrines but is a 'principle of social association' (p. 5). Pateman's work outlines the idea of 'property in the person' (2002 p. 26), that ideas of property in Locke's theory of the social contract were broad including rights, liberties, and powers and in some cases, could not be separated from a person. Miriam's (2007) description of Pateman's theory of social contracts and property allow us to begin to consider how these could be relevant to personal romantic relationships:

'As an owner of property in the person, an individual's freedom comes to mean her or his ability to control that property. As a principle of social association, the social/sexual contract thus structures those relations through which one party can *legitimately* use another party's property in their person, including her or his body and capacities, without, in principle, violating the latter party's basic freedom [...]. As owner of property in one's person, the individual is constructed as 'free' to trade or sell his or her capacities through contract relation in exchange for some benefit.' (p. 220)

In this way, intimate relationships could be constructed as an exchange of property - for example one's capacity to love, to support their partner or enact intimacy - between two individuals in a romantic relationship. Miriam outlines that this exchange is often for mutual benefit, this was characteristic of the social contracts outlined by young people in the present study, for example 'I will love you and make you happy if you love me and make me happy'.

### 5.1.2 IPV

Consent is another concept drawn upon by Pateman around the Sexual Contract.<sup>39</sup> Traditional Social Contract theorists present the case that people have the capacity and freedom to withdraw from the Social Contract at any time. Pateman refutes this,

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<sup>39</sup> I draw on this example as this seems most readily accessible example of the role of Social Contracts in young people's sense making of relationships, there is other research on heteronormativity and sexual orientation however it is felt this research is too cumbersome to cover in this brief chapter. Such research is noted in Chapter 9.

arguing that women, due to their subordination, do not possess equal rights to men and so cannot consent. For example, feminists argue that social institutions can dismiss women's experiences and restrict prospects and opportunities of genuine choice, consent and citizenship for women (Drakopoulou, 2007; Franzway, 2016).

Traditionally the marital contract presented women as the property of men through the 'divine authority of the patriarch' (Rose, 2015 p. 35). It is argued that women's subordination as outlined in Chapter 1, limits the options of women experiencing IPV, historical and in present day (Rose, 2015). DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993) drew on Social Contracts in relation to IPV. They looked at the correlation between familial patriarchal attitudes in men and men's perpetrations of IPV. Familial patriarchal attitudes were defined by as:

'a discourse which supports the abuse of women who violate the ideals of male power and control over women in intimate relationships [...] and an insistence upon women's obedience, respect, loyalty, dependency, sexual access, and sexual fidelity (p. 26).

Other research by DeKeseredy (2007 cited in DeKeseredy et al., 2007) found perpetration of IPV by unemployed men was away to exert power within the household to compensate for their lack of economic power. In these ways, the Sexual Contract can inform us about IPV. However, there is little research that uses the Sexual Contract or Social contracts to make sense of IPV in young people's relationships.

### **5.1.3 Justifications for using term 'Social Contract'**

The term Social Contract, as opposed to Marriage Contract or Sexual Contract, is used throughout this thesis. It was felt focus on the Marriage Contract or the Sexual Contract was too narrow for this analysis, as I will briefly outline.

First, the significance of marriage and the marriage contract are becoming less relevant. In Europe and North America, the significance of marriage has changed overtime, with fewer people getting married and marriage happening later in life (Berrington, Perelli-Harris & Trevenna, 2015; Gross-bard & Shechtman, 1985; Lundberg & Pollack, 2015). The gendered contexts of relationships are also changing (Lewis & Cooper, 1999), with 'gender revolution' narratives becoming prevalent around increased autonomy of women and the resulting transformation of relationships and family life (Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegard, 2015).

In the UK today, commitment to one's partner can be demonstrated in ways other than marriage: e.g., in co-habiting, joint mortgages and child-bearing. Marriage can be considered more a symbolic event with a less pragmatic function (Berrington, Perelli-Harris & Trevena, 2015). This research suggest the Marital Contract is less relevant to young people's lives and this was reflected in participants responses<sup>40</sup>.

Second, in *The Sexual Contract 30 years on: A conversation with Carole Patman* (Thompson et al., 2018), Pateman's core argument is that: '[e]ven the best societies are still structured so that somehow men monopolise all the top positions, they get all the power' (Thompson et al, 2018 p. 11). Although this perspective highlights the need to consider gendered dimensions within political theory and citizenship (e.g. employment and sexual harassment; see also Arnot, Araujo, Deliyanni & Ivinson, 2000). This perspective does not seem to account for women's perpetration of IPV. This is problematic for this research as a key part of young people's sense making of

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<sup>40</sup> In some discussions, young people drew on the marital contract, for example to justify objections to use of physical violence in a relationship (see Chapter 8 Duty and Obligation). However, when the marriage contract was drawn upon young people constructed it as irrelevant to their relationships

IPV focused on men's forgotten rights<sup>41</sup>. Thus, although Pateman's work is useful to this analysis, the analysis uses the broader term of 'Social Contracts' rather than focusing the analysis on marital contracts or the sexual contract.

## 5.2 Introduction to analysis

The following analysis chapters demonstrate the ways in which young people employ Social Contracts to make sense of relationships and incorporate rules and expectations into their understandings of romantic and sexual relationships. Young people drew upon three broad forms of Social Contracts I have called: Love and Happiness, Trust and Fidelity, and Duty and Obligation. They did so with varying levels of awareness and reflection but always in complex and thoughtful ways. The Social Contracts I identify as infusing my participants sense-making around their romantic relationships, provided young people with set rules around relationships, but these were flexible and at times raised problems and conflicts of interpretation and values. As I will show, the participants in this study were articulate in their struggle to describe what they wanted from their relationships and how they viewed the relationships of other young people and employed identifiable set of value-infused discourses to do so, theorised in my work as modes of Social Contracts.

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<sup>41</sup> Notably, I go on to focus on women's subordination and men's power when discussing consent and heteronormative frame however, it remains important to have space to construct men's victimhood in relation to social contracts.

## Chapter 6a: Love and Happiness Contract

*I will love you and make you happy and you will love me and make me happy*

Young people's attempts to make sense of ambiguous relationship behaviours drew heavily upon ideologies around what good, healthy relationships look like. Young people attempted to work out what portfolios of behaviour would still render a relationship 'healthy'. Their talk invoked one predominant marker for a healthy relationship - that it should be characterised primarily by having experiences of love and happiness. This marker referred to whether one feels happy and loved, rather than the intention to create these experiences for one's partner. In these ways, young people oriented to understanding relationships as being based on a contractual agreement that "I will love you and make you happy and you will love me and make me happy".

This assumed contract offered young people one way of deciding whether some relationship behaviours were healthy (i.e. that they were grounded in love and led to happiness). Although this contract proved helpful for some deliberations, it was not always easily applied, and several grey areas emerged which appeared difficult to resolve: When might the absence of love and happiness be a normal 'Rough Patch'? When might troubled parts of a relationship outweigh the love and happiness benefits? How well can outsiders judge the love and happiness status of a relationship and therefore be trusted help-givers?

This chapter explores participants' assumptions about, and use of, a 'Love and Happiness' contract with particular attention to:



(a) Behaviours that were deemed to: characterise love and happiness; be contract breaking; and / or raise questions about whether apparent contract breaking might ever be 'worth it'; and how contractual terms could vary by gender or sexual orientation.

(b) How love could be separated from happiness in making sense of healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, how this appeared to change with age, and particularly how the separation of love and happiness impacted talk about whether troubles were 'worth it'. Deliberations around this issue gave rise to talk about Rough Patches, which generated both solutions and new problems in making sense of relationships.

(c) Limitations of the Love and Happiness contract in making sense of relationship behaviours (e.g. when a 'victim' might be deemed delusional or biased, love as a confusing factor, love as a means of manipulation). Speakers also discussed the role of outsiders, constructions of the situation as complex and the rationality, or irrationality, of the Rough Patch Diagnosis.

These topics are covered in the three sections of chapter 6 (6a, 6b, 6c, respectively). I will conclude by considering how the use of an assumed Love and Happiness contract appeared to both help and problematise young people's sense-making around relationships and help-seeking. Instances where sense-making varied depending on the gender or sexual orientation of the vignette protagonist and age of the speakers are discussed throughout.

### 6a.1 Behaviours characterising the Love and Happiness Contract

Ideals of healthy relationships were foundational in how young people began to make sense of potentially problematic relationship behaviours. They looked for behaviours, which characterised a Love and Happiness contract. Behaviours deemed to be consistent with the contractual agreement of Love and Happiness were:

- **appropriate displays of affection/love**

“if he’s affectionate that’s fine but everything else is not really” (Jon, 15-16, M, Sch A);

“you should treat her better [...] maybe if you took her out and showed you loved her more” (17-18, M, Sch A);

“most of the time you want to give compliments to your partner instead of just bringing them down” (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B);

“emotional affection”, “it’s like complimenting her, or she’s complimenting you and it doesn’t have to be hugging and kissing [...] the odd kiss or the odd hug or something like that, that is something that you can do every day” (17-18, M, Sch B);

“Well yeah, not affectionate to the extent where you’re constantly hugging each other but to the extent where you’re not hitting each other and arguing” (17-18, M, Sch B).

- **having fun**

“it’s just abuse isn’t it it’s not fun” (Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A).

- **feeling happy**

“she says she usually feels happy with him, that shouldn’t be the case really it should be all the time she should enjoy every moment she spends with him” (Stan, 15-16, M, Sch A);

“I think he’s definitely behaving badly ‘cos he’s messing with her emotions and like in a relationship he should be looking after her and making sure she’s happy” (Jenny, 18-21 F, Undergraduate);

“The whole idea of being in a relationship is it’s for both of them to be happy” (Elijah, 15-16, M, Sch A);

“when you love someone, you try and make them... feel good” (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B);

“if it doesn’t feel right just end the relationship because you shouldn’t be in one that’s making you upset.” (15-16, F, Sch B).

- **care and support by, and to, one's partner**

“if he actually like loved her then he'd accept that she'd want to talk [...] in a relationship they should be supportive” (Sophie, 15-16, F, Sch A);

“give them constructive criticism”; “when you love someone you try and make them... feel good” (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B);

“you can speak to them all the time and be communicative and even listen to them and understanding, that can be considered affectionate as well” (17-18, M, Sch B);

“if they could sort it and like if one of them didn't care then well there's no point, like leave” (15-16, F, Sch B).

- **and the ability to trust, and be trusted by, one's partner**

“Again trust, relationships based on trust and everything”, (Elijah, 15-16, M, Sch A);

“she's not exactly going to be happy with a relationship [...] where she can't do anything but really spend time with him”; “if they can't do what they want then it's [the relationship] going to become unhappy anyway” (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A);

“If there's no trust or happiness and then you shouldn't really be with them.” (15-16, F, Sch B).

Adherence to the Love and Happiness contract was presented as a two-way exchange. The latter two behaviours (i.e. care and support by one's partner and the ability to trust, and the ability to trust, and be trusted, by one's partner) were also premises of other relationship contracts discussed in Chapter 7 and 8. This cross-over demonstrates the intertwinedness of the Love and Happiness contract to other relationship contracts and its centrality to the relationship as a whole. The premise of the contractual agreement of Love and Happiness was most clearly established through talk around behaviours that challenged, and in some cases, broke, the contractual agreement. That is, it appeared easier for participants to put forward behaviours that were incongruent with Love and Happiness than those that were in keeping with it.

### 6a. 1. 1 Behaviours incongruent with the Love and Happiness Contract

Physical violence, lack of communication, being isolated from others by one's partner, lack of trust, and emotional manipulation were all construed as indicative of relationship unhappiness. In most cases, such behaviours were viewed as unacceptable. In some instances, lack of relationship happiness was taken to indicate an abusive relationship. Speakers proposed that feelings of unhappiness when in a relationship with a partner could be resultant a partner's bad treatment, for example:

“Cos if you're like constantly unhappy with someone then you need to like get with positive people [laughs] and not stay around someone like that, it's better to be on your own and happy than with someone who's abusive and making your life, feel bad about yourself all the time and hurting you.” (Sammy, 17-18, F, Sch B).

Likewise, feelings of unhappiness were understood to be an indicator that the relationship was not okay:

“The fact that he's like shoving her sometimes and if they've been in a relationship for a year then he probably didn't do that before if she's only just starting to feel unhappy” (Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Thus, feelings of unhappiness were viewed as both a product of, and an emotional indicator of, a partner's bad behaviour. With respect to cases of physically violent relationships, participants repeatedly proposed that unhappiness was understandable. In this way, the presence of physical violence (and subsequent unhappiness) was offered as evidence of a breach of the relationship contract agreement: 'you will make me happy'.

In other, albeit fewer instances, affection, or lack of, was also seen as a marker of unacceptable or abusive behaviours when physical violence was highlighted: e.g., *“it's becoming physical and shoving her and it's... if she was admitting that then I would feel like it's not right, it just makes it seem like she's a possession to him and it makes it feel like it's not a relationship but in fact it's just abusive and it's not nothing like a relationship, they don't hug, kiss, whatever, but it could be just one side*

of the story but from what I've seen here they shouldn't be in a relationship, she needs to tell somebody" (17-18, M, Sch B). In this way, speakers oriented to the lack of behaviours congruent with love and happiness alongside contract-breaking behaviours, such as physical violence, to substantiate claims that the behaviours were in breach of the relationship terms of 'you will love me'.

Young people's talk around physical violence was particularly interesting. In all instances, at least in initial discussions in this area, physical violence in relationships was deemed unacceptable and a clear violation of the Love and Happiness contract:

"why would you want to hurt someone you apparently love?" (Anisha, 17-18, F, Sch B);

"it's not nice, you don't treat someone who you love like that and disrespect them by shoving them" (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B).

However, in the older group (18-24), although hitting was most readily treated as an act of violence, shoving was often excused and treated with more lenience:

"I know obviously shoving was still really bad but I feel like that's [hitting] just completely like over the line" (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

"[A]ctually hitting her and stuff is too far. I think, yeah, I think she needs to like go to professional help" (Ceri, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Sarah: I know it sounds bad but I think out of all of these I probably view this [gay male victim] as like the least kind of, dangerous one, I don't know why, I just do [...]

Int: If he said that he'd hit them would you suggest he [gay male] would seek professional...?

Sarah: Yeah, I would at that point, yeah. (18-21, F, Undergraduate).

For the younger groups (15-16 and 17-18), both hitting and shoving were considered unacceptable violence and antithetical to love. Across the age groups, many argued that one would not hit someone that they loved: "*there should be no want to [hit your partner], that thought shouldn't even go through your head, there's no way you could hit the one person that you love really*" (Simon, 17-18, M, Sch A). Across age groups, and scenarios, hitting was deemed to be unequivocal evidence that the relationship contract of 'you will love me' was broken.

In contrast, there were differences in how displays of affection, or lack of, were understood to uphold or breach the relationship contract and these aligned with speaker age. Namely, for younger speakers affectionate behaviours were viewed as largely physical and public (such as kissing and hugging). Similarly, for younger speakers, immediate happiness and fun was prioritised, and hence its absence could indicate problems: *"it's just abuse isn't it, it's not fun"* (Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A). For older speakers (18-24), displays of affection shifted to more caring, communicative, and intimate displays (such as compliments, listening, and talking to one's partner) that fostered an understanding of one's partner on a deeper, psychological level.

To conclude, implicitly young people proposed that a relationship should uphold the contractual agreement of 'I will love you and make you happy and you will love me and make me happy'. It was easier for young people to distinguish behaviours perceived to flout the Love and Happiness contract (i.e. physical violence, lack of affection or love, lack of trust) than those consistent with it. Yet, as demonstrated in this section, apart from declarations of unhappiness and acts of aggression, there were few reliable markers for young people to use in determining whether a relationship was healthy or unhealthy.

A lack of reliable markers suggests intangibility regarding what a 'healthy' relationship is and, arguably, such intangibility is intrinsic to Love and Happiness as a psychological and emotional phenomenon. It is only in comparison to an unhealthy relationship that the contractual terms and breaches (i.e. IPV) come into focus. Such a focus foregrounds the importance of drawing on examples or past experiences in sense-making, yet given the age of speakers, particularly 15-17 year olds, and their assumed lack of relationship experience, one may need to consider the

extent to which they can access appropriate comparisons. What if young people's lack of relationship, and life, experience does not afford accessible relationship comparisons? As this section has shown acceptable displays of affection are not fixed but change with age. This suggests interpretations of affection exceed a clear-cut definition of 'good' or 'bad' behaviours afforded by these markers and require a more complex and flexible approach to sense-making. A more flexible and pragmatic approach to determining a relationship's adherence to the Love and Happiness Contact was taken up in constructions of relationship worth, which will now be discussed.

### **6a. 2 Is it worth it?**

In response to the evasiveness of what it is to have a 'healthy relationship', young people expanded sense-making from markers of a good relationship to a broader decision about relationship 'worth'. Whether a relationship was 'worth it' was deciphered in two ways: (1) identifying the presence of *types* of behaviours which indicated a relationship's diminished worth, and (2) actively *weighing up* worth via a cost-benefit analysis for either partner (although the need to weigh up worth was predominantly discussed in relation to the 'victim'). These two approaches in some cases overlapped.

This section will outline the progression of approach 1 (i.e. focusing on specific behaviours to indicate worth) to approach 2 (a broader overview of behaviours in a cost-benefit analysis and considerations as to whether contractual breaches could be forgiven). I will then go on to discuss the role of gender and sexual orientation in these evaluations of worth exploring arguments that: '*It could be worse*'.

In the first approach, relationship worth was simply determined by the presence of certain behaviours and experiences in a relationship, rather than a dialogue of weighing

up a relationships worth. For example, relationships that manifested *types* of behaviours and experiences such as emotional manipulation, unhappiness, or lack of affection were deemed to have low worth. Happiness was central to relationship worth so much so that one participant asked, '*if you're not happy why are you in the relationship?*' (Claire, 17- 18, F, Sch A).

In many cases, a hyper-romantic construction of the importance of happiness to relationships was employed with happiness proposed as the '*whole idea of being in a relationship*' (Elijah, 15-16, M, Sch A). Young people contended that in a worthwhile relationship one should *always* feel happy when they are with their partner: ("*she says she usually feels happy with him, that shouldn't really be the case really, it should be all the time she should enjoy every moment she spends with him and yeah, I think I agree with Aiden and Elijah, they should get out of it really*") (Stan, 15-16, M, Sch A). In the extract below, the speaker invokes entitlement to happiness, pointing to the assumption that one should always be happy in relationships.

"It's obvious she's not happy with it so she needs to really think what's the point, to say being in the relationship, because she is not feeling happy and they're not talking about anything so it's clear that the relationship is going nowhere." (Male, 17-18, M, Sch B).

Here, citing the absence of happiness and apparent attempts to rectify this, the speaker argues that the relationship has little chance of a future: "*[it's] going nowhere*", and therefore difficulties are not worth bearing: "*what's the point*". Such instances of low relationship worth were offered as strong grounds for leaving the relationship. In this way, speakers argued that providing happiness was a central, if not sole, *purpose* of a relationship. Moreover, happiness was an individual's *right*.

It could be argued that such demands are short sighted, focusing on immediate relationship qualities and expectations (i.e. immediate and constant happiness) without considering longer-term investments and hardships. This likely reflects



speaker age mostly 15-18, of whom many characterised relationships in their age group as short term (e.g. couple of weeks or months), a relationship lasting a year (as described in the study vignette), although not exceptional, was judged to be uncommon.

In addition to happiness, the presence of behaviours such as hitting, shoving, being controlling and experiences of manipulation and coercion, were deemed to depreciate a relationship's 'worth' more than other behaviours (i.e. jealousy and arguments). Although 'worth' was not explicitly stated, the detriment of these experiences to relationship worth was signaled through:

**(a) assertions of the behaviours unacceptability:**

"He's obviously very controlling and violent as well in some cases so yeah, it's definitely not okay." (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

"I think it's really weird that she's being a bit controlling over him, like again, just really weird, it's really wrong. And also, obviously the shoving's wrong as well." (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

"I think it is completely justified as well again [that the heterosexual male victim is feeling unhappy]. I think more so though with the controlling aspect again, I think that's just more, I don't know, I don't know why, I just rate it as worse" (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

**(b) and/or a need to leave the relationship:**

"I think it's mainly the controlling thing I don't like, like the whole, he can't spend time with his friends that I think just, I don't know, it's just weird, I think it's just like, not right relationship, he should just kind of like leave it." (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

These suggested that the relationship was no longer worth sustaining. Thus, like the previous section both happiness and a lack of physical violence were important in determining whether a relationship was good and/or worth it. Although helpful, this first approach was quite simplistic. In some relationships, such as the vignette scenario, simply identifying worthy or unworthy behaviours through the presence of physical violence or happiness was insufficient for an overall judgement of worth where

both factors were present (i.e. if someone were experiencing physical violence but also felt happy). As such a second approach to determining relationship worth was used also employed which proposed thresholds of these factors, which I will now discuss

The second way of assessing relationship worth was a more flexible tool. Here the response to troubling experiences was to ask: 'is the relationship, and the accompanying hardship, worth it?'; 'Could one 'keep going' and or forgive the behaviour?'. Communication was advised as a means of answering such questions: "*Probably suggest keep going and just talk and just see whether like it's worth it kind of thing*" (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Previously drawn lines about the unacceptability of unhappiness or the presence of aggression were blurred and it was deemed necessary to *weigh up* a relationship's worth to assess whether some behaviours were redeeming or could be forgiven:

"there's still like affection [...], it kind of shows that nothing would be like that bad, 'cos when relationships get really bad obviously you get to the point where you don't want to have sex or you don't want to kiss someone anymore, just kind of avoid each other, like marriages when they go really bad, but these are all still like happy and affectionate so like I think it's still good." (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

This way of determining relationship worth took a broader view whereby all facets of the relationship were considered. If a relationship had many positive (or negative) aspects it was judged as more (or less) worthwhile and the problematic behaviours could be overlooked: "*[I] f [after talking] they both feel happy then it might eliminate the bad times, but if in the end it didn't then I don't think it would be worth it*" (Jenny, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). This understanding of worth considered multiple factors such as communication, happiness, future relationship prospects, some of which made up the Love and Happiness contract, as shown by the following male speaker<sup>42</sup>:

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<sup>42</sup> In some focus groups, it was hard to differentiate speakers. Thus not all speakers were assigned a pseudonym.

“It’s obvious she’s not happy with it so she needs to really think what’s the point, so say being in the relationship, because she is not feeling happy and they’re not talking about anything so it’s clear that the relationship is going nowhere.” (17-18, M, Sch B).

As below, worth was actively weighed up, *types* of behaviours had different impacts on worth and physical violence remained a severe breach:

“Yeah. I think that’s [hitting is] like that’s too far. Like I know obviously shoving was still really bad but I feel like that’s just completely like over the line and she should definitely just finish it there. Like even if she’s happy some of the time that’s just, it’s not right now, that’s just it.” (Sarah 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, Sarah orients to the fact that the ‘victim’ may be happy, so the Love and Happiness contract may be partly upheld, but she quickly declares that the act of hitting undermines the merit of occasional happiness. Thus, acts of aggression were again easily and readily utilised as ‘lines in the sand’, which rendered a relationship ‘not worth it’, even if there were happy times. This highlights a difficulty for speakers in using individual’s assertion of love and happiness as evidence of the Love and Happiness contract being upheld when physical violence, an apparently clear breach of the contract, is also apparent.

Physical violence was a primary indicator of an unhealthy relationship the costs of which were deemed to exceed any benefits of happiness or love. Megan attested: “*even if she’s happy some of the time it’s not worth getting like physically hurt or, abused*” (18-21, F, Undergraduate) and Olivia expressed similar sentiments for a male victim:

“he should leave her if she’s started hitting him because it’s not a healthy relationship and, um, he’s obviously not happy. He says he’s happy some of the time, well usually but, it’s not worth it if you’re really unhappy when she’s hitting you.” (Olivia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Further, Jeremy argued that the victim was worth more than to stay with their partner:

“stay with somebody who doesn’t appreciate her properly” and so should “find somebody else [...] I’d tell her that she has a lot more worth than having to stay with somebody who doesn’t appreciate her properly, and as soon as anybody starts to hit you or starts to attack you, not just emotionally but physically, then it’s definitely time to find somebody else”. (18-21, M, Undergraduate)

Jeremy's example presents relationship 'worth' as incorporating an individual's 'personal worth' which includes wellbeing and longer-term happiness. Aligning 'worth' with personal welfare substantiated arguments that physical violence and the detriment to worth that it posed (relationship worth and personal worth) was more important than experiences happiness. Speakers' foregrounding of physical violence over happiness was further underscored by the positioning of the victims' happiness as inauthentic (see Chapter 6c for further exploration of this).

It is worth commenting here about speakers' repeatedly uncritical employment of physical violence as evidence of low relationship worth. That is, throughout the data physical violence was considered a primary indicator of poor relationship worth through portrayals of physical violence as an unnecessary and unsustainable way to solve relationship problems (unlike talking). This position was upheld by arguments that physical violence was likely to involve serious risks and danger, for example:

"I think there's much more of a risk of her getting like quite badly hurt now and obviously it's really wrong of him to use violence towards her, like whatever their issues are" (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

and to escalate in severity:

"[I]t's just not safe to sort of stay with him because it [the physical violence], could just keep getting worse and carry on" (Kate, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Moreover, physical violence was seen as *evidence* of a contractual breach:

Int: before when you said you don't think that she should seek help, why do you not think that she should seek help?

Jessica: Because the whole situation is a bit trivial maybe and like unless you're actually being given black eyes and being really threatened, like you're afraid and like you feel trapped kind of, I think physically wise you shouldn't really seek help" (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

"I'd only actively interfere if she was being beaten essentially, if my friend was being actually beaten up, then only if I had proper evidence for that" (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate)

Thus, foregrounding physically violent behaviours over statements of happiness allowed speakers to evidence an objective contractual breach and, hence, a low worth relationship even despite the presence of positive behaviours. As mentioned above, this type of talk raised the potential for victim's accounts to be construed as unreliable: a point I will explore further in the final section in this chapter Duty and Obligation Contract Help-Seeking Stage 1b. That said physical violence was not always considered to take precedence over assertions of happiness, specifically when 'non-traditional victims' were considered (i.e. gay men, gay women, and heterosexual men). I will discuss this in more detail in the next section: '*it could be worse*'.

Relationship worth was diminished by other behaviours but these were often argued to be less serious and more forgivable than physical violence. For example, below, Tom proposed jealousy in a relationship to be a sign that things may be "*starting to get toxic*" but "*not overly heinous*":

"[H]e's just getting jealous for the sake of getting jealous and just invading her privacy on that level it's starting to get toxic. I wouldn't necessarily say that would be an end to the relationship because it's not overly heinous but it's not good" (Tom, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

Here, Tom suggested that jealousy, whilst potentially destructive, still indicates the person values the relationship and that there is no overt attempt to cause direct harm – unlike in acts of physical aggression – and thus it is still worth continuing the relationship. Like jealousy, arguments were proposed as a normal and understandable aspect of relationships and so more forgivable than physical violence.

Speakers drew upon shared assumptions of how relationships work, and that arguments did not necessarily contravene the Love and Happiness contract – which now extended to be founded on principles of forgiveness. Tom explained that "*You feel*

*anger towards each other obviously if you are in an argument"* (18-24, M, MD). Jon elaborated that arguments that become physical constitute an unforgivable breach:

"You're always meant to have arguments [...] that's part and parcel of it, every relationship, it happens all the time and so we can forgive him for that I suppose but not hitting, and shoving" (Jon, 15-16, M, Sch A).

Thus, one way in which a relationship could be evaluated as 'worth it' or not, was to identify the presence and nature of particular behaviours. While many problematic relationship experiences were considered unwelcome, most were deemed to be normative, and indicative of attachment and intimacy (e.g. understanding, forgiveness). However, acts of physical aggression remained the clear line in the sand that love had been breached, and so the relationship was not worth it.

In summary happiness was central to relationships, portrayed as the purpose of a relationship, a right, and key to determining a relationship's worth. However, focus on happiness alone limited sense-making and a constant need for relationship happiness seemed to ignore longer-term relationship investments and struggles. Speakers focus on happiness raised the potential for a relationship to be constructed as worthwhile despite problematic behaviours, yet in many cases this approach was used to dismiss happiness as a sole reason to stay in a relationship.

The importance of happiness to relationship worth was secondary to the potential costs of physical violence. Physical violence in many cases was presented as an unacceptable behaviour that evidenced an unhealthy relationship. Objections of physical violence made the assertion that the relationship was upholding the contract 'I will make you happy' despite physical violence a difficult position for speakers. In response to this it was argued that the effect of physical violence on relationship worth overruled any benefits that happiness offered. Yet, as mentioned above, physical violence was not always deemed abhorrent and, in many cases, the gender and sexual

orientation of the 'victim' affected how costly instances of physical violence were to relationship worth, as I will now discuss.

### **6a. 2. 1 Is it worth it? 'It could be worse'**

So far, the analysis has suggested that in several cases physical violence was a clear and definitive sign that a relationship was unhealthy: that the Love and Happiness Contract had been breached. In these instances, speakers generally based these arguments on the unacceptability of a man's violence against a female partner and they utilised this, both implicitly and explicitly, as the template against which all other 'types' of relationships were compared.

However, using this as the referent model for unacceptable violence led to some different outcomes when the gender or sexual orientation of the protagonist or victim was altered. Such talk placed the situation in a gendered and/or Heteronormative Frame, as this section will discuss. Specifically, when deciphering the worth of a heterosexual relationship with implicated abuse by a woman towards her male partner a Gendered Frame was used, or in a potentially abusive same-sex relationship a Heteronormative Frame was used. This constructed the breach of the contractual agreement as not as bad, or having '*could be worse*', in comparison to a man's violence towards a woman.

That is, the impact of physical violence on a relationship's worth was worked up differently depending on the gender and sexual orientation of those involved. It was often proposed that problematic behaviours in relationships other than the heterosexual template did not damage a relationship's worth as much and, in some cases, there was deemed to be no breach of the Love and Happiness contract (i.e., 'it could be worse', 'equal fight' see below). I will now discuss the differences in

assessments of worth and contractual breaches in relation to gender and sexual orientation.

### **6a. 3 The Gendered Frame: How gender changes the impact of actions**

Talk around the unacceptability of physical violence also considered the significance of gender and sexual orientation, but here the ‘hitting criteria’ as a breach of the Love and Happiness contract appeared more complicated. This was largely because understanding as to what constituted physical violence was gendered. This gendering was used to judge the significance of the act, and its potential harm to the relationship, placing the situation in a Gendered Frame. I will outline the ways gender was used to illegitimise - and legitimise - the victim status of heterosexual men. I will then go on to outline how speakers employed a genderless position of ‘abuse is abuse’ to argue for genderless terms to the relationship contract which legitimised victims of ‘non-traditional’ violence (i.e., violence in same-sex relationships and women’s violence against men).

A man’s violence against a woman was used as the template of abusive relationships and deemed unacceptable because of the potential for significant bodily harm:

“Girls are just seen as being more kind of... they can’t really defend themselves as well, just not as strong, there’s loads of things like that, if it was in a situation and it was just them two you’d be more worried if like no-one could see what was going on, that he could really hurt her” (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

In contrast, a woman’s violence towards a man was deemed less significant because the risk of physical injury to a man would likely be lower:

“Yeah, and it’d hurt and I think it’d hurt a girl more than it’d hurt a boy, not... like physically and like emotionally a girl would probably be more upset if she got hit compared to a boy” (Sophie, 15-16, F, Sch A);

“when you hear of a woman hitting a man you don’t really think of the man being seriously hurt from it, even though it is still, it’s just as bad but they’re less likely to be hurt from it” (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch A).



This talk placed physical violence in a Gendered Frame and illegitimised heterosexual men's victimisation through arguments that men's physical power would prevent them from being truly vulnerable to physical violence, as outlined by Kate:

"[I]f you look at sort of cases of domestic abuse, yeah a lot of guys do get hit by their wives or girlfriends, but the most deaths, [...] is from a man on a woman, because I'm guessing if it did go the other way, if a woman did want to attack a man, then you know, sort of survival instinct he could most likely stop her" (Kate, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

From this stand point, heterosexual men's experiences of physical violence at the hands of their female partner did not meet the threshold of 'domestic violence/abuse' because the power imbalance inherent in understandings of 'domestic violence/abuse' was not present, or was reversed:

"I think just because, yeah girls are weaker and like I think we hear so often about domestic violence against women, like we're kind of more stereotyped against it I suppose, like kind of think it's more bad than, a woman to a man." (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

This talk placed the construct of domestic abuse/violence within a Gendered Frame in which (heterosexual) women's victimisation was deemed worse than (heterosexual) men's. In many instances, predominantly amongst older speakers (18-24), the Gendered Frame rendered heterosexual men's experiences of physical violence as not as *bad* compared to heterosexual women's experiences:

"a girl like can't do as much damage as a boy so it's not as threatening, it's not as worrying" (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate);

"I think if one of my friends was like, "Oh I hit my boyfriend last night, not like hurt them," but you'd probably like laugh and just say, "Oh what's he done now," but if they turned around to me and said, "Oh Michael hit me last night," I'd be like, "Oh my god," like I'd be so shocked and I'd be worried, it's just different." (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

In some cases, heterosexual men's experiences of violence were seen as the *least* severe relationship scenario, i.e. less severe than abusive behaviours in same-sex relationships: "[I]f it's like, a bigger guy [perpetrating physical violence] than [the gay male victim], like it's worse [than a female perpetrator], because they're guys." (Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). These arguments drew on gendered ideas that male perpetrators possessed a propensity for violence and inflicting physical harm that female perpetrators did not possess.

A significant justification for normalising women's physical violence against men was that men were familiar with physical violence so much so that it was a means of communication. For example, Kate said:

"sometimes a girl gets so angry with a boy that they're not listening and you can't get through to them and it's like just easier to just shove and obviously boys doing that to a girl is really bad 'cos they're so strong [laughs], but yeah girls shouldn't push each other." (18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Here physical violence is assumed to be a masculine trait that women sometimes *should* employ to communicate more effectively with men and with harmless outcomes. In this way, within the Gendered Frame, arguments around aggression and risk were built-up utilising stereotypes of women as (in general) physically weak and men as (in general) physically strong.

An implication of using the Gendered Frame was that it undermined any argument that women's physical violence against men was a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract and, hence, did not depreciate relationship worth as much in comparison to the same behaviours being enacted by a man against a woman.

The Gendered Frame also utilised assessments of gendered power, which were generalised to all potentially unacceptable behaviours (e.g. emotional abuse, arguments, peer pressure etc.) not just physical violence. For example, in the following

quote, the three female speakers undermine the potential for a man to be a victim of emotional abuse at the hands of his female partner, and go on to suggest that he should rise up and restore the relationship's functionality:

Jessica: Just the fact that it's like a girl, like shouting, just seems he should... like stand up for himself maybe.

Sonia: Man up.

Jenny: Yeah.

Sonia: And take the dominant role...

Jessica: Definitely.

Sonia: ...and maybe if he did that she wouldn't be as... she wouldn't feel she had as much control and probably sort out the problems if he actually took some control of the relationship.

(Jessica, Jenny & Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

The speakers suggested that "a girl" "shouting" is not sufficient to constitute a problem, with the term "a girl" – not a woman - implying the lack of power afforded to the potential perpetrator. Rather, the relationship problem is assigned to the man's failure to adhere to his gender role, according to which he should "stand up for himself", "man up", "take the dominant role" and take control of the relationship. Without this dominance, the speakers suggested that a dangerous vacuum was created in which the female attempted to assert her dominance: that "*maybe if he did that she wouldn't be as [...] much in control*".

Here, the man's experience of relationship problems and potential abuse could be delegitimised. Further, the man was also held accountable for both the relationship's problems and solutions – all premised on gendered relationship roles and responsibilities within the Gendered Frame.

Interestingly, as demonstrated earlier in the analysis, issues relevant to the question 'is it worth it?' become 'what should he do about it?'. Notably, focus on how the heterosexual male 'victim' should resolve the undesirable behaviours was echoed in speaker's advice for victims to talk to their partner, irrespective of gender and sexual orientation (see Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation Contract,).

In contrast to advice to talk, there was often a strong, explicit, assumption that heterosexual men were accountable for the problematic relationship behaviours enacted against them: an assumption not found in talk about heterosexual female victims (other than in cases of infidelity which was indiscriminate of gender, see Chapter 7: Trust and Fidelity Contract). As such, breaches of the Love and Happiness Contract and their effect on relationship worth were not the same for everyone but are gendered, highlighting the Gendered Frame employed in young people's talk.

Within the Gendered Frame, aggression by a female perpetrator towards a male is not a 'clear line in the sand' and did not always definitively mark a relationship as abusive or 'not worth it'. Furthermore, the above extract shows how failure to adhere to gender roles can be constructed as a failure to uphold conditions of the relationship contract. In some cases, speakers went so far as to say that the only thing that should change in the relationship was the man's attitude: "*I think he should just, there's no help that he needs, he just needs to like toughen up really*" (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Thus, heterosexual women's potentially abusive or violent behaviours were normalised, in keeping with the contractual terms and deemed not to depreciate relationship worth. Subsequently, within the Gendered Frame perceived failures to uphold gender ideals render behaviours, which in other circumstances would be deemed to be a breach of the contract, permissible and less detrimental to relationship worth. As demonstrated in the extract, this could result in victim blaming. In this way, use of the Gendered Frame in sense-making of heterosexual relationships, meant that men and women were considered to have

different contractual terms, and claims to victimhood whereby heterosexual men risked them having their masculinity called into question.

However, not all talk of women's violence and abuse against men blamed or illegitimised male 'victims'. Consideration of the emotional impact of violence constructed men as equally vulnerable to harm in relationships as women and, in this way, reinstated the potential for the Love and Happiness Contract to be broken in ways that were the same for everyone. For example, in the next extract, the two male interviewees appealed to the constructions of 'abuse' to explore how physical violence may, indeed, have the potential to cause significant harm to a man, just as it would for a woman. In doing so, they raise the issue of the emotional impact of physical violence:

Graham: I think that it would be exactly the same. I think the issue is not that it's physical, it's the emotional kind of impact it has as well, maybe perhaps more this one [V2 heterosexual male protagonist] with, you know, men being built a little bit sturdier and what-not but...

Tom: I think it's...

Graham: ...apart from that [the physical difference between women and men] then, yeah, abuse is abuse isn't it?

Tom: Yeah.

Int: So you think maybe because it's [the potential victim] a man he's more likely to be a bit stronger, certainly less...

Graham: Yeah, possibly [because the potential victim is a man he's likely to be a bit stronger], yeah.

Tom: Possibly [because the potential victim is a man he's likely to be a bit stronger], again most of the damage, at least until you get to the point of really bad abuse like down the stairs or something like that, most of it, it's... It is the emotional aspect of it, it's him saying I'm worried she'll do it again.

(Tom and Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

Here, although men were contended to be at lower risk of physical harm, they were still deemed vulnerable to *emotional* harm from physical violence. Female participants also expressed this. Kate weighed-up the risk of physical vs. emotional harm: "*the psychological factors are probably, more of an issue than the physical one would be because she probably, in most cases, wouldn't be able to do as much damage to*

*him*" (18-21, F, Undergraduate) and Cara concluded that rendering someone insecure was indeed a significant form of harm:

"I'm debating whether the psychological factors are worse just because, like although he'd like shoving him is still really bad, she probably won't be able to do as much damage as like he would if he was doing it to her but, if she keeps on like chipping away at his confidence it's going to have the same effect, like it's going to make him feel really insecure, like really insecure and like not self-confident and it might be worse" (18-21 Female, Undergraduate).

Thus, within the Gendered Frame, despite constructions of 'gendered strength' being upheld, focus on emotional harm was a way to legitimise heterosexual male victims.

In numerous discussions of a heterosexual male experiencing potential violence from a woman, importance was placed on the woman's *intention* to cause harm rather than the *actual* harm or damage caused to the man: "*it's not the threat of being hit because there isn't as much there, it's the intention which is bad, more in this one than in the other ones.*" (Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). This worked to reinstate heterosexual men as legitimate victims by re-establishing acts of violence by heterosexual women as a contractual breach within gendered constraints of men as strong and women as weak and raised the possibility that such behaviours would damage relationship worth.

Through the Gendered Frame, gender differences in harm were upheld based on victim and perpetrator gender. That is harm was constructed as different for men and women in keeping with gender roles, again, gendering the terms of the Love and Happiness contract. Speakers use of the 'gendered strength' argument negated any physical harm to a heterosexual male instead importance was placed on the psychological aspect of male harm, and women's violence:

"it might be a little bit more psychological, the fact that you're a big macho man and all that stuff" (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate);

"I suppose if you're looking at a female you kind of see it more manipulative than abusive. I think of it being more manipulative" (Claire, 17-18, F, Sch A).

Assertions of women's violence incurring greater psychological harm were upheld by constructions of women as Machiavellian, 'sneaky' and 'manipulative' unlike men who were 'straight-forward':

"generally speaking guys are much more straightforward [...] but girls, girls can like, are quite manipulative and can be quite sneaky" (Kate, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Potentially abusive women were argued to weaken men emotionally as they could not do so physically:

"like the worst thing in the world where people say, "you're such a dick" put it on Twitter about someone and then and then if you ask, "was that about me?" it's like "oh my god you're so self-centered" but then it probably was about you anyway" (Mike, 18-21, M, Undergraduate).

In some instances, heterosexual men's subjection to physical violence was construed as a form of victimisation. Here, physical harm incurred by a heterosexual man from his female partner was considered 'evidence' of a contractual breach:

"Like obviously that's, like we were saying if you if there were objects involved or if she, you know, had really caused him, damage or harm then, like it is still bad but I would just assume that, a girl like can't do as much damage as a boy so it's not as threatening, it's not as worrying." (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

"[I]t depends like what it means by hit, like, it sounds I don't know, like if there's like actual bruising and like she's done it really like, she actually has caused harm then it's the same I think but if she just kind of like, I don't know, like, not hit him like really hard, not actually hurt him, and like done it, like I wouldn't view it as bad as, a man doing it to a woman." (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Notably from these examples, affirmation of male victimhood was tempered by assumptions that, due to gender differences, physical injury would be unlikely, only possible with weapons, and would not be as *bad* as a man's physical violence against a woman. Thus, although women's violence against men could inflict harm, and thus depreciate relationship worth, within the Gendered Frame this was less likely and not as bad of a breach compared to men's violence against women.

Interestingly, in some cases the Gendered Frame was employed in a complex way in which differences in behavioural expectations due to gender were reconstructed as evidence of men's legitimate victimhood. For example, speakers - such as Sammy - argued that men's assumed physical advantage over women meant a man would be chastised for defending himself against his female partner's physical violence:

"It could be said that it's worse as well because the man's expected never ever to hit her back as in the first situation [heterosexual man being violent to a woman] like people would probably say 'you should hit him back, you should slap him [...] stand up for yourself, be independent' kind of thing, whereas a lot of people would say like 'no no, he's got to take that, like take it, don't ever hit her back, it's wrong and you should never hit women.'" (Sammy, 17-18, F, Sch B).

Likewise, Ella argued that expectations that men have physical supremacy over women, but also that they should not hit women, could compound the psychological impact of abuse:

"He wouldn't be as physically damaged by it but I think it's still abusive behaviour because she's belittling him physically [...] having [...] someone who's stereotypically weak shove you and you not being able to do anything about it that would make you feel even more powerless yourself." (15-16, F, Sch A).

Sammy and Ella's arguments are particularly interesting as they consider multiple aspects of the Gendered Frame to legitimise men's victimhood (i.e., gendered norms of strength, gender norms in relation to relationship violence, and the impacts of such expectations on male victims).

But these arguments also buy into, and reinstate, gendered power relations within the Gendered Frame. That is, although Ella does not explicitly state that men should be granted more power in heterosexual relationships than women, the implicit message, although premised of equal rights to defend one's self, is that as a man, not being able to do so, particularly against someone you should be more powerful than, would increase the psychological impact. Ella could have challenged norms of 'gendered strength': and argued that men's experiences of psychological harm demonstrate



men's vulnerability to women's violence and abuse and so challenge men's assumed relative power. However, the argument drawn on is based upon unequal, or at least asymmetrical, assumptions of power between men and women.

Arguably this highlights the enduring nature of gender norms and the Gendered Frame in sense-making of problematic relationship behaviours and contractual terms and how it may be easier for young people to work within Gendered Frame than to challenge it outright. Such outright challenges will be discussed in the Abuse is Abuse section 6a.5. However, it is worth mentioning here that Ella went on to argue, using the example of heterosexual men's victimhood that both men and women were disempowered within the Gendered Frame:

"I don't think that we should trivialise violence against men in favour of violence against women because I think that's harmful to both genders in a way.

Int: Can you explain that?

Because when we trivialise violence against men we are both dismissing females as weak and ineffectual, and but we're also leaving men vulnerable to violence and unable to receive any support.

Int: Okay, so you think it's just not really helping anybody.

It's not... it shouldn't happen on anybody. I don't think it's any worse to hit a girl than it is to hit a man." (Ella, 15-16, F, Sch A)

Here, Ella outlines many of the critiques from this and the following section, such as 'gendered strength': affording few gender roles, assuming men as perpetrators and women as victims, and overlooking women's capacity for violence and men's vulnerability to harm. This talk established gender roles as harmful to sense-making of abuse for heterosexual men and women. Similarly, Anisha argued the Gendered Frame was disempowering for women constructing them as "*the weaker inferior gender*" and that a lack of recognition of heterosexual male victims is: "*a gender thing that a man can't be getting hit by a woman because she's the weaker inferior gender, so that's not right, but it should be perceived the same because we [females] should be equal to a male kind of thing*" (17-18, F, Sch B). Both Anisha and Ella's argument raise the

potential for increased awareness of women's violence against men to be constructed as a feminist issue in that it would benefit women generally.

In summary, within a Gendered Frame, the terms of the Love and Happiness Contract changed based on assumed gender differences in physical strength. Men's violence against women was a fundamental breach of the contract and supported by the assumption that men are just stronger than women and, hence, that women are always legitimate victims. This assumption worked also to illegitimise heterosexual men's victimhood which, compared to the experiences of heterosexual female victims, 'could be worse' or was 'not as bad'. That said, it was interesting how speakers used the Gendered Frame drawing on gender norms to legitimise heterosexual male victims through the *psychological* impact of violence and abuse, and stereotypic portrayals of women as sneaky and manipulative.

These representations demonstrated some critical ability around gender roles and afford heterosexual women power to inflict harm upon their partner. However, these arguments of power remained within the restraints of the Gendered Frame and 'gendered strength' argument and often became quite complex. Markedly, although 'gendered strength' could legitimise heterosexual male victims this argument does not challenge the Gendered Frame and the gender norms within it. Instead it supports a gender power asymmetry that could be problematic for heterosexual women (who are assumed to both possess and be entitled to less power).

#### **6a. 4 Heteronormative Frame: How sexual orientation changes the impact of actions**

The previous sections have explored the ways in which the Love and Happiness contract, and specifically the 'no hitting' rule, was first deemed to be a clear marker for an unhealthy relationship. This claim was then complicated by the Gendered Frame, which focused on gender of perpetrators and victims, and the apparent differential risk of harm for male vs. female victims.

This next section illustrates a further complication of the Gendered Frame and the concept of gendered harm in relation to sense-making of same-sex relationships and speakers use of a Heteronormative Frame. The section will explore how the Heteronormative Frame rendered certain behaviours permissible in same-sex relationships, behaviours that were considered problematic or potential contract breakers in heterosexual couples. The section will then outline the ways in which 'gendered strength' legitimised same-sex victims (whether male or female), and how notions of gender and the Gendered and Heteronormative Frames were criticised as unhelpful guides under arguments that 'abuse is abuse'.

With regards to same-sex relationships, ideas of 'Gendered Strength' inferred a parity of power between both partners, which seemed to transform understanding of physical violence. For same-sex relationships, physical violence and other problematic behaviours were sometimes deemed as less serious than men's violence against women because the risk of harm was felt to be minimal (as in female to male aggression). These constructions placed the situation in a Heteronormative Frame in which it was often argued that men's violence towards women was the most apparent breach of the contract, as shown in the extract below:

I think it's bad but again I don't know, I just don't see it as bad as in a heterosexual relationship when a man's doing it to a woman. I don't know, I just don't.

Int: Why do you, what is it about it that...?

I think maybe because they're like, I suppose because like they're both male so that they're both well, like physically strong so like, it, like the harm isn't as likely to be inflicted on the man than it is the woman if that makes sense? Obviously like, well, women are like generally like more weak so, like more harm is likely to be caused to her if a man's doing it to a woman but it's like a man to a man it might not be, I don't know.

(Sarah, 18-21, Undergraduate)

Sarah's argument rendered aggression in same-sex relationships as not '*as bad*' as in heterosexual relationships as the important 'gendered strength' differential, that increases risk of harm to women, was not present. Thus, physical violence in same-sex relationships was constructed as an 'equal fight', hence, less likely to be deemed a breach to the Love and Happiness Contract. This conclusion highlights the application of a Heteronormative Frame to the situation. Here, viewed from a Heteronormative Frame, in terms of violence, the relationship contract is only broken by an unfair or unequal fight which was indicated most readily by gender differences and potential harm in *heterosexual* relationships. That is:

(a) Men's violence towards women is *unequal* because the *male perpetrator* has *more* strength, so is *more* likely to harm the female victim, thus physical violence is *unfair* (a contractual breach);

(b) Women's violence towards men is *unequal* because the *female perpetrator* has *less* strength so is *less* likely to harm the male victim, thus physical violence is *fair* (no contractual breach);

(c) Women's violence towards women/ men's violence toward men is *equal* because the *male/female perpetrator* has the *same* strength so is *less* likely to harm the male/female victim, thus physical violence is *fair* (no contractual breach).

This argument demonstrated how the Love and Happiness Contract as upheld on principles of fairness in relationships thus, in a same-sex relationship where both partners are assumed to possess equal physical strength, physical violence, although undesirable, is not deemed to depreciate relationship worth automatically. The direct comparison of this argument's conclusions across the different 'types' of relationships (specifically the inclusion of same-sex relationships) as shown above, makes clear that arguments of 'gendered strength' within the Gendered Frame appear to be subsumed into a broader Heteronormative Frame. That is, such 'fairness' is implicitly heteronormative, privileging the rights of those in heterosexual relationships and women above those in same-sex relationships.

As shown by Sarah in the extract, often the difference in contractual terms across relationships and the significance of the Heteronormative Frame to sense-making was hard to articulate. For example, as outlined by Jeremy below, the different contractual terms for heterosexual female victims compared to other 'types' men and lesbian women were justified by an immediate unthinking and/or emotional response that same-sex violence was less risky:

“when it's a man being physical towards a woman often you think it's worse, or I would treat it as worse, without really thinking about it [...] it's just something inside, just something inside you makes you feel more sort of emotionally involved because it is a man hitting a woman” (18-21, M, Undergraduate).

Here, placing physical violence into a Heteronormative Frame was implied to be automatic.

#### **6a. 4.1 Normalising IPV in same-sex relationships**

The Gendered Frame and use of gender stereotypes were also drawn upon to rationalise the Heteronormative Frame by normalising lack of concern for physical violence in same-sex relationships. In some cases, gay men, like heterosexual

men, were assumed to possess a greater 'willingness for violence' and so were naturally more physically violent:

"there's always people fighting outside [night clubs] or always people fighting in there and they're pretty much always guys, that's normally guys who fight, I think men are more prone to fight, and therefore I think men are more prone to violence." (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate).

In other cases, gender roles in same-sex relationships were seen to be different. This rationalised lack of concern for physical violence between such couples. Here, gay men were portrayed as melodramatic and feminine, which further illegitimised gay men's victimhood as shown by Sonia and Jessica:

"Sonia: I think gay couples like that are male, I think they are quite melodramatic, like the ones I know anyway, they're very out there, who are like have a lot of arguments 'cos they're both... 'cos gay boys are quite feminine anyway so they're quite like bitchy and...

Jessica: They're actually worse than females.

Sonia: Gay men are so bitchy and I don't think it is a problem, I think it's just expect it of a gay relationship." (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, the portrayal of gay men as feminine implied an emotionality and pettiness that raised the potential for gay men's accounts of violence to be over-exaggerated, or normal for a gay relationship. In this way, use of the Gendered Frame upheld the Heteronormative Frame. That is, when gender roles were directly transferable (as shown by Jeremy) male victimhood was still illegitimised. Likewise, in Sonia and Jessica's example, speakers' judgements of worth and breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract were seen not to be directly transferable from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. The contractual thresholds in a gay relationship were lowered, compared to heterosexual female victimhood, in consideration of the assumed different characteristics of gay men.

Moreover, the 'bitchy', 'out there' and somewhat chaotic portrayal of gay relationships was presented as inherent to the fact that both partners were 'feminine': "*cos they're both... 'cos gay boys are quite feminine anyway so they're quite*

*like bitchy,*” and a similar case was made for lesbian relationships: “*I’ve been with a girl before and just both of you just being so emotional, it was just like it’s crazy, like that’s why it’s so difficult, [...] it’s [lesbian relationships] quite clashy, you clash a lot with each other I think*” (Jenny, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Jenny went on to substantiate this argument arguing that relationships with two dominant characters, without male and female gender roles, or ‘levels’, could be unworkable and dysfunctional “*you’re just going to scream at each other*”. This argument posed a challenge to relationships that did not conform to the Heteronormative Frame, i.e. same-sex relationships, or those where men and women did not adhere to their gender role.

Jenny argued these ‘levels’ were also needed where both partners were submissive: “*[Y]ou need those kind of levels, [...] ‘cos if you’re both quite submissive about things it’s like nothing seems to really happen or get done or no one even decide on anything*” (18-21, F, Undergraduate) a view supported by Jeremy who said within a functional relationship: “*there’s often sort of someone in every relationship who will sort of wear the trousers as it were*” (18-21, M, Undergraduate).

These ‘levels’ of gender, were advised for same-sex relationships as well: something I will consider after discussing implications of the gendered contract on lesbian relationships. Support for these ‘levels’ of gender in relationships aligned with the Heteronormative Frame, attesting to the wider argument that the asymmetrical roles gender afforded heterosexual couples in a relationship functioned to ensure relationship harmony in all relationships - gay and straight.

### 6a. 4.2 Lesbian relationships

For lesbian relationships, interpretation of the significance of physical violence and what it meant for the relationship was complex but overall, like men, lesbian women's victimhood was illegitimated. In the few cases that woman-to-woman physical violence had the potential to be a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract it was considered contrary with '*feminine*' behaviour and/or judged to be vicious, catty, or '*unclassy*':

"[T]o me girls don't hit each other, they generally just shout comments" (Izzy, 17-18, F, Sch A)

"[W]ith the whole shoving thing, I just don't think that girls should shove, I would never... if I had a fight with a girl, flirted with my boyfriend or something I would never push them or like hit them, I would always deal with things talking." (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

"[G]irls when they have fights it's just like going at each other, I come from Oldham, it's horrible like, rough area and you go out with girls and they just have fights, but I think girls fights are worse than boy fights [...] Rip your hair, scratch your face."; "I don't think girls should fight, they should stay classy, if you've got a problem just talk about it [...] if they've slept with your boyfriend, fighting is not going to take that back, just be the bigger person rather than lower to their level." (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Here, although woman-to-woman violence is presented as unacceptable behaviour, as shown in the examples most often women's violence was set within a Heterosexual Frame of women fighting other women to guard their boyfriend or protect their heterosexual relationship. Speakers used very few examples of women's physical violence in actual lesbian relationships. Thus, although, depictions of women's violence raised the potential to be judged as a breach to the Love and Happiness Contract, speakers tended to avoid exploring such scenarios and violence in lesbian relationships was judged as "*very strange*" and its seriousness downplayed.

Akin to constructions of heterosexual men's vulnerability to women's violence, for lesbian relationships a greater focus was placed instead on *non-*



*physical* problematic behaviours (e.g., arguments, jealousy, criticism). This was justified through assertions of women as emotional and natural communicators, which downplayed the seriousness of physical violence in lesbian relationships:

“Sophie: compared to male and a female, like their [a lesbian couple’s] strength is more equally matched so [...] emotionally they’d still be the same, like hurting you, but physically I don’t think it would hurt as much generalising.

Ella: As I said before I think a woman would naturally be more comfortable communicating with another woman [than a man], even if they were in a relationship and even if they were the two different roles.” (17-18, F, Sch A)

To summarise, this analysis highlights the centrality of physical violence to sense-making of the Love and Happiness Contract, within the Heteronormative Frame, alongside the idea of ‘gendered strength’, and how these approaches watered-down contractual breaches in same-sex relationships. Premises of fairness were imbued with heterosexist assumptions which, when applied to same-sex relationships, illegitimised, and in some cases denied, gay men and women’s victimhood. Through the Heteronormative Frame behaviours that would be accepted as victimising towards women in heterosexual relationships, while deemed as not ideal in gay relationships, were understood to diminish relationship worth significantly less.

These examples have shown that in many ways the Gendered Frame is subsumed within the Heteronormative Frame, only becoming apparent in applications of the Love and Happiness Contract in same-sex relationships. That said, in some cases speakers applied gender roles to partners in a same-sex relationship (i.e. one is the ‘man’ and one is the ‘woman’), focusing in on the Gendered Frame. This focus changed the impact of ‘gendered strength’ argument, as I will now discuss.

### 6a. 4. 3 Gendered Frame applied to same-sex relationships

As mentioned before, within the Heteronormative Frame gender roles or 'levels' were seen as central to upholding a relationship. Different roles meant partners' characteristics complimented facilitating harmony between both partners. Gender roles were applied to same-sex relationships as a way to legitimise physical violence and emotional abuse as a breach to the Love and Happiness Contract. Men's violence against women was seen as the template of domestic abuse, rationalised by the 'gendered strength' argument. Yet, in some cases, this configuration of violence was applied to same-sex relationships by assigning heterosexual gender roles to partners in homosexual relationships as a way to translate the breaches of the Love and Happiness Contract to same-sex couples:

"maybe her girlfriend is more like the man of the house, kind of the one who calls all the shots and she's the weaker one that just has to deal with all the criticalness and the drama and stuff like that." (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Here, Jessica presents the role of perpetrator as the 'masculine' role: "*she's more like the man of the house*", and the role of the victim as 'feminine': "*she's the weaker one*", to recognise the breach to the Love and Happiness Contract in a lesbian relationship through a Heteronormative Frame. This was also the case for male-male relationships:

"I've got gay mates here at uni and at home who are both test to the fact that in many gay relationships you have one of the members which will conform to more of a feminine stereotype and one which will conform to more of a masculine stereotype, it's like a twink, I don't know the names, but yes, so again it would maybe depend on that sort of side of things maybe." (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate).

As shown in Jeremy's example, gender roles were deemed to be transferable to same-sex relationships. However, the translation of gender roles to same-sex relationships was not always directly transferable. For example, gender roles in same-sex relationships were presented as different to heterosexual relationships: here, partners were granted the choice and flexibility to perform gender roles

inconsistent with their gender (e.g. feminine men as *'twinks'* or masculine women as *'butch'*). However, speakers claimed to know little about gender roles offered by same-sex relationships that were outside of the Heteronormative Frame:

“I don't really know 'cos like I don't really have much experience of like lesbian [relationships]” (Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A);

“Again, more difficult to advise it in a gay relationship if you haven't had experiences of that” (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

As such, speakers often fell back on gender stereotypes of women as emotional and men as less valid victims. For example, Jeremy, leading on from the example above, went on to argue that, despite gender roles being applied to gay relationships, gay male victims evoked a less protective emotional reaction, from third-parties and society, than women: *“because they're both men, then that protection that you... or that protectiveness that you feel towards a woman in a male female relationship that's getting beaten up is removed”* (18-21, M, Undergraduate). This argument was drawn on by several participants, suggesting that, despite same-sex relationships offering alternative interpretations of gender, the Heteronormative Frame was hard to avoid making traditional gender roles most accessible.

Yet, Jeremy went on to argue that the same protectiveness he would feel toward a heterosexual woman would be evoked toward a gay male victim because the violence was being perpetrated by a man and so was, as risky as men's violence against women: *“in the gay male relationship if a man is beating up another man in this case I would feel more inclined, or women are sort of with the extension as well, I would feel more inclined to step in earlier, in this case.”* I will now explore this further.

The translation of the Gendered Frame to same-sex relationships legitimised gay men's victimhood through constructions of damage. As outlined by Kate and Cara, in some

cases the damage inflicted by gay male perpetrators was comparable to that inflicted by a heterosexual man due to both perpetrators being men:

“Kate: [Q]uite often in gay relationships you do normally have someone that’s like dominant and someone that’s more like submissive if you will, like it’s just quite a normal thing, so the chances are that you’re going to have one person that’s like quite a bit bigger. But I think all the advice and everything I would give would be exactly the same as, the first one [men’s violence against women] [...] because again there is the threat of the guy doing damage because you know, historically speaking men can do a lot more damage physically than, women can.

Cara: Yeah, even though it is another guy like he can still hurt him a lot more than, a girl might be able to do. So, when boys beat each other up they can do quite a lot of damage.” (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, assumptions of same-sex relationships as equal were challenged through use of the Gendered Frame in which men’s propensity for physical violence and harm was attributed to the gay male perpetrator. In this way the translation of gender roles to a gay relationship legitimised gay men’s victimhood, making physical violence against a man in a male-male relationship a breach to the terms of the Love and Happiness Contract.

Noticeably, as shown by Kate and Cara in a previous extract, comparison of men’s propensity for physical violence over that of women’s highlights how the binary nature of the Gendered Frame and ‘gendered strength’ argument affords power to one gender (i.e. men) by denying it in another (i.e. women) e.g. “*because again there is the threat of the guy doing damage because you know, historically speaking men can do a lot more damage physically than, women can*”; “*he can still hurt him a lot more than, a girl might be able to do*”.

Use of the ‘gendered strength’ argument establishes gay *men* as legitimate ‘perpetrators’ (and thus gay men as legitimate victims) because a man – not a woman - is enacting the violence. However, despite legitimising gay male victims, this argument has the effect of delegitimising *female* perpetrators (and thus lesbian and heterosexual male victims).

Interestingly, the application of gender roles to same-sex relationships was used to invalidate same-sex victims of violence over heterosexual women. For example, the same speaker - Kate - applied the 'gender strength' argument to lesbian relationships arguing that, because same-sex relationships were more likely to afford a flexibility of gender roles it was less likely for physical violence in a lesbian relationship to be as serious as when the perpetrator is male.

"If your friend's the one [i.e. the potential victim] that's sort of the more dominating and say she's taller than her girlfriend or bigger and her girlfriend [the potential perpetrator] is quite small and is the one shoving her then you think, okay, yeah, it's still not okay and she shouldn't be being treated like that but you think okay, well if it does come to it, she could probably hold her own, which is then when you look at sort of like, if you're looking at a male/female relationship. Obviously, you can get relationships where the girl is really big and the guy is really small ((laughs)), but if it's like a six-foot guy and a five-foot girl or whatever than realistically she's much less likely to be able to hold her own against him. [...] I think why it's [physical violence in a lesbian relationship] perceived differently is the sort of threat that the person, that one person can have on another and the bigger the threat or the bigger the danger, the worst it seems, not that it should, like it's still someone intending to hurt someone else or someone intending to do damage to someone else, that's obviously not okay. But if threat is bigger than it's normally perceived as more of an issue." (Kate, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, although Kate asserts that any act of violence remains a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract and is '*still not okay*', some breaches are deemed worse than others. The severity of breach was largely determined by the gender role of the perpetrator, often more apparent in heterosexual relationships as they are usually established by sex. But in lesbian relationships sex is unhelpful so gender roles are instead determined based on individual differences in levels of masculine and feminine characteristics and size. As in heterosexual relationships, it remains true to third parties that small or weak partners (i.e. the 'women') enacting violence against stronger, bigger partners (i.e. the 'men') in same-sex relationships, is not a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract.

In this way, the application of the Gendered Strength argument to some relationships reinstated a Heteronormative Frame to understanding the Love and Happiness Contract. The application of heterosexual norms granted only men, or large masculine women, the (physical) power to be valid perpetrators of abuse. Thus, only heterosexual women and, in some cases, gay men and small feminine lesbian women were seen as valid victims.

For lesbian women specifically, this talk only afforded victimhood status where lesbian women (perpetrator and/or victim) aligned with the Heteronormative Frame of the Love and Happiness Contract (i.e. large masculine female perpetrator, small feminine victim). However, lesbian women's victimhood was not deemed as *bad* as heterosexual women's experiences of violence because strength-wise heterosexual women are at a disadvantage. So, although the Heteronormative Frame offers a way to make sense of the Love and Happiness Contract across heterosexual and same-sex relationships the gendered and heteronormative nature of the frame minimises violence and victimhood in same-sex relationships.

In summary, the importance of gender to young people's sense-making of the Love and Happiness Contract and breaches was transferred to same-sex relationships. This highlighted a broader Heteronormative Frame within which the Gendered Frame was situated. In some cases, the application of the Gendered Frame (e.g. gendered norms/templates of victimhood/perpetrator) to same-sex relationships enabled recognition of contractual breaches in non-heterosexual relationships and translated physical violence in same-sex relationships as risky or unacceptable and thus legitimised same-sex victims and perpetrators of violence. This 'translation' could be a powerful device which worked with the Heteronormative Frame, to afford IPV in same-sex relationships the same risk and severity as a man's violence against a woman.

However, the Gendered Frame was not always empowering for potential victims. Gender stereotypes were powerful tools in relationship sense-making. As was the case for heterosexual male victims. Use of gender stereotypes and the Gendered Strength argument often downplayed or normalised physical violence for men and those in same-sex relationships, illegitimising their victimhood. This highlighted a broader Heteronormative Frame within the Love and Happiness Contract. This seemed particularly significant considering the finding that young people had little access to how gender, or relationships, could be 'done' differently outside of a Heteronormative Frame. That said there were cases in which the use of a Gendered and Heteronormative Frame was construed as problematic, as I will now discuss.

#### **6a. 5 Abuse is abuse: Challenges to the Heteronormative Frame**

In some cases, speakers actively rejected the idea of gender and sexual orientation as central to the relationship contract. Instead it was argued that Abuse is Abuse and that the *act* of violence - predominantly *physical* violence - against you by someone you are in a relationship with is a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

This argument served to deliberately legitimise both lesbian women's, gay men's and heterosexual men's victimhood. Such arguments were employed in discussions to validate same-sex and heterosexual male victims. Thus, this section will not follow a clear format of dealing with the contractual terms in same-sex relationships and then those for women's violence against men. Instead I will outline the 'abuse is abuse' argument and the implications as to how lesbian women, gay men and heterosexual men's victimhood was legitimised.

Within the Abuse is Abuse argument, speakers largely rejected notions that gender was central to the Love and Happiness contract. Instead it was asserted that gender was unhelpful to sense-making in relation to unhealthy relationships because it obscured, rather than highlighted, breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract. For example, when considering women's violence against men, Shelly and Genny said:

"Shelly: Some people would see that as he's weak and it's like oh wow, you got hit by a girl, get over it, but that doesn't change the fact that they're in a potentially abusive relationship, and that's not right, no matter like who's doing it to who.

Genny: No-one should like get hit in a relationship, I don't think anyone should get hit really. No need for it." (15-16, F, Sch B).

In some ways, the Gendered Frame and wider Heteronormative Frame were employed by speakers to engage critically with gendered assumptions of victimhood. For example, it was argued by Kate and Cara that a Heteronormative Frame was useful for identifying and communicating breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract in 'non-traditional' relationships as outlined in the case of violence in a lesbian relationship below:

"Int: [I]f you met with somebody who was kind of downplaying the situation because it was a lesbian relationship how do you think that could be, that problem could be overcome? [... Clarification of question]

Kate: Well I mean if the girlfriend was, if she was being like "Oh but it's not a big deal because you know she's my girlfriend and she can't do that much damage to me", then I think I'd say, "Okay maybe she can't" but put it in perspective "If it was a guy hitting you then it wouldn't be okay", and at the end of the day she is still intending to harm you. And I guess you'd say the same thing to other people as well you'd just try and put it in perspective and say "If it was a guy you wouldn't be okay with it so why should you be okay with it? The intention is still there", so it's not like it should be any different to if it's like a massive bloke trying to hit her, or shoving her, or whatever.

Int: Okay, so like intention to cause harm is the important thing?

Cara: Yeah.

Int: Is that something that you would do?

Cara: Yeah it's a good idea to put it into perspective for other people because like, I just don't think society sees it the same way, they should but it's just not, seen as the same way." (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, speakers foregrounded the view that everyone in a relationship was granted equal contractual rights. However, because 'society' saw gender as a key element of a relationship and the relationship contract in general, one



could use the Heteronormative Frame to guide whether a behaviour was a contractual breach, i.e. if it is not okay for a man to do to a woman then it is not okay for anyone. Such reframing was described as enabling behaviours to be “*put in[to] perspective*”. Arguments of individual differences were used to undermine the implications of both gender and sexual orientation to the Love and Happiness Contract. Many young people constructed homophobia and sexism as ‘*outdated*’. Sexism and homophobia were presented as uncharacteristic of the participant’s generation which was constructed as progressive and inclusive of people regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Many speakers using the ‘abuse is abuse’ argument tried remove gender from sense-making of the Love and Happiness Contract and potential breaches, by focusing on actions. For example, when discussing violence in a lesbian relationship, Tom and Graham criticised the use of gender or strength to substantiate an argument that physical violence in a same-sex relationship was a “*fist fight*”:

“Tom: The only difference between those two pieces of paper [the vignettes] is the assumption that the man is stronger, in that relationship he may not necessarily be.

Graham: Yeah, exactly.

Tom: She could be a body builder and he could be scrawny but he’s still hitting her and she... And the key thing it’s not, it’s not a fist fight so the whole physicality aspect of it, while it’s maybe slightly more intimidating I suppose to be stood over by a six foot seven bulky man than as I say but the intimidation aspect of it is more from the love you feel for the person, it doesn’t come from the fact of I think they could break my jaw with one punch, it comes from I love this person, why is this happening and all the mental aspects that come from that so while it may be slightly more dangerous for a stronger person to hit someone rather than a weaker person, in terms of how quickly it might get very, very dangerous, from the abusive standpoint and what you’d advise it’s exactly the same.

Graham: Yeah, I think it’s irrelevant whatever they are, whatever kind of relationship it is, it’s still abuse, isn’t it?” (18-24, M, Undergraduate)

Here, Tom and Graham make a strong case that, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, unacceptable behaviours are the same: i.e. that Abuse is Abuse, arguing against ideas that violence in same-sex relationships is an equal fight. As seen before, Tom uses the Heteronormative Frame to substantiate the position that ‘abuse

is abuse', however, interestingly, the gendered assumptions of this frame are interrogated: "*She could be a body builder and he could be scrawny but he's still hitting her*" (Tom), and he works-up a challenge to gendered indicators of harm as "*the only difference*" between the situations.

The Love and Happiness Contract - specifically 'love' - is foregrounded over potential physical damage to present physical violence as a universal contractual breach: "*the intimidation aspect of it is more from the love you feel for the person, it doesn't come from the fact of I think they could break my jaw with one punch, it comes from I love this person*" (Tom).

Focus on damage remains but rather than physical damage per se, emphasis is placed on *emotional* damage and damage to the *relationship* which substantiates physical violence as abusive. This argument was reflected also in sense-making regarding women's violence against men, where men's assumed propensity for violence was considered irrelevant because physical violence in a relationship was not a fight but abuse (i.e. not a consensual two-sided disagreement but a one-sided act of harm against one's partner). As such physical violence by women against a male partner breached the Love and Happiness Contract:

"It's not right, like if you get hit and you don't like, and it's not like an arranged fight as people call it, then obviously you don't want it to happen, so like it's obviously hurting you and stuff, and like emotionally and maybe even physically, if you don't like it." (Shelly, 15-16, F, Sch B).

Within the 'abuse is abuse' argument some speakers asserted that the Love and Happiness Contract was universal, transcending individual differences, sexual orientation, and gender. A male participant when asked by the interviewer how gender or sexual orientation could affect the advice demonstrated this approach:

"Int: Do you think the advice would be the same, do you think it would be as applicable or do you think there would be a difference?  
Well I don't know in general, but as we've shown, like we'd give the same advice so I don't know if that would work for everybody. [...] I mean we're not similar people

outside of this, we're quite different people, we're all from like different backgrounds and we've all said the same thing." (Male participant, 17-18, M, Sch B)

Here, individuals are presented as aware of the Love and Happiness Contract despite differences. This, counters use of the Heteronormative Frame that rendered same-sex relationships as 'other'. This perspective rejected the Heteronormative Frame and was further validated by Aiden's argument that *any* physical violence is illegal and so a definitive breach of contractual terms:

"Int: [D]o you think maybe talking about these kind of things you can't talk about it as much because you're not as aware of these types [same-sex] of relationships? No. You can talk about the same I think [...] still they're physically abusing someone which everyone should know isn't allowed, it is illegal at the end of the day. So regardless it's, you can, you know that that's wrong so doesn't matter who it's between, as soon as I hear anything like that or like the other things that are going on I know straightaway it's wrong." (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A).

Within the 'abuse is abuse' argument, a focus away from gender, outside of the Heteronormative Frame, allowed participants to explore more generally the terms, of what I am identifying as the Love and Happiness Contract. In this way, speakers legitimised the victimhood of 'non-traditional' victims by considering specific behaviours, for example:

#### **Are there controlling behaviours?:**

"Yeah, I think it's just the same issues as the other two relationships, the same controlling and the abuse. It's not a healthy relationship" (Olivia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

"Like it's still the same, the intention's the same, kind of like control, and stuff like that, I think it's as bad. [...] Sarah: Yeah, I just agree that it's, like it's not a healthy relationship and it's not right what she's doing, yeah." (Ceri, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

#### **Are they happy?:**

"[I]t's exactly the same as before, 'cos it's regardless of what kind of relationship it is and then if she is unhappy with it they do need to talk and if not and like they can't agree on anything then it would be better to leave." (17-18, M, Sch A)

"Sammy: Because it's [lesbian relationship] the same situation, it's still making her feel just as bad as it... the girl was with her boyfriend.

Livvy: Yeah, like if it were the other way around and it were the boyfriend who were feeling like that 'cos his girlfriend were acting this way to him you'd tell him to leave.

[...]

Caroline: Yeah, it doesn't matter about the gender, it just matters about how you feel." (17-18, F, Sch B).

Similarly, speakers argued that, regardless of gender and sexual orientation, no relationship should have to tolerate physical violence:

"I think no-one should have to put up with like someone doing that to them [hitting them]. So, I think it's just all the same to be honest. Stan: Yeah. In each case every person is the victim getting hit they probably feel really insecure after it, it doesn't vary no matter what the relationship is." (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A).

It is worth noting that arguments of 'abuse is abuse' were not always readily drawn on by speakers, as gender norms seemed integral to sense-making of relationships, for example one participant, Ella said: "*certainly in younger relationships especially, our notions [...] of what a relationship is are more stereotypical and more biological than emotional so we're more likely to subscribe to these traditional roles, even when it's two people of the same gender.*" Interestingly, overall use of the Gendered Frame was more readily utilised by the older participants (i.e. undergraduates aged 18-21). This could suggest that a Gendered Frame gains further currency when young people are engaging in relationships.

Thus, the Gendered Frame was an important resource for sense-making. However, through discussions of same-sex relationships, speakers seemed to take issue with the broader Heteronormative Frame. Specifically, they were often critical of the ways in which this frame failed to grant equality in victimhood across 'non-traditional' relationships. Therefore, some participants preferred to focus on intention to enact violence as it seemed to provide greater flexibility and apparent fairness. This suggests that discussions of same-sex couples can introduce ways of making-sense of relationships outside of a Heteronormative Frame.

Arguments of 'abuse is abuse', enabled universal assessments of worth across relationships about behaviours such as checking texts, coercion, physical violence, emotional abuse which could be used as markers of abuse indicating that the relationship should be ended:

"I've got the exact same opinion, like just because he's gay doesn't change anything, like I still believe that if his boyfriend is being abusive to him or doesn't like him well doesn't like what he's doing, he's checking his Facebook, it shouldn't work and they shouldn't be together, [...] just because when they're both gay doesn't change anything, I still feel that they shouldn't be in a relationship." (Male speaker, 17-18, M, Sch B);

"Aiden: Because it's exactly the same situation, don't matter who it's between it's the same thing that's happening.

Int: So, it's the actions that are important? Stan: Yeah. Well still getting hit, we've still got doubts and yeah, that can happen in a relationship and it doesn't differ I would have thought." (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A).

In summary, the argument of 'abuse is abuse' highlighted ways in which young people made sense of the Love and Happiness Contract outside of the Heteronormative, Gendered Frame. This allowed speakers to explore behaviours that could be argued to breach basic, universal rights or expectations across all relationships.

## **6a. 6 Conclusion**

In broad conclusion, the structure of these sections: (i) Is it worth it? 'It could be worse' (ii) the Gendered Frame, (iii) The Heteronormative Frame, (iv) Gendered roles applied to same-sex relationships, and (v) Abuse is Abuse, reflected the ways young people's talk negotiated the terms of the Love and Happiness Contract for each relationship and identified potential breaches. The analysis so far suggests that the young people interviewed had available to them linguistic resources with which to attempt to make-sense of potentially problematic relationship behaviour. Of note, is the way in which, what I am calling, the 'Heteronormative Frame' was the most robust of these resources.

However, many young people rejected the limited flexibility of the 'gendered strength' argument implicated by the Heteronormative Frame, particularly in relation to non-heterosexual relationships and potential victimisation of men. Young people attempted to find ways of understanding problematic behaviours that considered different kinds of romantic relationships, with the 'abuse is abuse' argument the most readily available and successful way of doing so within the Love and Happiness Contract I have identified.

## Chapter 6b: Love and Happiness Contract: Rough Patch

### Diagnosis

Relationship worth was determined in many ways. As discussed in the previous chapter the Love and Happiness Contract and relationship worth could change depending on gender, sexual orientation and age, drawing on concepts of heteronormativity and fairness.

This Chapter will discuss speakers' interpretations of Love and Happiness Contract and worth along different lines, those of perseverance and resolution expressed through constructions of problematic behaviours as being part of a relationship 'Rough Patch'. Young people proposed the idea of a 'Rough Patch' to account for problematic behaviours whilst upholding the argument that the relationship may still be 'worth it'. This chapter will first overview the characteristics young people positioned as indicators of a generic perpetrator of IPV, then describe the Rough Patch Diagnosis highlighting how perpetrators in a Rough Patch are different from 'real' perpetrators of IPV<sup>43</sup>. The chapter will then explore the ways in which relationships 'worth' could be measured. The chapter will then draw out how a Rough Patch is differentiated from a substandard relationship and the significance of the Love and Happiness Contract.

It should be noted that, the Rough Patch Diagnosis was predominantly used in discussions of the heterosexual female experiencing problematic behaviours. However, applications to same-sex relationships and heterosexual male 'victims' experiences are discussed below.

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<sup>43</sup> In the present study, young people did not use the term IPV but domestic violence or domestic abuse. As such I will use these terms throughout this chapter.

## 6b. 1 Rough Patch Diagnosis

### 6b. 1. 1 Valid perpetrator

In trying to make sense of problematic behaviours some speakers invoked the notion of a Rough Patch to test whether the problems were temporary and sufficiently mild to be acceptable. A starting point to working out whether a rough patch could be diagnosed, was to define what a perpetrator of true IPV is like in comparison someone who was behaving in unhealthy ways for a limited period. The Rough Patch Diagnosis relied on portrayals of partner's who enacted problematic behaviours as different to seemingly 'valid perpetrators' of IPV. 'Valid perpetrators' were constructed as follows:

- **male** (as demonstrated in the use of the Heteronormative Frame in the Chapter 6a)
- **aggressive**  
 "Well he pushes her and I've seen him push her and she shoved her in an argument. Which is physical violence, technically, [...] I don't think violence belongs in a relationship, but at the same time I do think it's easy to misinterpret stuff, but by the sound of this guy I don't think he's a nice piece of work." (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate)
- **dominating**  
 "[S]o like physical dominance and he's obviously working on her self-esteem as well, telling her that she's self-centered and immature and he's checking up on her on texts and Facebook, so actually he might not be insecure, but maybe he's on a bit of a power trip"; "He's definitely treating her as a subordinate" (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate)
- **volatile**  
 "[H]e's obviously quite like, maybe a bit, paranoid or worried about her cheating on him, so it might just sort of aggravate the situation more when she tries to discuss their problems or try and break up with him." (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)  
  
 "It's not even like the violence is both ways, it's not like she's hit him or anything and he's just reacted or... And even though that's obviously not right either but it can be understood, yeah, it's just from a position of power isn't it, it's horrible." (Tom, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)
- **nasty**  
 "I don't think violence belongs in a relationship, [...] by the sound of this guy I don't think he's a nice piece of work" (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate)



- **controlling**

“[T]he fact that he’s like calling her self-centered and immature, it’s just like trying to get in her head and stuff like that, it’s really wrong [...] trying to like control her, like saying to her that she’s self-centered and immature for wanting to spend time with her friends but obviously she’s not, she’s just being like a normal person.” (Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

- and a **bully**

“I think it’s more the mental, kind of putting someone down all the time is a form of bullying so, it’s only gonna get worse really, sort of thing.” (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

“The pushing over in arguments and the controlling, not letting her see her friends and what-not, that’s... And calling her self-centered and immature, its psychological bullying kind of isn’t it” (Tom, 18-24, M, Undergraduate).

As attested to in these examples, contractual breaches by a ‘valid’ perpetrator were constructed as intrinsic to their personhood. These breaches were worked up to broader portrayals of such men as dominant, destructive and dangerous, with such individuals focused on causing harm much like constructions of female perpetrators as Machiavellian, sneaky and manipulative (see Chapter 6a). These characteristics, given their permanence, substantiated arguments that the situation was unstable and/or likely escalate:

“[I]f he’s encouraging her to do things like smoking and drinking as well and she doesn’t want to, and if he’s being violent towards her, then it’s just gonna end up bad.” (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

“[O]bviously if he’s shouting at her and has occasionally shoved her in an argument then maybe that could escalate into something worse.” (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

These constructions were deemed to suggest a lack of future unhappiness and so were clear indicators of the relationships lack of worth as argued by Sonia: “[I’d] *feel nervous for her. [...] Like I’d feel like if she didn’t split up with him I’d feel guilty knowing what he was like and that she wasn’t happy*” (18-21, F, Undergraduate). Such behaviours also indicated poor contractual terms: “*Well my friend had a situation where her boyfriend kept calling her fat and things and like would check her phone and be really crazy and I was literally like, what’s the point in being*

*with him, if he's going to treat you like that, it's just ridiculous.*" (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Notably such constructions aligned with characterisations of a 'traditional victim' who was down trodden, physically injured, bullied, etc., for example Jessica said a woman in such a situation was: *"going to be a nervous wreck"* (18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Implicit in this talk were assumptions that leaving such a relationship was easy and to *"put up"* with a relationship with even *"slightly"* poor contractual terms was pointless as:

"I think just for me, like even if a lad just like slightly disrespected me, I'd be like, get out of my life [laughs], so if my friend... I mean I've got a situation at the moment where my friend has got a boyfriend who's really horrible to her and, I'm just like, "I don't know how you put up with that," just 'cos I couldn't cope with it for one minute like." (Jenny, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Thus broadly, behaviours that breached the Love and Happiness Contract and indicated a 'valid perpetrator' and a 'valid victim' were those resultant of characteristics and behaviours deemed permanent and situations that were likely to escalate.

However, determining whether a behaviour was resultant of the partner's personality or predisposition, and so permanent could be hard to determine. Thus, speakers often tempered accusations of substandard contracts, e.g. *"at the same time I do think it's easy to misinterpret stuff"* (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate); *"he's obviously quite like, maybe a bit, paranoid or worried"* (Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). This talk portrayed *some* contractual breaches as tolerable and reasonable so long as they could be resolved. This raised the possibility for a Rough Patch Diagnosis, which I will now discuss.

## 6b. 2 The Rough Patch Diagnosis

Within the Rough Patch Diagnosis, the problematic behaviours exhibited by the perpetrator were constructed as due to external stressors, rather than a fundamental character flaw as Sonia explained:

“Yeah, I’d probably say to her as well like, “What’s going on with him at the moment?” like see if anything majors changed that might be causing him to act that way and then explain to her that, “It’s probably not you, it’s probably just him being stressed and it’ll probably go away.”

Int: Okay, and for what you just said about looking at other things that might be going on in his life, why did you think to like suggest that advice to her?

Because it said they’ve been going out a year and it’s only recently started to get like bad, so if he’s been alright for a year then it can’t be something to do with him, you can’t really hide something for a year can you so it’s just something external that’s causing him to feel like angry at her or something.” (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, Sonia assigned blame for the relationship difficulties away from the woman (*“it’s probably not you”*) and as independent of the boyfriend’s nature (*“if he’s been alright for a year then it can’t be something to do with him, you can’t really hide something for a year can you”*). Instead the problematic behaviour was positioned as part of a wider context. This idea of the problematic behaviours being due to something external was reinforced by Sonia’s reasoning that someone who is abusive is presumably inherently violent or bad and so would not have been able to *“hide”* this side of their identity for a year (a year being the length of the relationship presented in the vignettes).

So, in diagnosing a Rough Patch speakers drew upon notions of inherent bad behaviour vs. temporary bad behaviour. Unlike inherent badness, temporary bad behaviours were not a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract as long-term acceptable contractual terms could be upheld. This reiterated the importance of forgiveness to the Love and Happiness Contract and highlighted how use of a Rough Patch could privilege potential perpetrators of violence by excusing their behaviour.

Similar reasoning was employed for same-sex relationships. Here speakers contended that lesbian women and gay men might enact problematic behaviours against their partners due to the additional pressures same-sex relationships faced, such as homophobia and stigma:

“Genny: I think coming out for people is so hard because they feel like they’re lose everyone who cares about them because you don’t know who’s...

Chelsea: Who will accept people.

Shelly: Yeah.

Genny: ...Like you don’t know who’s homophobic nowadays ‘cos most people are, there’s a lot of homophobic people around.

Shelly: Yeah, and like in a group of friends you might not want to come out as gay and lesbian because if one person’s homophobic and they’re like a more liked person in the group say then they might turn the rest of them against you and obviously you don’t want to risk that.

Chelsea: Then you’ll have no-one.

Laura: Then you’ll have no-one

Int: Aw, yeah, you both said it at the same time!” (17-18, F, Sch B,)

“[S]ome people still feel conscious about being gay, and they still feel like they need to hide it from people because of people wouldn’t want to accept them that way” (Male, 17-18, Sch B)

Speakers outlined that lesbian and gay people may feel rejected by their peers, family, and wider society. Such feelings of rejections could have negative outcomes for young people in same-sex relationships: hiding one’s sexual orientation to avoid shame and ridicule. Other speakers went on to argue that such stressors and pressures to conform to traditional sexual identities could result in lesbian women and gay men enacting unacceptable behaviours in an effort to be more masculine and/or to express their frustrations:

“Martin: [W]hat’s going on is the same, but maybe there are different reasons for the behaviour [...] on this one [Lesbian relationship] it might be pressures like oh what you’re actually doing is wrong, someone might be saying that the relationship itself is wrong and that’s coming out in another way

[...]

Zac: could be like that hard lesbo culture though.

[...]

Martin: Masculine women.

Zac: Yeah, like [...] on Friends where Phoebe like grabs Rachel and Monica by the ears and like, “You’re my bitches,” it could be like that way like [all laugh] that they sort of have this dominant... they want to be like...

Simon: The male, yeah.

Zac: ...make themselves like the male and the male...

Martin: Yeah, something like that.

Simon: Yeah, pressure to one act like the male stereotype and one act like the female stereotype, so it might be like that again.” (Martin, Zac & Simon, 17-18, M, Sch A)

“Lydia: [M]y gut reaction would be that her girlfriend is like insecure and unhappy and she’s being...

Claire: Lashing out.

Lydia: ...lashing out but she might just be not very nice like.

Claire: Yeah.” (17-18, F, Sch A)

Here, speakers expressed that wider pressures and criticisms for being homosexual from the straight and gay community may take their toll manifesting as physical violence, dominance and aggression. Specifically, lesbian women may feel pressure to adhere to a masculine gender role and be ‘*masculine women*’ or ‘*the male*’ as part of a ‘*hard lesbo culture*’. As seen in talk of same-sex relationships in Chapter 6a this talk highlights and evokes the Heteronormative, Gendered Frame applied to same-sex relationships. Although this talk raises the potential to challenge notions of sex determining gender (i.e. it proffers constructions of violent *women*) widening the arena of violence to include women, where *women as women* are constructed as perpetrators of *violence*. These positions are rarely taken up. Instead such characterisations of violent lesbian women, focusing on their *masculine* characteristics - despite being women - largely reaffirm the gender binary of feminine ‘victim’ and masculine ‘perpetrator’ within the Heteronormative Frame.

Within the heteronormative frame it was not clear if the aggressive female’s manliness was inherent to her personhood, which complicated the task of diagnosing a Rough Patch in lesbian relationships. Yet the Rough Patch Diagnosis comes to the fore in explanations of the behaviours as a manifestation of societal pressures (‘*hard lesbo culture*’) to ‘*act like the male stereotype*’ and ‘*make themselves like the male*’ which, as shown by Lydia and Claire above may cause the

woman to feel '*insecure and unhappy*', with the phrase '*lashing out*' evoking ideas that the behaviour is a spontaneous, angry response to an injustice.

However, a Rough Patch Diagnosis in same-sex relationships was different to that of heterosexual relationships. That is for same-sex relationships external stressors were presented as more permanent or long lasting (e.g. disapproval from family and society of an aspect of one's identity) than stressors in heterosexual relationships (e.g. work stress). Yet, as with other external stressors, stressors specific to same-sex relationships arguably were possible to overcome through personal development such as 'coming out' or ignoring homophobic comments and people.

### **6b. 2. 1 Rough Patch Diagnosis: Renegotiating the contract**

A Rough Patch Diagnosis was also suggested through constructions of behaviours as symptomatic of both partners merely adjusting to one another. This meant either the contract had to be renegotiated or the potential victim should change their behaviour. In most of these cases, speaker's excused problematic behaviours arguing that the partner was enacting problematic behaviours *because of* the potential victim's actions in not upholding the contract:

"Zac: I wouldn't personally, but especially girls could say to him like well she's obviously not happy, you're obviously not doing something right, you should treat her better, you should..."

Martin: And then maybe she'll..."

Zac: "...take her out, maybe if you took her out and you showed you loved her more."

(17-18, M, Sch A)

In this example Zac and Martin discuss a woman's potential misbehaviour towards her male partner. Here, men are constructed as unfamiliar with the Love and Happiness Contract, about which women are experts. Notably, Zac's main point is that gender obscures the real contractual breaches misattributing blame to the victims – however

these sentiments of men as blame worthy for not being affectionate, attentive or manly enough were recurrent in the data as shown in Chapter 6a *it could be worse*.

Blame was not only attributed to heterosexual male victims but also heterosexual women. Predominantly, in such cases heterosexual women were positioned as at fault for being weak and not ensuring their partner upheld the relationship contract. As such the potential victim was called upon to take back control and renegotiate the relationship to stop the man doing whatever he wished:

“I think she needs to challenge him, by the looks of things she has been sort of letting herself be, not walked... yeah, actually letting herself be walked over, she’s been giving too much ground to him, so I think she needs to gain some of it back and not necessarily... yeah, I suppose stand up to him and question why things are how they are. And then hopefully change them for a fairer deal.” (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate)

The resolution proposed by the male speaker is for the woman to challenge the inequality in the relationship (“*stand up for herself*”) and renegotiate the contractual terms for a “*fairer deal*”. Within this talk is the idea that women should safeguard relationships – something brought out in the previous example above where women were seen to possess greater understanding of the relationship contract than men. Moreover, it is supposed that without this female intervention men, naturally, will take more than they give or will be too controlling. That said such greed, natural selfish and need for control was not only attributed to men but women too. Heterosexual women (as potential perpetrators) were also constructed as expecting preferential treatment in relationships, wanting to be treated like a ‘*princess*’ or taking too much power if given free reign (see Chapter 6c. 2. 4: Gender Double Standard and Men’s forgotten rights).

In all instances, a similar resolution was proposed for potential victims to take back control of the relationship and reassert their right to be treated well. Thus, the overall message was that all good relationships require strong, regulated people with boundaries constructing a sub-clause of the Love and Happiness Contract that: ‘this

relationship will work if we both stand up for ourselves'. These expectations spoke to foundations of communication to develop a strong relationship and a shared duty of both partners to ensure the relationship contract was being upheld (both discussed further in Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation Contract).

The proposed renegotiation of the relationship contract also had gendered implications. For female 'victims' renegotiation was more likely to be framed as empowerment, whereas for male 'victims' renegotiation was most often negatively framed, (i.e. as needing to be resolved due to stop ridicule or under-fulfilment of expected behaviour). This linked back to the Gendered Strength argument and gender ideals implicit in the contract (i.e. that men are dominant and women are submissive). Hence, it was acceptable and forward-thinking for a woman to be encouraged to pursue more equal terms, but a somewhat taboo/uncomfortable position for men to occupy who should already have had the upper hand.

Renegotiation of the relationship terms were posed by other speakers, with suggestions that negotiations should talk about "*what's happened*" (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate), and result in the self-improvement of one, or both, partner(s) and/or a "*compromise*" (Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). The framing of self-improvement, compromise of both partners and maintenance of the relationship as a desirable outcome again places the blame away from the potential perpetrator to the external context. In this case the relationship dynamic. This position prioritises the longevity of the relationship over the experiences of the potential victim. Although, so far discussion of the Rough Patch Diagnosis seems to ignore the Love and Happiness Contract, it does play a central role in constructions of relationships undergoing a Rough Patch, which I will now discuss.



### 6b. 3 Differentiating Rough Patch from a worthless relationship

So far, this chapter has outlined the clear features of the Rough Patch Diagnosis (i.e. behaviour as temporary and due to external factors). As I will now discuss participants argued that a relationship undergoing a Rough Patch could be like a substandard, potentially abusive relationship. I will also outline the many cases where young people drew on previous constructions of relationship worth and the importance of love and happiness to navigate the boundaries of the Rough Patch Diagnosis and differentiate a Rough Patch from a worthless relationship.

#### 6b. 3. 1 Happiness & worth of the relationship

Participants proposed that happiness and relationship worth were central to the task of differentiating a Rough Patch from a worthless relationship, as exemplified in Jessica and Sonia's extract:

Int: Okay, and how do you think you'd work out whether it was a rough patch or whether it was just gonna be like this all the time, is there any way to work that out?

Jessica: If you have like a really happy day or like moment and you kind of realise back to when you used to be really happy all the time, you can see the same like love for each other, you kind of just need to feel that happiness again.

Int: So, if he had a good day, a really happy moment, would that make it seem like it's something that could be fixed?

Jessica: It'd make you feel like it was kind of back to normal, and that obviously they still have feelings and stuff.

Int: Yeah. So if your friend said to you that like they had had like a really nice day the other day, but this was still going on, like they were still arguing and he was still the same and things he was saying, what would your advice be, how would you go from there?

Jessica: Probably suggest keep going and just talk and just see whether like it's worth it kind of thing.

Sonia: I'd probably say if in the happy times you're not even that happy then there's no point, if you can't get it back to how it was then just give up.

Int: Okay, so would you think even if it was just one happy day that wouldn't be enough?

Sonia: Yeah, I think the happiness has got to outweigh, like the pros have got to outweigh the cons in a relationship, you obviously are going to have some bad times, but it's got to be more happy than sad or there's not much point. (Sonia & Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, the Love and Happiness Contract (*I will love you and make you happy and you will love me and make me happy*) was drawn upon to differentiate a Rough Patch

from a worthless relationship. Feelings of happiness and love were constructed as having the potential to offset bad or sad times but the “*pros have got to outweigh the cons*”. This view was also taken by Sonia who argued that to be “*worth it*” “*the happiness has got to outweigh*” the bad times. In establishing reasonable relationship worth speakers proposed ‘thresholds of happiness’ which, with happiness being a central ‘*point*’ of the Love and Happiness Contract. If not met the Love and Happiness Contract was breached (“*if you’re not even that happy there’s no point*”, Sonia) and so the partner in the relationship is free to, and should, terminate the relationship (“*if you can’t get it back to how it was then just give up*”, Sonia).

In contrast, in keeping with a Rough Patch Diagnosis, it was argued that sharing a happy day, or moment, with one’s partner could rekindle an intimate connection and enliven one’s commitment to the relationship (“*just need to feel that happiness again*”). Feelings of love and affection in the face of relationship badness or sadness were positioned as affirmation of the Love and Happiness Contract and thus positioned breaches to the relationship contract as temporary – confirming a Rough Patch Diagnosis.

In summary, this presented love as a common feature of two contrasting ideas, (1) ideals of the ‘victims’ duty to persevere in the relationship and (2) ideals of the partner’s duty to the ‘victim’ to make them happy. Moreover, differentiation of a Rough Patch from a worthless, substandard relationship was quantified, in almost measurable quantities of love and happiness (e.g. days or moments of happiness, thresholds of happiness) that can be calculated, or “*weighed up*”, against the negatives. Emotional reactions such as trusting one’s instincts were also drawn upon but predominantly differentiation was a logical calculation of whether the good and happy outweigh the bad or sad.

The importance of Happiness to the Rough Patch Diagnosis raised the possibility for *different* relationship contracts with *different* terms and agreements. To explain, focus on the importance of happiness (a subjective measure) in judging a relationship's worth, instead of the presence of problematic behaviours (a largely objective measure) raised the possibility for relationships with *different* terms and agreements. For example, so long as the Love and Happiness Contract was being upheld by both partners (i.e. that they loved and were happy with each other) relationships which contained physical violence, jealousy, arguments, controlling behaviours, etc., could arguably be permitted, as they did not breach the Love and Happiness Contract.

#### **6b. 4 Conclusion**

To conclude a Rough Patch Diagnosis was used by young people to construct problematic relationship behaviours as normal and temporary. Love and happiness indicated whether a relationship was undergoing a Rough Patch, and was potentially abusive, by establishing (i) behavioural blips rather than inherent perpetrator badness, and (ii) the agency of the protagonist to insist on or renegotiate the contract. These claims asserted that the relationship still had the potential for Love and Happiness and so was worthwhile.

However, some speakers constructed a fine line between a Rough Patch and a sub-standard relationship. Participants worked up ways in which a Rough Patch could be differentiated from sub-standard and potentially abusive relationships such as: the importance of happiness, overall relationship worth and a quantification of pros vs. cons. In this way, not all problematic behaviours were deemed as at odds with the Love and Happiness Contract. That is if the happiness aspect of the contract was upheld the relationship was still worthwhile.

The next Chapter will discuss limitations young people posed to the use of the Rough Patch Diagnosis and the Love and Happiness Contract, critiquing some of the arguments in this chapter. The next chapter will also highlight where the Rough Patch Diagnosis could aid identification of abuse within a complex domain of seeking third-party opinions on relationship problems.

## **Chapter 6c: Love and Happiness Contract: Evaluations of Rough Patch Diagnosis and the Need for outsiders**

This final chapter on the Love and Happiness Contract will outline the limits speakers placed on the Rough Patch Diagnosis and evaluations of victim and perpetrators implicated. I will begin by outlining speakers' critiques of differentiating a Rough Patch, in which a relationship is worth saving, from a worthless, substandard relationship which should be abandoned. This is done through speakers drawing on limitations of the Love and Happiness Contract for differentiating these contrasting kinds of relationships, discussing how: (i) the Love and Happiness Contract may *excuse and deny abuse*; (ii) the victim may be 'blinded', tolerating difficult behaviour; (iii) interrogation of Outsiders Objectivity; (iv) *distorted relationship norms*; and (v) how far from normal these behaviours were; and juxtapositions of a *blinded victim and an objective outsider*.

I will then critique this talk outlining the following arguments drawn upon by young people: (vi) that "it clearly isn't that easy" to leave; (vii) the subjectivity of outsiders; (viii) "fear of being single and the fear of being alone"; and (x) love as complicated. I will then summarise the benefits of a Rough Patch Diagnosis to young people's assessments of relationships: namely (xi) third party judgment and stigma; (xii) pressure to be in a happy relationship; and (xiii) ending the relationship as the victim's choice: 'it's her choice'.

### **6c. 1. Limitations of the Rough Patch Diagnosis**

Despite some speakers offering ways to differentiate a Rough Patch from a worthless relationship, as outlined in Chapter 6b, other speakers contended that the lines were blurred.

### 6c. 1. 1 Excusing or denying abuse

Some speakers argued that, in some cases, use of the Love and Happiness Contract to substantiate a Rough Patch Diagnosis was a strategy to excuse or deny problematic behaviours to sustain the relationship:

“because she’s like “Well he does make me happy”, and if you give her advice she’ll be like “Well...”, like he’s obviously not making you happy because he’s telling you that you’re immature and all this stuff” (Cara, 18-21, Undergraduate).

It was argued that claims of happiness were suspicious and may be the result of a victim assessing the relationship in an overly optimistic or even irrational manner. Like Cara, another participant outlined that in cases where negative behaviour was “clearly” apparent, assertions of happiness raised questions about the validity of a potential victim’s account:

“[[I]t’s like she remembers the good times, in order to cancel out like all the bad times that’s happening but you can’t do that, like you need to weigh it up equally, like on this it’s clearly showing more negative behaviour than positive behaviour” (17-18, Female, Sch B<sup>44</sup>).

These sentiments were reflected by other speakers who proposed that the woman’s assertion of happiness was “*a lie that she’s telling herself*” (Jeremy, 18-24, M, Undergraduate) or that “*she knows that she’s not in a healthy relationship, she just doesn’t really want to admit it*” (Lydia, 17-18, F, Sch A). In these ways the meaning of ‘symptoms’ of a Rough Patch, previously outlined in Chapter 6b – such as reports of happiness, and measurements of relationship ‘worth’ (i.e. weighing up the positive and negatives) – were refuted and, in some cases, seen as ways of denying serious relationship issues as opposed to just a Rough Patch.

These accounts highlight the centrality of objectivity and rationality to the Love and Happiness Contract without which accurate diagnosis of a Rough Patch cannot be

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<sup>44</sup> It was difficult to assign speakers in this group so pseudonyms are not given.

made. The arguments also constructed the potential victim as possessing an illogical desire to sustain a sub-standard relationship at the expense of her own personal safety or dignity, the reasons for I will now explore.

### **6c. 1. 2 Blinded Victim and tolerating difficult behaviour**

Victim's accounts were refuted through proposals that the victim was 'blinded' by love, as suggested by Cara above. Accounts of such unawareness were presented through the argument that love and affection towards an abusive partner could render victims stuck in a substandard relationship contract, as explained by Jenny:

“A lot of people seem to get into this loop where when they love somebody but they don't have a good relationship with them but they stay with them anyway and they become a bit blindsided and then after they'd split up with them they'd realise how good they've done by getting out of that situation, realise how unhappy they were. I think sometimes when you're unhappy you don't know that you're unhappy because something's keeping you in that situation.”  
(Jenny, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Jenny suggests there are types of relationships where this is the pattern, and in which people are unknowingly trapped. In such relationships, and contrary to the constructions of love in the Love and Happiness Contract, loving an abusive partner is a barrier to a rational decision to terminate the relationship. In this way, some victims were depicted as wanting to uphold their end of the contract despite their partner's renegeing. Here, potential victims were presented as excusing or being naïve of the behaviour and dismissing it as a Rough Patch. As Tom argued: “*she will have trouble ending it because she seems to express the opinion that he's still good inherently*” (18-24). Such relationships seem to be constructed as having low quality contractual agreements of Love and Happiness stating an implicit position that the contract only works if both sides are committed. So, advice was to leave, although it was recognised that terminating the relationship when commitments were unequal was complicated by a woman's love for a man.

These constructions draw on a broader gendered discourse of women as irrational and emotionally-driven. This can be seen clearly in the use of the term “*blindsided*” that portrays women’s ability to assess the Love and Happiness Contract - something about which a woman should have a good understanding – as undermined by her feelings. This frames the victim’s experience of love and happiness as “*a loop*” trapping her in the relationship as opposed to being evidence of the relationship’s worth.

This ‘loop’ of irrationally sustaining of the relationship was framed as a self-indulgent weakness and neediness in which women went against their best judgment to satisfy their emotional needs: “*get into this loop where when they love somebody but they don’t have a good relationship with them but they stay with them anyway*” (Jenny). Other speakers took this up explicitly:

“[S]ometimes girls do like that affection and that’s the only thing that’s keeping her I would think, just the attention, you know? But really I just think she’s lost touch with him.” (17-18, Sch B)

This male speaker makes the case that women’s emotional neediness can result in the Love and Happiness Contract becoming distorted at various levels and describes some women as sustaining relationships for a lesser form of love: ‘*just attention*’. Further, the Love and Happiness Contract may have been breached because a deep emotional connection between the two partners has been lost: “*she’s lost touch with him*”, and the love component of the Love and Happiness Contract is one-sided. Subsequently, the woman’s need for attention is the “*only thing keeping her in the relationship.*” According to this account, the relationship should be ended but in many cases, it is not. This again evoked ideas that the relationship is only being sustained because of the woman’s weakness and/or irrationality.



### 6c. 1. 3 Distorted relationship norms

So far, this chapter has outlined how use of the Love and Happiness Contract in victim's diagnosis of a Rough Patch – particularly if female – is often presented as flawed. This position draws on the situating of such victims as irrational, needy, and blindsided by love so requiring outsider assistance. Some participants, argued that the situation presented in the scenarios with a female victim suggested that distorted relationship norms had been established: *“it's [hitting] almost sort of becoming like a normal thing for her which isn't okay because you shouldn't have to put up with that”* (18-21, F, Undergraduate). For Kate, apparent acceptance of physical violence indicated that the Love and Happiness Contract had been breached and was now operating under a different contract of: ‘you will love me by forgiving my behaviour and I will love you by not leaving you’.

Kate went on to argue that normalisation of hitting indicated an unsafe and escalating situation: *“it's just not safe to sort of stay with him because it, could just keep getting worse and carry on”*. In this way, such distortions of the Love and Happiness Contract made it hard to rescue a victim and another speaker argued that it was only by leaving a male perpetrator that he would ‘realise’ his behaviour was unacceptable. Thus, whilst a Rough Patch can, in principle, protect the primacy of the Love and Happiness Contract, there is danger in that it can also be used to conceal problematic behaviours. Yet, as I will come to discuss in this chapter (6c. 2: *Help-seeking: Complications and High Stakes to Identification of Abuse*), in some instances this disempowerment of victims was recognised and problematised in young people's talk.

A discussion by Cara, Kate and Lisa outlined how young people endeavor to weigh up the relationships pros and cons and how these judgements can be flawed and abuse obscured or excused:

Cara: I think she's like a little bit torn as well because she said that when he's nice to her that she feels really happy and like it might feel like if they've been together for a year that's probably how she's felt quite a lot before so she's like, doesn't really think that he's still going to make her feel like that and the bad bits are just like a little blip, so she might, be reluctant to break up with him for that reason, so,

Kate: Like outweighing the negatives with the positives in her mind, which might not actually be what it is like, in reality.

Int: Yeah. Do you think from the outside that her feeling happy sometimes maybe makes it better, like a better situation?

Cara: For her maybe but it just makes it harder.

Kate: Well then there is also that she, I mean obviously he's doing things that aren't great but if you, for example, like if you still have your own life and she was happy a lot of the time and he was affectionate a lot of the time and they were fine a lot of the time you might think "Well you know all couples do argue", maybe not, always in this way, but I can imagine from the outside you would sort of think to an extent well, yeah, they have these arguments and he can be a bit rubbish and controlling but they are normally happy...

Int: Okay.

Kate: ...or she is normally happy as well.

Int: What do you think Lisa, do you agree?

Lisa: Yeah, I think the same, you would get a different perception if you looked and if you saw them every day and they were always happy but then, when they get home it's a completely different story, you don't get to see the both, two sides.

(Cara, Kate & Lisa, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, the speakers were attempting to figure out whether a Rough Patch is just a cover for a sub-standard relationship and positioned possible victims in the same quandary: "*I think she's like a bit torn*". Cara argued that there is a risk that the "*bad bits*" are downplayed as a temporary "*blip*" "*which might not actually be what it is like, in reality*". Towards the end of the extract the speakers go on to attribute some of the difficulty in differentiating a sub-standard relationship from a Rough Patch to the potential victim's account. For example, Kate brings into question the reliability of the girlfriend's viewpoint, suggesting she may be lacking an accurate perception of "*reality*".

Lisa's talk focuses on Love and Happiness Contract as a problem of the Rough Patch Diagnosis: "*[she] doesn't really think that he's still going to make her feel like that [unhappy] and the bad bits are just like a little blip, so she might, be reluctant to break up with him*" where love for one's partner could result in a false diagnosis of a Rough Patch (discussed further in section 6c. 2). Further, Cara highlights a need to consider the reliability of both the potential victim's and the outsider's view of the relationship: "*if*

*you looked and if you saw them every day and they were always happy*” “*you don’t get to see both sides*”. This portrays the Love and Happiness Contract as subject to variable interpretations. Importantly, potential victims are positioned as less rational than others, mistaking permanently distorted contractual terms for a temporary Rough Patch.

In contrast, Lisa’s final statement constructs relationships as having ‘two sides’<sup>45</sup>: a public side and a private side of what happens ‘*behind closed doors*’, and that it is only by considering both that one can make a realistic assessment of the relationship. The implications of this are that public and private relationship behaviours are different and ‘contractual breaches’ are likely to be kept private (see Chapter 7: Trust and Fidelity Contract and Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation contract for further discussions of Privacy). Thus, public behaviour could be a false performance of ‘love and happiness’ and so does not necessarily evidence that the Love and Happiness Contract is being upheld away from the public gaze.

In contrast to Cara and Kate’s constructions, this calls into question the accuracy of outsiders’ accounts, as they are unlikely to have access to this private realm. Instead, it is those in the relationship who have ‘the truth’ about whether the relationship contract is being upheld (discussed further in section 6c. 2)<sup>46</sup>.

#### **6c. 1. 4 Interrogating outsider objectivity**

When talking about a lesbian relationship, Sarah, argued that seeking help was important to preventing the victim from normalising problematic behaviours and becoming trapped:

Int: OK. And do you think it’s better to get help at this stage rather than get help later on or...?

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation Contract for further discussion of ‘sides’ to relationship accounts.

<sup>46</sup> This perspective evoked by Lisa was in the minority.

Sarah: Yeah.

Int: Yeah. Why?

Sarah: Because like kind of like before her self-esteem gets even more damaged and she kind of, starts to justify her girlfriend's actions, otherwise she'll kind of like get deeper and deeper in it and then, like it will be too late because she'll just be kind of like, submissive to her, like she just won't, she won't think what she's doing is wrong anymore, she'll just kind of like put up with it and stuff like that and she just won't seek help in the end.

(Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, Sarah proposes that the victim is passive and in doing nothing against her partner's behaviour will become increasingly submissive and blind to it. As in Chapter 6b, the victim is positioned as having the agency to resolve the situation. However, this agency is presented as liable to erode over time which could result in a cycle\loop of distorted perceptions in which the victim's self-esteem is continually eroded. Again, the speaker presents distorted relationship terms in which the contract is split into two parts and only the love aspect is being upheld - by one partner - to the detriment of that partner's happiness.

With the victim unable to make rational judgements about the relationship, outsiders were considered to play a key role in supporting victims in establishing whether the Love and Happiness Contract had been breached. The need for outsiders also suggested that an individual's ability to judge a relationship was socially led, and misled by perpetrators. Thus, it is a responsibility of outsiders to 'save' people from such relationships before it is "*too late*" but only to those victims who seek support. This talk hints at the idea that relationships are private but that loyalty to one's partner can manifest as excusing problematic behaviours so that outsiders can only help victims if they are asked to (aspects of loyalty and privacy are discussed further in Chapter 3).

In summary, this section has explored participants proposed limitations to use of the Rough Patch Diagnosis particularly victim's feelings of happiness. It was argued the victim's feelings of happiness could be used to excuse or deny abusive behaviours

undermining previous assertions that love and happiness differentiated a Rough Patch from a worthless relationship. Similarly, assertions of happiness from the potential victim may also indicate that the victim was blind to the reality of the relationship. This positioned the victim as vulnerable and irrational. This position was juxtaposed the outsider who was portrayed as objective and rational, thus able to access the true reality of the relationship and so give 'correct' advice.

Speakers outlined that the Love and Happiness Contract must be two-sided and both aspects (Love and Happiness) must be fulfilled. This highlighted the subcontract that: both partners have a responsibility to ensure the Love and Happiness Contract is being upheld. Broadly, this subcontract alongside constructions of the victim as 'blind' resulted in complex, potentially contradictory responsibilities and expectations of potential victims. That is, under the subcontract victims were deemed to retain the agency to demand fair contractual terms. However, victims were also positioned as 'blind' to the contractual breaches due to love and so vulnerable accepting poor relationship terms. In contrast outsiders could help identify contractual breaches but - because of notions of relationships as private - were only allowed to help when the victim asked.

In this way victims presented in a paradoxical, 'loop' in which they were unaware of the contractual breaches and so vulnerable and powerless yet victims were expected to have the power and insight to leave the relationship. Overall, this presented convoluted responsibilities around the Love and Happiness Contract shared between outsiders (who were deemed to have greater power and insight) and those in the relationship (who bore most of the responsibility but the least power and insight).

## **6c. 2. Help seeking, Complications and High Stakes to Identification of Abuse**

So far, this chapter has largely focused on constructions of heterosexual women. Focus on heterosexual women is likely due to the prevalence of the Heteronormative Frame in the Love and Happiness Contract. Within this frame heterosexual women's victimhood was more readily recognised than the victimhood of lesbian and gay people and heterosexual men. However, the availability of women's victimhood was not empowering for female victims. As the extracts have shown speakers often drew on tropes around women's victimhood and reasons for her failure to leave the relationship that reinstated gendered strength arguments and women's lack of power or competency in various areas (e.g. emotion regulation, their ability to leave relationships and to think rationally). Thus, although heterosexual women were recognised as victims, such recognition did not seem empowering but instead placed them in a hopeless situation of irrationality and blame.

Considering this, this section will discuss cases where participants' talk refuted outsiders presumed objectivity and the simplistic solution of leaving the relationship. This section will first consider how young people constructed advice to '*just leave*' as failing to consider the complexities of the Love and Happiness Contract. This section will overview young people's critiques to the objectivity of the outsider, making the cases that ending the contract as '*not that easy*' due to: (i) basic contracts being a source of safety and female identity and (ii) Love as a Complication. The section will then further explore the ways in which speakers were critical of third parties: (i) questioning their objectivity and (ii) outlining judgment as a drawback to seeking help from outsiders. I will then conclude with comments as to how the Rough Patch Diagnosis, despite excusing or denying abuse, could in fact be a beneficial tool for victims in deciphering whether a relationship is acceptable. To maintain focus on the Rough Patch Diagnosis

a broader discussion of judgement and help seeking, including consideration of gender and sexual orientation is offered in Chapter 8 – Duty and Obligation contract.

### 6c. 2. 1 “It clearly isn’t that easy” to leave

Some participants contended that telling the friend to leave the relationship was an overly simplistic solution and therefore unhelpful, as explained by Jessica:

“[S]ometimes it can be really annoying when you love someone and people are constantly like, “Oh just break up with him,” it clearly isn’t that easy, otherwise she wouldn’t be asking for advice so maybe you need to like listen to her and understand what really is going on, what she’s doing and stuff like that.”  
(Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Jessica asserts that advice to leave, by outsiders fails to grasp the complexity of the Love and Happiness Contract, particularly how feelings of love make it difficult to end the relationship (“*it clearly isn’t that easy*”). Moreover, speakers argued that rather than being objective, outsiders may overreact, focusing only on the problematic behavior – specifically the failings of the perpetrator – rather than the Love and Happiness Contract as a whole: “*listen to her and understand what really is going on, what she’s doing and stuff like that*” (Jessica). By focusing singularly on the reported relationship problems, the outsider could recklessly reject a Rough Patch Diagnosis and prematurely end a potentially good relationship.

### 6c. 2. 2 Subjective Outsiders

Talk around third parties, from the perspective of the potential victim, drew different conclusions about an outsider’s potential objectivity. Parents’ potential to be objective was questioned. Cara stated parents were not “*impartial*” and Kate argued it was a parent’s “*job to protect*” their child and thus parents would advise them to “*get out*”, labelling the partner as “*bad*” even in minor cases:

“the first thing they’re going to do, even if you say, “Oh he’s slightly been upsetting” or something the first thing they’re going to say as well, you know, “Get out, he’s bad and everything” which isn’t necessarily the case” (Kate, 18-21, Undergraduate).

The lack of objectivity of some third parties was further problematised by arguments that seeking outside help could undermine the assumed victim's ability to make the '*right decision*'. Cara outlined that disclosure of relationship problems to one's parents, particularly those involving physical violence (i.e. shoving), would likely result in restrictions that could terminate the relationship (e.g. not allowing the boyfriend to come to the house):

"I'm not sure that a parent is the best option because obviously they're going to want the best for their daughter and if she says that he's been like shoving her they probably, they might not let him come to the house or stuff like that" (Cara, 18-21, Undergraduate).

Thus, speakers here shut down this potential avenue of help, as parent's relationship judgements were clouded by risk which problematised invested parental views and prioritised the subjectivity of the potential victim. Moreover, parents were further seen as unhelpful as they may use their authority in the parent-child relationship to end the relationship without considering the victim's wishes:

"[a]nd if she does want to like work on the relationship then, her parents being so negative against it is probably, not going to help her, and they're just going to tell her to break up with him straightaway" (Cara, 18-21, Undergraduate).

Kate went on to contend that unlike parents, friends specifically a mutual friend of the couple, could be a good, objective confidante. Friends were positioned as better able to provide 'impartial' advice on how the relationship could be adapted to fulfil the obligations of the Love and Happiness Contract. A friend was framed as able to "see *both sides*" and possessing a rapport with the partner that would facilitate and mediate corrections to a temporarily distorted relationship contract.

### **6c. 2. 3 "Fear of being single and the fear of being alone"**

Young people highlighted that victims may not want to leave the relationship because: "*sometimes the safety of being in a relationship can make you feel like you want to stay*" (Jenny, 18-21, Undergraduate). It was contended that being part of even a rudimentary



relationship contract that: 'I will not go out with anyone else and neither will you' provided a basic indication of one's worth as well as a safety net, and so was sufficient for some individuals to continue in the relationship.

Desires to stay in the relationship were compounded by fears of losing a companion and being single:

"I think sometimes the safety of being in a relationship can make you feel like you want to stay and the fear of being single and the fear of being alone, so after a year when you've got used to someone that much it'd be weird to not have them in your life" (Jenny, 18-21, Undergraduate).

This was presented as a particular concern for women:

Lydia: Um, well I think that, I don't know, especially in situations like that [vignette], girls tend to have less power in the relationship and so they kind of feel that, I don't know, like if they leave they'll become less or kind of like, I don't know, just like...

Claire: I see what you mean. Because they feel...

Lydia: Like the relationship validates them as a person.

Claire: So without that kind of status they feel as though they're like out on a limb, whereas guys can see it as "oh I'm single so whatever, I'll just go pull that one tonight", whereas girls go, we don't talk about it in the same way. And we're judged for being, getting off with somebody whereas they're praised for it, so being single's not the same. [...]

Int: Do you think that it's true that if a girl has a boyfriend then she's probably like more of a woman than if, than compared to a single girl?

Lydia: I don't think she's more of a woman but I think she would be seen, like women perceive, women are kind of meant to be in a relationship I think, like that means you're successful.

Claire: But a relationships like a secure zone so she can do what she wants within the relationship, within those constraints but as soon as she does what she would do in a relationship outside of it, that's when it becomes not socially acceptable or the guys will see her as a slut or something."(17-18, F, Sch A)

Lydia and Claire's account depicts men and women as possessing different needs and rights in relationships. Subsequently women felt differently to men when not in a relationship. Men were positioned as indifferent to the failure of a relationship with societal acceptance of men's casual sexual intimacy positioned as the primary reason for men's indifference to being or not being in a relationship: "*guys can see it as "oh I'm single so whatever, I'll just go pull that one tonight"* (Claire).

Women's involvement in a relationship provided them with "*status*" and "*validate[d] them as a person*". Being part of a relationship contract was presented as a goal for a

woman and marker of her success: “*women are kind of meant to be in a relationship I think, like that means you’re successful*” (Lydia). Without such a contract, women “*become less*” and were constructed as ‘*out on a limb*’ - a phrase that evokes images of single women as separate, lost or not fulfilling their purpose. In this way relationships were gendered, framed as more important to heterosexual women than men and positioned women as *in need* of a relationship partner.

The speakers further worked up the benefits of a relationship in that it provides women with both freedom and safety: “*a secure zone so she can do what she wants*”. However, there are hints that this freedom – predominantly sexual freedom –inside the relationship is limited, in that: “*girls tend to have less power*” presumably than men, and “*can do what [they] want [...] within those [relationship] constraints*”. Yet, sexual freedom outside a relationship contract is further restricted with sexual behaviour “*deemed socially unacceptable*” and judged by men to be ‘*slut[ty]*’.

Speaker’s contrasts of men and women’s rights to behave sexually (or not) outside of a relationship strongly suggested a ‘Gender Double Standard’. This can be seen in Claire’s phrase: “*guys can see it [being single] as “oh I’m single so whatever, I’ll just go pull that one tonight”*”. In this phrase, the use of the adverb “*just*”, ambiguous personifier “*that one*” and the noun “*tonight*” work up the position that men’s behaviour is sexually promiscuous and frivolous yet: “*they’re praised for it*”. Further the verb “*can*” highlights men’s freedom to act in such ways. This construction of relationships and gendered sexual freedoms provided support for the case that women, despite experiencing abuse, might still receive some benefits for staying in a substandard relationship, empathising with the potential victim’s decision to stay.

In some cases, fears of leaving a relationship contract were formulated in more extreme ways: that the victim may “*end up lonely forever*” or “*the rest of [their] life*” further feeding

into constructions of women as needy. However, in many of these extreme instances the victim's bleak outlook was proposed to be a product of the perpetrator's manipulation and criticisms:

"[W]hen it [the vignette] says that he's very critical of her, she might have started to think that she won't be able to get anyone else or she won't be able to move on from him because he's making her feel like this so she might be scared to leave him, in case she'll end up lonely forever" (17-18, M, Sch B)

"[M]ost relationships like this where, you know, they criticise you so you feel like you're not going to get anybody else and you feel like you're going to be lonely for the rest of your life, and things like that" (Benjamin, 17-18, M, Sch B)

Here, failing relationship contracts were constructed as subject to the perpetrator's manipulation and characterised by a power imbalance in the relationship. Speakers raised the possibility that, in addition to ending the relationship and never entering into another relationship, a broken contract had the power to damage people - particularly women. That is, one could end the relationship and still be in love with their, now ex-, partner unable to 'move on' and initiate a new relationship. The use of phrases such as "feel like", "think that" and "might be" presented these scenarios as speculative fears.

Yet the severity of these potential outcomes expressed through extreme case formulations such as "*lonely for the rest of your life*", "*you're not going to get anyone else*", "*lonely forever*" constructed breaking the relationship contract (i.e. leaving the relationship) as risky, having *potentially* irreparable negative consequences for the injured party (i.e. the victim). Use of phrases such as "feel like" and "think that" also spoke to the possibility that the perpetrator may have planted the victim's fears of ending the relationship contract in order to keep the victim in the relationship. This represented the potential for contracts to be distorted to work more for one party more than another.

### 6c. 2. 4 Gender Double Standards and Men's Forgotten Rights

Some speakers argued that third parties might encourage relationships where the Love and Happiness Contract favoured one party over the other, specifically women's rights over men's. This evoked an argument of Men's Forgotten Rights. That is, although generally women were positioned as being disempowered in relationships some speakers (male and female) argued that within the realm of IPV and breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract women in fact had the upper hand:

Martin: [I]f you talked about this [a woman being physically violent to a man] people could, like I wouldn't personally, but especially girls could say to him like well she's obviously not happy, you're obviously not doing something right, you should treat her better, you should...

Zac: And then maybe she'll...

Martin...take her out, maybe if you took her out and you showed you loved her more.

Dom: If she didn't do that [be abusive] to me then you would [take her out more] wouldn't you?"

(17-18, M, Sch A)

In this extract Martin argued that third parties, particularly women, might blame heterosexual men for their girlfriend's misbehaviour. Martin, Zac and Dom argued that third parties could re-frame the woman's contractual breach as due to the *man's* failure to fulfill 'obvious' aspects of the Love and Happiness Contract. For example, by him failing to make her happy or "*obviously doing something wrong*". Thus, outsiders were positioned as likely to overlook the rights of men and the potential for men's victimhood. It was argued that outsiders may position the man as to blame and propose that the man should solve the problem by upholding his end of the contract, for example, "*treat[ing] her better*", "*tak[ing] her out*" and "*show[ing] you loved her more*". Notably, these suggested are used by young people as outlined earlier in Chapter 6a. These portrayals of Men's Forgotten Rights are like those previously proposed in Chapter 6c. 1 where heterosexual female victims were blamed for continuing potentially abusive relationships.

Many speakers rejected such third-party notions that the male victim was to blame for his girlfriend's behaviour deeming such propositions as unfair and nonsensical. Instead speakers, such as Dom argued that the boyfriend's failure to uphold the Love and Happiness Contract was in direct response to his girlfriend's initial failure upholding *her* end of the contract: "*If she didn't do that [be abusive] to me then you would [take her out more] wouldn't you?*". This highlighted the Love and Happiness subcontract that the agreement was two-way and that the other partner does not have to uphold the contract should their partner already breach it.

These male speakers went on to argue that third-parties had a Gendered Double Standard for women and men's contractual obligations which disadvantaged heterosexual men:

Martin: In all the like romantic films it's either the guy likes the girl for ages and just like keeps going back [...] or the girl likes a guy and it's always way... if it's that way around the girl always likes the guy but the guy likes the wrong girl and somehow that's perceived as wrong, like...

Dom: Martin and his romcoms! [Overspeaking] [all laugh].

Int: It's a good point Martin.

Martin: It's almost like an end from that point of view, of us watching a film, it's... [Dom makes a joke about Martin talking about romcoms] it's like from the point of view of the viewer the guy's wrong for liking another girl. [...] And then at the end of the movie it's always like he's picked the right one 'cos she likes him all along and stuff like that, and it shouldn't be like that, it shouldn't be... either way around they [girls] shouldn't just be taught to like be persistent and you'll get them [a boy].

Zac: Girls especially watch those sort of films from a younger age, and they have this idea of being treated like a princess and all that sort of...

Simon: ...malarkey?

Martin: Yeah, and it's like well why shouldn't the guy be treated like that as well, like on...

Dom: I want to be treated like a princess [in high pitched voice, all laugh].

Martin: Do you know what I mean though [overspeaking] [all laugh], but it's there shouldn't be any reason... surely a relationship should be balanced and it should go the same either way.

[...]

Simon: Because no-one will take him seriously if he says to anyone, if it escalated to the point where, you know, his life was in danger and he went to the police about it, they'd [the police] probably chuckle to themselves, why not, nothing would be done, but like in the first situation if it was the other way around the girl went to the police they'd run to his house and shoot the geezer to be honest [laughs], but it's [men's violence against women] taken a lot more seriously.

(Martin, Zac, Dom and Simon, 17-18, M, Sch A)

In these discussions, the speakers contended that heterosexual women were often portrayed as having greater relationship insights than heterosexual men. Speakers used common storylines from romantic comedies to illustrate this point where the male character is “*wrong for liking another girl*” and the film ends with the man “*pick[ing] the right one*”. Here, viewers and society’s perspectives were aligned with women’s desires, which overlooked men’s wants.

Zac challenged this account of relationships arguing that it inappropriately overlooks men’s right and portrayed heterosexual women as having a right to higher relationship standards than heterosexual men such as “*being treated like a princess*”. This standard of “*being treated like a princess*” promoted ideas of women as a protected class, whose wants and needs men should pander to, and to whom men’s desires are secondary and forgotten (“*the guy’s wrong for liking another girl*”).

This was expressed later in the group by Zac and Simon who argued that often men were expected to ‘*get with*’ a girl just because she liked them and no attention was paid to whether the boy liked the girl:

“Zac: [I]f there’s a girl and a guy’s got a crush on her it’s there’s no social pressure to kind of act on that at all on the girl’s part and but if it’s the other way around and that it’s known in a group that a girl likes a guy everybody would be to the guy, “Well like, well why aren’t you going there?” like...

Simon: Just get fucked [drunk] at a party and get with them or whatever  
(Zac & Simon, 17-18, M, Sch A)

These arguments fed into arguments of Men’s Forgotten Rights. Here, speakers problematised the societal assumption that men desire any, and all, sexual intimacy arguing that it falsely assumes that men do and should accept any offers of intimacy meaning their desires are overlooked, again positioned second to women’s. Taken with the Martin, Simon, Zac and Dom’s extract the speakers argued that the Love and Happiness Contract and outsiders, specifically women, who drew on it were sexist in

their assessment of the contract having Gendered Double Standards that called their objectivity into question.

In Martin, Simon, Zac and Dom's extract, male speakers took on an equality argument proposing men and women should have equal contractual rights regardless of gender: "*surely a relationship should be balanced and it should go the same either way*" (Martin) a view speakers contrasted with the views of female third-parties where men's rights were forgotten. Yet, resistance to equal contractual rights for men and women was expressed by speakers such as Dom, in the persistent use of humour in response to such demands which constructs such relationship demands as emasculating, e.g. "*I want to be treated like a princess*" and "*Martin and his romcoms*".

At the end of the extract above Simon supports Martin's argument proposing that the Gendered Double Standard of relationship contract, and negating men's right, had serious consequences. That is, heterosexual men's claims of breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract – even in life threatening circumstances *and* when reported to professional authorities – would be ridiculed and dismissed. Yet heterosexual women's accounts would be met with extreme, immediate action such as shooting the offender. This Men's Forgotten Rights narrative positioned women as a protected group, for whom breaches of the relationship contract were excused, but breaches against whom were strongly disapproved.

In this way, the boys' argument challenged Claire and Lydia's account that the Gendered Double Standard in relationships was positive for men as they had more power and freedom within, and outside of, relationships. The disadvantages of men fed into broader arguments of Men's Forgotten Rights. Given the boys' account it seems the Gendered Double Standard of relationship terms disadvantaged both heterosexual men and heterosexual women. That is, just like women desired sexual freedom, men

desired a freedom to choose their own partner and an escape from a presumed drive for sexual conquests.

### 6c. 2. 5 Love as complicated

Although love was central to the Love and Happiness Contract its significance raised the possibility for emotions to be mixed and confused. Potential victims were constructed as feeling love, guilt, anger, sadness and fear towards their partner and the relationship; this was presented as muddying the waters:

Graham: [I]t must be scary to be in a kind of a relationship where there's so many confusing emotions, where you love him but he's potentially beating her or being horrible to her, so yeah.

Tom: It's why it's such a bad thing, it's not just a level of violence, if you meet someone in the street, have a disagreement and you punch them they get angry at you, justifiably because you've just hit them, this is a level where she loves him so the anger that she should feel for being abused and being violated doesn't manifest in the same way, she will probably half blame herself, think it's her own fault, he may even tell her it's her fault and it's terrible."

(Tom & Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

Graham argued that the victim's love for their partner would be discrepant with the problematic behaviour, causing confusion, a point he also made elsewhere: "*a lot of studies that say the victims don't, they don't recognise it as abuse, how could he or she abuse me when I love him and she loves me or he loves me or whatever.*" (Graham).

Tom furthered this point contending that love may cause the victim to respond by: "*probably half blam[ing] herself*". This raised the potential for the partner's misbehaviour to be blamed on the victim for not upholding their end of the Love and Happiness Contract (as shown above in cases of heterosexual male victims).

However, speakers argued such accusations were unreasonable as the victim's mixed emotions made the Love and Happiness Contract unworkable, e.g.:

"[I]t's why it's [IPV] such a bad thing [...] this is a level where she loves him so the anger that she should feel for being abused and being violated doesn't manifest in the same way" (Graham, 18-24, Undergraduate)



“there’s so many confusing emotions, where you love him but he’s potentially beating her or being horrible to her” (Tom, 18-24, Undergraduate).

The terms of the Love and Happiness Contract were further convoluted by the argument that love and affection could be emotional manipulation. This presented additional complications to victim and outsider’s interpretations of the relationship, as shown in the following extract:

Simon: Yeah, he’s like drawing her in then doing that [problematic behaviours], then being affectionate again to drop back into trying to keep her...  
 Martin: ‘Cos then she’s like, “oh well sometimes he’s really nice”.  
 Zac: Yeah, he’s nice.  
 Martin: But then he’s getting angry sometimes.  
 Int: Okay, so you think that this affection is actually just like kind of false, it’s just trying to keep her...  
 [...]  
 Dom: whether he’s meaning to manipulate her or not I think it does come across as manipulative.  
 (Simon, Zac, Martin and Dom, 17-18, Sch A)

Here, contradictory behaviours were considered to evidence a dysfunctional relationship. The speakers focused on the partner’s intentions to manipulate. For example, displays of affection and “*being nice*” were constructed as incongruent with an abusive partner providing the victim with a reason to stay (“*‘Cos then she’s like, oh well sometimes he’s really nice*”) and “*draw[ing]*” her back into, or ‘*keep[ing]*’ her in, the relationship.

The potential perpetrator’s behaviour was constructed as changing and unpredictable: “*sometimes he’s really nice [...] But then he’s getting angry sometimes*”, with the modifier “*sometimes*” highlighting the unsettled nature of the partner’s mood and intermittent compliance with the Love and Happiness Contract. Another participant also expressed this:

“Because through this [scenario] it shows like he’s different, like it shows he’s got quite different moods a lot of the time and he seems like if he’s violent towards her he could become increasingly violent” (Sophie, 15-16, Sch A).

This impression of the situation made way for propositions that the victim was justifiably confused. For example, another participant, Jack, said the girlfriend would be overwhelmed by emotions leading to confusion, and leaving her not knowing what to feel:

“[B]ecause she’s [...] feeling worried, also that she’s feeling happy as well so she’s got a confused feeling about him and that she doesn’t know obviously what to feel” (Jack, 17-18, Sch B).

Emotional manipulation could lead to self-doubt. This could stop the girlfriend leaving the relationship: “*she might be doubting herself and thinking maybe he’s right, which is why she’s still with him*” (Jack, 17-18, M. Sch B). Another speaker began to describe the ominous insidiousness of self-doubt labelling it as paranoia arguing that it “[i]s engraved into your head” and inescapable by its intangible nature, with the use of the pronouns ‘you’ and ‘your’ positioning this struggle not just specific to potential victims of abuse but a relatable experience: “*you don’t know whether or not to believe paranoia because it’s not a thing, it’s not a real thing, it’s just in your head and paranoia is hard to get rid of*” (17-18, M, Sch B).

It was argued that emotional abuse, in this instance criticism, could trigger paranoia and eventually be believed by the victim:

“[P]eople are telling you that they’re being critical of you, paranoia is going to start to kick in and you can’t really get rid of paranoia if people are telling you that you’re ugly or they don’t like you and then you’re going to start to believe it eventually” (Jack, 17-18, Sch B).

This diagnosis outlined that when relationships failed, belonging to a relationship contract had its drawbacks, as some individuals were vulnerable to believing that they were the problem. Further, as shown in the examples above within constructions of Love as Confusing the victim’s vulnerability to emotional manipulation was positioned as resultant of the victim’s honest and believing nature. Moreover, the victim’s decision to maintain, or indecision to terminate, the relationship despite the Love and Happiness

Contract not being upheld was rationalised through portrayals of the victim as committed to the Love and Happiness Contract (i.e. feeling love for one's partner) and so trusting and believing that the perpetrator will maintain their commitment to the Love and Happiness Contract as attested to by other speakers:

"[I]t sounds a bit corny but like falling in love can make you quite naïve and stupid and ignore things that you really shouldn't." (Jeremy, 18-21, M, Undergraduate)

"It's a story that happens every day isn't it, where potentially the abuser gets arrested and it all comes out but at the end of the day the victim withdraws the complaint and then they just go back to how it was, hoping that they'll change or... But it's a very deeply emotionally horrible situation to be in I should think." (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

In summary, accounts of Love as Confusing enabled speakers to empathise with a victim's believing and trusting approach to the maintenance of the Love and Happiness Contract. Here, talk worked up trust for the perpetrator in many ways such as: the use of the pronoun '*you*' instead of 'they'; empathising with victim's responses (e.g. "*it must be scary*"), and speaker's distance of themselves from accounts that construct the victim at fault for the contractual breach. This argument contrasted to those outlined in the beginning of this chapter where victims were positioned as lacking insight, resilience and self-respect. In the case of Love as Confusing, talk rationalised the potential victim's response to the relationship's complexities placing potential victims in a slightly more privileged position than talk in section 6c.1.

### **6c. 3: Third Party Judgment & Stigma: Arguments for Rough Patch Diagnosis**

So far, this chapter has overviewed limitations to the Rough Patch Diagnosis, criticisms of such limitations, and challenges to portrayals of victims as subjective and blind. The chapter has also explored talk which expresses greater sympathy and alliance towards potential victims and the complexities of love. This next section will explore speaker's constructions of third party involvement from the victim's perspective, particularly the unwanted judgment relationships may face. The remaining part of this chapter will build

up some of the benefits victims may gain in using the Rough Patch Diagnosis; or rather the costs victims may face in not using it.

The practicalities of Love as Confusing placed the potential victim in a bind. As shown by one participant, Lisa, such confusion could make the victim reluctant to seek help: *“in case she’s over exaggerated, she doesn’t actually know if she’s just thinking it in her head or that he’s actually controlling her in that sort of way.”* (18-21, F, Undergraduate). Lisa constructed psychological manipulation as hard to recognise. The excerpt also implies that there is a lot at stake when identifying, and seeking help for controlling relationships. Primarily that the potential victim’s evaluation of the relationship could be wrong and a potentially good relationship could be ended.

Third parties were also at risk of making such erroneous judgements. As discussed before, the ‘objective outsider’ was a way to decipher if the relationship was ‘worth it’. However, as Lisa hints at, in some cases seeking help from outsiders came at a cost: judgement and stigma, which alone could end a potentially good relationship.

### **6c. 3. 1 Judgement and stigma: Pressure to be in a happy relationship**

One way in which judgement and stigma were constructed was through assertions that there were pressures on young people to be seen to be in a relationship that upheld the Love and Happiness Contract. Young people did not want to disclose their partner’s breaches of the relationship contract because no one wants to admit they are in a bad relationship:

Jessica: [N]o-one wants their friends and stuff to know that they’re maybe having problems, everyone wants to be seen as like a strong couple, like nothing can break them, like although with your closest friends you tell them everything, I think to like the general, you wouldn’t want to be seen arguing in the street, like it’s embarrassing for people to think you’re not happy I think.

Int: Okay, can you think of any other reason [the friend may not want others to know about the problem]?

Sonia: Her friends might be in really strong relationships so she's comparing it to that and she just feels like inferior to their relationships and she might just not want to talk about it.

Int: So do you think it's quite important to not have people think that, like a relationship isn't very good?

Sonia: Yeah, because I think sometimes like when your friends get involved and then your boyfriend and your friends fall out, and then you've sorted it out then there's always that awkwardness between your friends, and then it just ruins that, you can't bring them out to the same places and stuff.

(Jessica & Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, Jessica and Sonia argued that there were normative pressures on young people to be seen to be in a happy relationship. Behaviours that evidenced a relationship failure to adhere to the Love and Happiness Contract were, seen as largely private.<sup>47</sup> Issues that one would not want to share with those outside the relationship because they may judge them: "*no-one wants their friends and stuff to know that they're maybe having problems*". Given this pressure, failure of one to be seen in a relationship that makes one happy, or shows them as part of a "*strong couple*" evoked feelings of embarrassment and inferiority: "*it's embarrassing for people to think you're not happy*"; "*she just feels like inferior to their relationships*". This construction and the use of the pronoun '*you*' positioned the speaker as sympathetic to the complexities the victim may face.

Another speaker, Sarah (18-21, Undergraduate) argued that the outsider's perspective could be damning for both the potential victim: "*they'd think that you were just kind of a pushover or something like that*", and the perpetrator: "*they would judge your boyfriend, they think 'oh he's a really bad boyfriend' or 'oh he's a really bad person'*". This argument seemed against outsider involvement as it could cause more harm to the relationship than good.

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<sup>47</sup> Constructions of relationship privacy are discussed further in Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation contract.

In addition, as shown in the main extract above, Sonia raised another limitation to seeking help from outsiders, that: if behaviours were part of a Rough Patch (i.e. a temporary breach of the relationship contract), disclosing them to one's friends, even once resolved, could cause lasting 'awkwardness', arguments, 'fall outs', and even 'ruin' the relationship. Another participant Olivia (18-21, Undergraduate) made a similar case arguing that once the behaviour was disclosed "*a lot of people, wouldn't like him [the partner] at all really, be against him*". This stigma from outsiders was portrayed as lasting and indifferent to whether the contractual breach was temporary (a Rough Patch) or if it had been overcome and the contract was now being adhered to. For example, Olivia contended that even if the partner were to change he would "*still have that stigma about him*" as "*people [would] still think of them [the partner] as being violent*". In this way outsiders were portrayed as buying into the Love and Happiness Contract and having little forgiveness for those who breached it, acting in ways that ensured these relationship standards were upheld and punishing those who broke the terms even if they were now upholding them.

Accordingly, seeking help from third parties was constructed as risky, as lasting outsider judgment could "*put strain on the relationship*" (Olivia). In this way, although as shown in Chapter 6b outsiders were positioned as a source of rationality and clear-sightedness, at other times outsiders were viewed as potentially damaging to the relationship, likely to erroneously judge a relationship to be entirely dysfunctional.

To summarise, in relation to the broader argument, the meeting of these two contrasting ideas placed the potential victim in a Double Bind. The first level of the bind was that discussed in 6c. 1 that: the potential victim may not be able to trust their own evaluations as to whether the relationship contract is being upheld, due to emotional manipulation or distorted relationship norms. As such the potential victim should seek advice from

outsiders to distinguish how far the problematic behaviours challenge, or break, the Love and Happiness Contract.

On a second level, as discussed in this section (6c. 3), seeking outsider advice opened the relationship up to undesirable, lasting and potentially inaccurate judgements. This situates the potential victim (primarily heterosexual women) within a “vicious cycle” of being unsure of their own evaluation of whether the Love and Happiness Contract was being upheld - and so desiring help from outsiders – and fearing judgement from others which inhibits seeking outside help.

Contrary to section 6c. 1 where the Rough Patch Diagnosis was heavily criticised because it risked excusing dangerous behaviour, in this section talk reframed the risks as outsider’s judgement and irrationality. Specifically, outsiders were constructed as likely to ignore the difference between permanent and temporary breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract, to police and interfere with relationships in a way that disempowered individuals to make their own choices.

These arguments highlighted an advantage of victims’ using the Rough Patch Diagnosis that: falsely diagnosing a Rough Patch was *more favourable* than falsely disclosing abuse to an outsider. Yet, outsiders were critical of the Rough Patch Diagnosis and possessed the authority to reject it. Thus, in some cases it was deemed easier and better for individuals not to disclose problematic behaviours to anyone. This talk supported arguments for relationship problems to be kept private (see Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation Contract). Notably, the idea of who held power in the relationship and its resolution was key to sense making of problematic behaviours, which I will now explore in the final part of this chapter.

### 6c. 3. 2 Ending the relationship: It's her choice

The beginning of this chapter explored participants' propositions that outsider intervention was the best solution to problematic relationships, leading on from constructions of the victim as delusional and having distorted social norms and the need for them to leave. In contrast, as discussed above, speakers argued that disclosure of problematic behaviours could relocate the power to resolve the relationship situation to those outside it. Following this critique, I will explore the impact of these constructions of victims from a victim's perspective.

Tom and Graham (18-24, M, Undergraduate) addressed this struggle for power between potential victims and outsiders. They made the case that the power to end the relationship should remain with the person in the relationship (*"it's her choice"*). Tom and Graham argued that an outsider *"interfering"* may *"cause the relationship to end"* – a desirable outcome – *"but not in the way it should"* taking the *"closure"* of ending the relationship away from the potential victim: *"if you were to just step in and go 'right, you're never seeing him again', she wouldn't have the same sort of, I suppose closure about it"*.

This approach attested to the intimacy and complexity of a relationship that an outsider most likely cannot understand. Speakers argued that relationships were private and so the victim *themselves* needed to realise the behaviour was unacceptable to be released from a cycle of violence: *"it's not my place to say it as definitively"*. This situated outsiders as having a *'place'* to encourage revelations (i.e. that the victim needed to leave and was in a worthless relationship), but did not afford outsiders a *'place'* to make outright accusations of IPV or demands to leave.



Notably, there remains the idea that the victim still does not have access to ‘the truth’ of the situation, however this talk seemed different to previous constructions of the victim as delusional. For example, Graham contended that outsiders should not ‘*over step the mark*’ by telling the victim “*you’ve got to end it*” as this was comparable to the abuse they were experiencing and so hypocritical: “*to say you’ve got to end it, it seems a bit pot calling the kettle black kind of thing because it’s what he’s doing*”. Graham’s talk rejected a paternalistic protectionist position of the victim and their vulnerability. Instead the victim was constructed as possessing the agency: “*she’s her own person*”, and desire to be allowed to “*make up her own mind*” about the relationship “*for better or for worse*”.

However, such talk was not entirely removed from previous constructions of the victim as misled, delusional and in need of an objective outsider as it was still proposed that by seeking outside help – affirming that the behaviour was not acceptable – the friend could be ‘*made to see*’ the truth of the situation:

“[J]ust to give advice and say look, this seriously isn’t right and maybe get her to talk to other people about it, to get some different points of view and see if the people say the same thing [...] it is a horrible situation but there’s not much apart from saying ‘this is a bad situation, you need to change it.’” (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

“I would be, at least from my point of view very, very inclined to be very protective of her at that point” (Tom, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

This was a position taken up by most participants, that the best way to advise a friend experiencing abuse was to gently persuade them to realise the behaviour was not acceptable.<sup>48</sup> This talk emphasised a socially led element of relationships of what was acceptable or not. Given these multiple pressures Graham and Tom contended that it was hard to ‘walk the line’ between supporting and guiding a friend experiencing potential abuse and affording them the autonomy to decide for themselves: “*it becomes*

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation Contract for further discussions of advice

*really difficult particularly from a friend aspect, you can't, you can't interfere completely, you can't*" (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate).

In summary, navigating the Love and Happiness Contract in relationships was difficult for both potential victims and outsiders. Power and responsibility about the relationship went back and forth in discussions as to who had access to 'the truth' of the situation. Largely outsiders were afforded an objective view and the victim the responsibility. This seemed an unfair and disempowering position for victims portrayed by speakers as a double bind.

Yet these attributions of power were rooted and rational within the context of relationships as private (discussed further in Chapter 8). As this Chapter has shown outsiders were constructed in two broad ways (a) unhelpful and (b) helpful. In the case of the former, despite outsider's predominant insight into the relationship, outsiders who granted themselves with the responsibility to resolve the relationship were unhelpful. Judged from the victim's perspective as inappropriately using their power, disempowering and potentially re-traumatising victims.

This talk presented victims as fragile, vulnerable and in need of protection thus the helpful outsider took on *some* responsibility, guiding the victim to the correct solution without adding to their problems or actively imposing their views. Notably, this talk emphasised the socially constructed element of acceptable relationship standards. Moreover, there is still the sub-text that the outsider's perspectives take precedence over that of the victim, despite the victim being granted the 'final say'.

#### **6c. 4 Conclusion: Love and Happiness Contract**

In broad conclusion for the three Love and Happiness Contract chapters, the Love and Happiness Contract was initially formulated as a simple agreement in which partners

pledged that: I will love you and make you happy and you will love me and make me happy. A relationship fulfilling this contract was shown at the beginning of in Chapter 6a to be a largely two-way exchange of making your partner happy, feel loved and feel trusted. A relationship upholding the contract was characterised as free of physical violence – particularly men’s violence against women - and one in which appropriate affectionate behaviours were demonstrated. Broadly, the presence of these behaviours – or lack of – were constructed as determining the ‘worth’ of the relationship contract, if it was being fulfilled, and how severe the contractual breaches were by weighing up the pros and cons.

Yet, due to the Heteronormative and Gendered Frame through which the Love and Happiness Contract was viewed the contractual terms and obligations in many cases differed for men and women, and straight and gay people. Often the thresholds of contractual breaches in lesbian and gay relationships were lower than those in heterosexual relationships, rationalised by the Gendered Strength argument and a focus on physical violence and risk. In some cases, the Gender Frame was workable for legitimising same-sex victimhood but this was complex and broadly validated gay men’s victimhood at the expense of lesbian women. Moreover, when the Gendered Frame was applied to same-sex relationship conclusions seemed limited in their capacity to validate same-sex victimhood. This highlighted the ways in which the Gender Frame was subsumed within a broader Heteronormative Frame.

For heterosexual relationships applying the Gendered Frame to women’s violence against men championed heterosexual women’s victimisation, the archetype of IPV, over those of heterosexual men via the argument that: ‘it could be worse’. Focus away from physical violence to emotional impact was a way of legitimising male victimhood, drawing on stereotypes of women as Machiavellian. There were instances where the Gendered Frame legitimised ‘non-traditional’ victimhood, but scope for validating

heterosexual men's victimhood and women's propensity for violence and harm was limited.

In contrast, the 'Abuse is Abuse' argument demoted the importance of gender and sexual orientation, instead focusing on actions, intentions and damage, and what were 'equal' and 'fair' terms for the Love and Happiness Contract across all types of relationships. This enabled victimhood to be validated regardless of the victim's gender or sexual orientation, presenting the Love and Happiness Contract in terms of an individual's universal rights and worth.

Progression of talk from the Heteronormative Frame to a genderless one was a journey and not linear. This highlights the merits of allowing young people have group discussions around what is fair and to critically engage with gender and what it means for relationship contracts. Broadly young people's talk was led by what they believed to be fair and equal and so gendered frames were often rejected after being discussed. It did not seem that cases the Abuse is Abuse perspective was 'right' and use of the Heteronormative Frame was 'wrong', instead both were needed.

The universal argument of Abuse is Abuse tended to lack to the nuances of the Gendered/Heteronormative Frame thus it seemed both were needed for many speakers to sufficiently make-sense of the situations. In many cases speakers drew on both Heteronormative and Universal terms of the Love and Happiness Contract, and use of both seemed to compliment and enrich arguments.

Chapter 6b explored the Rough Patch Diagnosis. The Rough Patch Diagnosis allowed for instances where the Love and Happiness Contract was breached but the relationship was still worth sustaining. This was rationalised via arguments that breaches were temporary and time or use of renegotiations would allow the Love and

Happiness Contract to be reinstated at an acceptable standard. Here, men and women were constructed as naturally selfish, taking more than they gave from their partner and/or being controlling. Thus, it was argued that individuals possessed a power and responsibility to safeguard relationships from such natural exploitation, resulting in a sub-contract that: 'this relationship will work if we both stand up for ourselves'.

This subcontract meant potential victims needed to challenge breaches to the Love and Happiness Contract and, in worthy relationships, renegotiate contractual terms. Notably renegotiations were gendered, seen as empowering for women, but somewhat embarrassing for men who should already have had the upper hand. Renegotiation portrayed relationship contracts as flexible, socially negotiated and somewhat forgiving, however, there was only so far that contracts could be stretched.

The end of Chapter 6b explored how the Love and Happiness Contract could be used to differentiate between problematic behaviours that were permissible and behaviours that evidenced a worthless relationship, sometimes tantamount to abuse. Speakers argued that one could differentiate a relationship undergoing a Rough Patch from a worthless, substandard relationship by making assessments around how normal the relationship was:

- How far from the Love and Happiness contract was the relationship?
- How much work or change would be needed to get back to normal or renegotiate the contract?
- How willing are both partners to work at upholding their contractual agreements, e.g. was the individual genuinely happy or were they trying to cover up the breaches?

Emotions and feelings were key to these assessments. Feeling love for, and happiness with, one's partner could motivate couples to work at sustaining and improving the relationship contract and work through the Rough Patch.

However, in the beginning of this chapter (Chapter 6c) the lines between symptoms of a Rough Patch and symptoms of a worthless relationship seemed blurred and the practicality of using the Love and Happiness Contract to differentiate the two was questioned. Speakers argued only rational people could use the Love and Happiness Contract to diagnose a Rough Patch, of which potential victims were not. In this way, the potential victim's assertions of love and happiness were not always evidence of fulfilment of the contract. Rather assertions of Love and Happiness were characteristic of victims who were blind to problematic behaviours, or who were intentionally denying their partner's failures to stay in a relationship contract with distorted terms. Such talk cast doubt on potential victims' accounts of Love and Happiness presented victims as possessing an irrational desire to sustain a sub-standard relationship.

Victim's rationality was doubted further through constructions of individuals becoming stuck in a 'loop' rendering them 'trapped' in the relationship. Although seemingly sympathetic to the victim's plight, implicit within this talk were arguments that victims – predominantly heterosexual women – were weak and needy, letting their emotions get in the way of important and 'obvious' judgements and decisions (i.e. the need to leave relationships where the contract has been distorted on various levels).

Constructions of victims as delusional were contrasted to objective, rational outsiders who could 'clearly' see the Love and Happiness Contract had been breached and thus the relationship should be terminated. This argument presented victims as having lower relationship standards, agreeing to contractual terms that most other people would see as unfair and so not accept. This talk placed victims in a Double Bind, positioning outsiders in a position of power, in that, unlike the victim, they had access to the 'truth' of the relationship, and yet, it was the victim's responsibility to resolve the problem.

As discussed in section 6c. 2 of this chapter, contrasting to depiction of a blinded victim and an objective outsider were sympathetic constructions of the victim and their failure to leave the relationship contract. These accounts constructed third parties as biased, failing to consider the Love and Happiness Contract due to their focus on problematic behaviours and vested interests in reprimanding those who breached the Love and Happiness Contract. For heterosexual women relationship contracts were presented as a source of 'safety' and 'validation' of female personhood for whom sexual desires and freedom outside a relationship contract were restricted and judged. Ending a relationship contract was portrayed as having potentially irreparable damage to the victim (e.g. still feeling love for one's ex-partner, never having the opportunity to enter another relationship). Thus, leaving an unequal contract was positioned as difficult and potentially incurred lasting damage to women.

Speakers argued that this demonstrated a Gendered Double Standard in the relationship rights of women and men, with men afforded greater sexual freedom outside of relationships, and more power inside. Yet, interestingly, speakers also contended that the Gendered Double Standard affected men for whom their relationship needs and desires were seen as secondary to those of vulnerable women within arguments of Men's Forgotten Rights. Here, assumptions that women had better knowledge of the Love and Happiness Contract than men were worked up as a reason why female outsiders may blame potential male victims.

In further critique of the Love and Happiness Contract speakers expressions of love could be positioned as a perpetrator's emotional manipulation of the victim to sustain an unhealthy relationship. Such situations would cause the victim to feel complicated feelings and that they were to blame for the Love and Happiness Contract not being upheld. This made it harder for the victim to leave. This case presented the Love and Happiness Contract as multifaceted (i.e. love as a confusing factor, needs and desires

to stay in sub-standard contracts, a victim's naturally honest or believing nature) and provided rationale as to why victims may not follow simple advice to leave a relationship if experiencing IPV.

As shown in the final part of this chapter talk rationalised reasons as to why potential victims may not disclose abuse. For example due to stigma and judgement. In some ways, talk disempowered the victim's desires and empowered those of the outsider ( i.e. delusional victim, distorted norms, victim as confused). Young people's talk reflected on this disempowerment with propositions that outsiders may in fact not be objective but have their own agendas (e.g. punishing those who breach the contract, parents with vested interests, outsiders as judging and putting strain on the relationship). In this way speaker's proposed complex constructions of victim vulnerability i.e. that victims were vulnerable to both their partner's and outsider's actions.

There were instances where young people's talk constructed complexities to this situation and afforded victims space to struggle with the complications of identifying worthless relationships and reach their own conclusions. In an effort to empower victims, speakers, as outsiders, asserted that leaving the relationship was the victim's choice. However, even this talk was imbued with suggestions that leaving was the *right thing* to do and the victim just needed to be persuaded to take this course of action. Thus, even here, outsider's perspectives were given primacy over those of potential victims. Yet, young people made clear efforts to define an appropriate role for outsiders, one that granted the victim, not the outsider, the ultimate responsibility for how the situation was resolved.

With these competing pressures in mind one can see why young people as potential victims may employ the Rough Patch Diagnosis to maintain a position of *some* power



and rationality. Situated within so many complex constraints, one must be mindful of them all when considering *how* best to aid young people's sense-making of relationships and IPV.

Given (i) competing pressures on help seeking (ii) love and happiness in a relationship, and (iii) the evasiveness of what constitutes a major breach to the Love and Happiness Contract, the Rough Patch Diagnosis may be a useful tool for young people. The Rough Patch Diagnosis offers a way for young people to seek advice from those outside the relationship, allowing potential victims to judge whether problematic behaviours are abusive or a permanent breach of the Love and Happiness Contract without identifying them as such.

Unlike talk such as Abuse is Abuse and that which focuses on problematic behaviours (i.e. physical violence, emotional manipulation) the Rough Patch Diagnosis offers young people a position where potential victims and peers can negotiate what are acceptable terms of the Love and Happiness Contract. The Rough Patch Diagnosis arguably allows this negotiation to take place whilst avoiding the judgment and stigma that identifying such behaviours to an outsider may incur without the Rough Patch frame. Further, the Rough Patch Diagnosis may also allow for outsider assistance without becoming 'a victim' – a status that has several implications for one's trustworthiness and rationality.

Yet, as this section has shown potential victims use of the Rough Patch Diagnosis still runs the risk of being rejected and labelled as abuse. That is as proposed by young people, potential victims may use the Rough Patch Diagnosis to continue a sub-standard relationship contract, with assertions of relationship love and happiness used to rebuff accusations of the relationship as abusive. These findings also highlight the need and merit of discussing same-sex relationships and IPV with young people.

## Chapter 7. Trust and Fidelity Contract

*We will each be faithful in this relationship and we will trust each other to be so.*

This chapter examines how young people drew upon a Social Contract of Trust and Fidelity to make sense of the vignettes, and the implications this has for understanding healthy or an unhealthy relationship. The vignettes described a partner checking the 'friend's' text messages and social media activity. Young people's attempts to determine whether this was acceptable drew upon assumed standards in healthy relationships.

These assumptions are captured here as a Trust and Fidelity Contract. Namely that when entering and maintaining a healthy relationship, each partner agrees that 'we will be faithful in this relationship and we will trust each other to be so'. Trust was "*a basis of*" (Male, 17-18, Sch B) and "*the whole idea of a relationship*" (Elijah, 15-16, Sch A). The Trust and Fidelity Contract had three related sometimes contested implications: (1) Monogamy (that one would be faithful), (2) Trust in Monogamy (that one would be trusted to be faithful), and (3) Openness and Sharing (that there would be no secrets or resistance to openness).

This chapter will first outline the three parts of the Trust and Fidelity Contract and how they were produced, resisted and problematized. The three aspects of the contract are introduced first because they are intertwined and provide the basis of more complex reasoning and dilemmas (e.g. invading a partner's privacy for the greater good of the relationship) and complexities and solutions generated by use of the Fidelity and Trust contract (e.g. permission and consent) as will be outlined in Section 7.2 of this chapter. I will discuss how gender and sexual orientation affected sense making throughout.

### 7.1 Cheating and checking for cheating: problems for Trust in Monogamy

Monogamy was viewed as a central component of a healthy relationship, predicated on the Trust and Fidelity Contract that each partner would be faithful to the other, and each be trusted to be so. The difference between Monogamy and Trust in Monogamy was slight but important. For example, one may be in a monogamous relationship, but wrongly suspect one's partner has cheated, in which case the relationship would be upholding Monogamy, but not Trust in Monogamy. Similarly, one could trust a partner to be faithful when they have cheated (that they may be aware or unaware of) in which case Monogamy is not upheld but Trust in Monogamy is.

There seemed no need to differentiate Monogamy from Trust in Monogamy in a healthy relationship. Monogamy and Trust in Monogamy "*shows that you're like committed and stuff*" (Female, 17-18, Sch A) and that a partner is "*not going to do anything [i.e. cheat] because like she loves you and stuff*" (Female, 15-16, Sch B). Trusting one's partner to be faithful was presented as simple and foundational in healthy relationships: "*you should trust like that they definitely are [faithful] and they're not going to change that*" (15-16, F, Sch B).

Young people attended to the conditions under which trust in faithfulness would be compromised, and focused their talk around cheating, and the implications of this for judgements of wellbeing of a relationship. Notably, cheating was primarily described as occurring via social media and occasionally in terms of spending time with someone else; cheating by being physically intimate was not mentioned. Cheating was defined as:

(a) **texting someone with whom they had a romantic history**

"depends on like anything in the past, that if anything in the past happened [participants laugh], depending like how long they've been friends and the situation that they're in" (Sophie, 15-16, F, Sch A);

**(b) being secretive about who they were speaking to/ messaging**

“you don’t text other lads and not tell your boyfriend” (15-16, F, Sch B)

**(c) having frequent contact with a member of the opposite sex (usually a friend)**

“Obviously if they were meeting up loads, like and I mean loads and loads then that seems like there’s something going on”, Shelly, 15-16, F, Sch B).

Cheating on one’s partner constituted ‘*something really bad*’ (15-16, F, Sch B) and was often deemed an irrevocable breach of the Trust and Fidelity Contract. If a partner had cheated speakers argued that the relationship ‘*[was] not going to work*’ and should be ended: “*like some people feel like they should still stay with them but you shouldn’t because clearly, they don’t like you that much anymore, if they can go, like [...] be with someone else but still want you there as well, like it’s not going to work.*” (15-16, F, Sch B). Thus, in many instances, speakers presented cheating as a straightforward deal breaker since, in principle, it is implicit in healthy relationships that “we will each be faithful in this relationship and we will trust each other to be so”.

The vignette content relating to checking a partner’s text messages and social media triggered discussions around one’s right to privacy in a healthy relationship vs. the view that in a trusting relationship, having access to each other’s texts and social media should be unproblematic (explored in section 7.2).

Advocating one’s right to privacy in a healthy relationship was done mostly by older participants. This built on viewing boundaries as part of a healthy relationship and the second part of the Trust and Fidelity Contract: Trust in Monogamy. Expecting complete Openness and Sharing (the third part of the Trust and Fidelity Contract) in terms of checking social media was framed by some as a breach of one’s right to privacy and a breach to Trust in Monogamy. Dan argued: “*you’ve got a password for a reason*” and “*you’re not supposed to look at other people’s messages; you just don’t do that*” (18-

21, M, Undergraduate). Here, people were positioned as separate individuals who trust each other to be faithful without the need for surveillance: *"I think you do have closeness so you do share a lot of things in a relationship but you should trust one another and checking messages and that isn't trust... you're stepping over the line of being in a relationship"* (Livvy, 17-18, F, Sch B). Others stated: *"[b]y checking her texts it's like ruining her privacy"* demonstrating that: *"[s]he's not trusted"* (15-16, F, Sch B), pointing to the ways that speakers drew upon assumed expectations of Trust in Monogamy.

A lack of trust was presented as injuring all parties (*"It's hard to be in a relationship with someone that you don't think trusts you, all the time, especially if you haven't done nothing wrong"*, Zac, 17-18, M, Sch A). It voided the potential for a healthy relationship: *"[I]f she's asking [to check his messages] then there's no trust, is there? She's not trusting you, then it's not a girlfriend, it's not a relationship, she's got no trust in you."* (Faheem, 16-17, M, Sch C). Here, healthy relationships were characterised by respect and privacy, challenging the need for, and expectations of, complete Openness and Sharing.

Although not as *bad* as physical violence (see Chapter 6a), being checked on was presented as unacceptable due to the potentially lasting sensitivities it could generate, as Kate explained:

*"[my friend's] ex-boyfriend was constantly checking all of her texts. And she was with him like four years ago but she still instinctively just deletes all her messages [...] so it's something that does seem quite small but it can actually have an effect on someone."* (18-21, F, undergraduate).

A breakdown of trust and associated checking was presented as antithetical to a healthy relationship as it might signify a slippery slope towards controlling behaviour. Aiden explained that if you do not trust someone and begin checking their social media *"you'd try to stop them doing things like going to parties and stuff or whatever so yeah, and then like if they can't do what they want to do then it's going to become unhappy anyway"*

so” (15-16, M, Sch A). Aiden presented the case that once Trust in Monogamy is questioned, there can be no positive outcomes for a relationship.

The unacceptability of checking was sometimes reinforced by descriptions of sinister motives. For example, Jeremy argued that checking a partner’s phone and social media could also be a method of ‘*bring[ing] them down*’ (18-24, M, Undergraduate). Tom and Graham extended this argument and stated that in a relationship with other problematic behaviours (e.g. physical violence, controlling behaviours and isolation from friends) checking constituted further ‘*oppressive*’ tactics and so was ‘*abuse*’ (18-24, M, Undergraduate).

Thus, speakers presented arguments that healthy relationships could be identified by Trust in Monogamy, and with it, rights to privacy. Under these conditions, checking texts and social media was deemed highly problematic, and seeped past contract breaking into potentially controlling behaviours. However, in other cases checking was constructed as part of a healthy relationship, as I will now explore.

## **7.2 Cheating and checking for cheating: Openness and Sharing**

Being open and sharing with one’s partner was presented as an aspect of a healthy and trusting relationship. Mobile technology and social media were the platforms via which Openness and Sharing was enacted and were characterised as significant objects and portals in young people’s relationships.

Counter to constructions of checking texts as an invasion of privacy, Openness and Sharing was argued to demonstrate a couple’s intimacy, closeness and trust. Here, trust was exemplified by ‘*showing [their partner] everything and not hiding anything*’ (15-16, F, Sch B). Sharing passwords for social media platforms such as Facebook and Snapchat with one’s partner was a “*normal*” thing “*a lot of people nowadays tend to*

[do]' (15-16, F, Sch B), pointing to emerging contemporary rules for 'normal'. Accessing a partner's phone also represented a fun, light-hearted and social aspect of healthy relationships:

"Int: And when you say having a laugh, what do you mean?

[...]

Aiden: like you, you're usually mates with their mates, [...] so like you might be Snapchatting her mates on her phone and then like he might be Snapchatting his mate, like her mates, like if you get what I mean like? Not like pretending to be that person, [...] because like you're not, you won't see them as often as she will but like you'll see them sometimes, so just to catch up really." (Aiden, 15-16, Sch A)

Sharing one's phone was a symbolic act of letting their partner into their life and part of the Trust and Fidelity Contract. Here, there was little need to draw a boundary of privacy between oneself and one's partner. The ease of granting special access indicated a healthy relationship. Although, in the above cases Openness and Sharing were talked about in relation to closeness, other talk around Sharing and Openness tackled checking for fidelity.

### **7.2.1 What is trust?**

As touched upon briefly above, young people drew on two major contending arguments for and against sharing and checking a partner's social media and mobile phone: Openness and Sharing vs. respecting a partner's Right to Privacy. These arguments centered on different aspects of the Trust and Fidelity contract. Each constructed a different account of what trust meant in a relationship and the significance of an individual's right to privacy in a healthy relationship, usually in relation to fidelity. As the I will outline, often one's right to Openness and Sharing was deemed greater importance than one's right to privacy.

### **7.2.2 Trust as Openness and Sharing**

Where principles of Openness and Sharing were foregrounded in young people's constructions of trust, ensuring a relationship was monogamous took priority over Trust in Monogamy and an individual's Right to Privacy (where privacy was a right).

Principles of Openness and Sharing seemed embedded in young people's digital lives. Here, Openness and Sharing substantiated checking a partner's social media or phone to establish whether their partner was upholding the contractual agreement that: "we will each be faithful in this relationship and we will trust each other to be so"

"Milly: I think that if you want to check their texts it's not necessarily meaning the relationship is bad because that might be from past experiences, like you don't trust anybody and I know obviously you've got to learn to trust them, but yeah...

[...]

Sammy: It's alright saying like you should definitely trust everything, but no matter how much you trust someone I think there's always going to be like if someone else says something you're always going to want to just double-check that that isn't true and they haven't been messaging that person or haven't done something." (Milly & Sammy, 17-18, F, Sch B)

"[I]t has been a year so you probably do end up thinking that after a while.

Int: Thinking what?

Like if they actually do still like you the way they did, or [they are] just in the relationship just because, so maybe he just doesn't feel like she like... she feels the same way anymore, so he feels paranoid about like in case she's texting other lads and stuff." (15-16, F, School B)

Trust in Monogamy was presented as sometimes hard to uphold given the broader context of any young person's relationship (i.e. rumors from peers, short-term relationships, past bad experiences and insecurity). Even in healthy relationships, Trust in Monogamy was changeable, it could be built up, diminished and maintained. Therefore, checking was a way to help distrusting partners trust again: "*You can lose trust in each other and like checking her Facebook, seeing that they're actually being honest and faithful and all that, then you can restore that, you know, that trust back into it.*" (Faheem, 15-16, M, Sch C).

Principles of Openness and Sharing played out in young people's digital lives. Social media was central to the context in which young people's relationships were placed. Social media was talked about as creating new problems, as well as new solutions for young people's relationships. Speakers evoked norms around these mediums of communication. For example, Sammy (17-18, F, Sch B) stated that, it was reasonable



that a person would '*always [...] want to just double check*' their partner's phone to verify or disprove accusations, rumors or suspicions of infidelity. Checking texts and social media was argued to have the potential to be a normal, reasonable and healthy relationship behaviour, allowing one to establish Trust in Monogamy and/or police relationships against infidelity.

However, checking behaviours were not always accepted. When an individual did not have permission, was controlling, behaving in an irrational way or checked the messages in an aggressive manner, this was deemed unacceptable if not abusive. This characterisation is discussed later in the chapter (see section 7.3: Permission: the central rule of checking and section 7.4: The 'nothing to hide' dilemma).

Some speakers constructed a right to be in a monogamous relationship, presenting the case that Monogamy was of the utmost importance to relationships. This led to expectations that one *should* forgo their right to privacy to prove they were adhering to the Trust and Fidelity Contract because no one would want to stay with a partner who was, is, or will cheat on you. Interestingly, such diminished rights were accepted by partners who had cheated in the past:

"If a girl knows that she's had history of like cheating on her boyfriend and then she goes into another relationship, she might purposefully let the other person, like if they're messing around and like going on each other's phone, she might purposefully let the other person go on so that he knows that she's not, she's like definitely with him and not with anyone else." (Stan, 15-16, M, Sch A)

"I know other people, like friends, [whose] girlfriend's and boyfriend's check their texts and Facebook but like not like in a psychotic way, it's just like just stuff that's happened in the past about that person so that the person just wants to make sure that they're not doing it again." (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A)

As shown by Aiden, acceptable checking was differentiated from checking in a '*psychotic way*'. As outlined by Stan, those who had cheated in the past expected and accepted their Right to Privacy to be reduced. This reiterated the position that one had

to earn their partner's trust and one's Right to Privacy was conditional on their past record of upholding the Trust and Fidelity Contract.

These findings suggest that interpretations of the Trust and Fidelity Contract could problematise privacy, sharing and expectations of trust and potentially obscure instances of IPV in young people's relationships. Firstly, one's right to be in a monogamous relationship was often presented as superseding Rights to Privacy of an individual suspected of cheating. In this way constructions of checking to ensure monogamy was for the good of the relationship may camouflage controlling behavior.

Secondly, as suggested by Stan, checking and policing behaviours were portrayed as subtle and harmless. Young people positioned themselves as willing to be policed. In some cases, contriving situations where they could be checked-up on to demonstrate their fidelity and trustworthiness. In this way policing could be hard for young people to take issue with. Thirdly, jealousy and insecurity in young people's relationships was common and normalised, exacerbated by social media. Thus, checking and surveillance in abusive relationships could be rationalised or excused by perpetrators as personal insecurity, a past bad relationship, etc. Similarly, controlling and possessive behaviours in relationships could also be presented as reasonable and necessary within this rationale. Peers were also deemed a risk to the Trust and Fidelity contract which I will now discuss.

### **7.2.3 Love Rivals**

Peers were assigned considerable power in young people's intimate relationships. They were described as able to enhance relationship trust by outing those who did not adhere to the relationship contracts (as outlined in analysis in the Love and Happiness contract). But peers could also undermine relationships by spreading rumors and encouraging cheating, as I will now discuss.

For younger participants (15-18), for a relationship to be successful, young people had to navigate the issues raised by peers, predominantly the risks peers posed to relationship fidelity. For example, which friends one could or could not see (i.e. Were they love rivals? Were they likely to encourage the young person to breach the Trust and Fidelity contract?) The risk peers posed to trust, even in healthy relationships, seemed to resonate with constructions of relationships as exclusive: particularly the importance of forging close, trusting, relationships with one's partner in which one could resolve issues privately (discussed further in Chapter 8: Duty and Obligation contract).

Where adherence to the Trust and Fidelity Contract was in doubt, as side from talking (see Chapter 8. Duty and Obligation Contract) young people presented few ways to resolve the situation other than policing the relationship:

Int: [W]hen we were talking about Facebook and texts and then someone said how it might be more understandable if she had cheated on her boyfriend, can someone explain that a bit to me?

Dom: If she's done that she's totally lost any trust she'd built up over the period.

[...]

Louis: They'd be worried that it might happen again so he's checking it's the easiest piece of communication to check, like he can't know what she's saying to her friends, so he's trying to stop her from going to her friends, if he can't talk to them to see if she's cheating again so he's checking her Facebook to see if she's talking to anyone else, just to make sure it doesn't happen again 'cos he loves her and...

Dom: Yeah exactly." (Dom, Zac, Simon & Louis, 17-18, Sch A)

Speakers presented surveillance as acceptable and even desirable. Checking up on *who* one's partner has been - and should be - talking to was a way of ensuring relationship fidelity. Often checking could only focus on *who* one's partner had been speaking to and *how* often, rather than the *content* of the messages sent ("*just looking at who's messaging if like, because you have streaks and stuff and like just checking if they've got any streaks with like girls that they've had a past with or boys that they've had like a past with, things like, stuff like that happens a lot that I know with my friend, happens with like him all the time.*" Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A).

Merely talking to a friend, one had ‘a *history*’ with, even without knowing what the messages said, was constructed as potential evidence of cheating. Thus, an innocent conversation could be interpreted as a threat to relationship fidelity. This created a culture of hypervigilance, where one’s Right to Privacy was overruled for the greater benefit of sustaining the relationship and fiercely guarding it against outsiders who may want to break it up.

Within this context it was worse to trust a partner, or overlook a partner’s questionable contact with their peers and be cheated on, than *not* trust a partner, judge an innocent message as evidence of cheating and be subsequently proven (e.g. via social media or messages) that their partner was faithful. In some cases, policing continued beyond social media and phones to one’s personal freedom, restricting which friends a girlfriend/boyfriend (who has cheated in the past) can see to *ensure* the relationship was monogamous.

An individual’s right to see their friends when in a relationship (opposite sex friends for heterosexual people and same-sex friends for lesbian or gay people) was presented as negotiable. As above, checking messages, jealousy, and possessiveness of a girlfriend/boyfriend’s time could be presented as a somewhat flattering expression of love; however, this view was also challenged:

“Holly: When she says that he makes her feel bad about wanting to spend time with him, I think that’s [making her feel bad about wanting to spend time with her friends] like acceptable ‘cos it shows he wants to be with her, like he cares about her, but he’s obviously gonna compromise.

Ella: I don’t know, if it were me I’d never accept someone I was in a relationship with, not wanting me to spend time with my friends.

Holly: I know, but like it shows he cares so like...

Ella: It shows that he cares, it’s just that he’s a bit... I mean I know that feeling, I mean I don’t know, I’d just if it was me in that situation I would feel a bit oppressed and I wouldn’t be very happy about it because, yeah.”

(Ella & Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A)

Here, partners who were jealous or possessive were presented as at risk of breaching the Trust and Fidelity Contract. This argument raised the potential that restrictions on who a young person could see – in an abusive relationship – could be rebuffed by the Trust and Fidelity contract and labelled as ‘controlling’ or ‘oppressive’. Here, being afforded space and privacy from one’s partner was constructed as *part* of the Trust and Fidelity Contract, backgrounding rights of Openness and Sharing.

Although talk tried to uphold one’s right to see friends, this position was tricky to maintain if those friends were characterised as a risk to fidelity (predominately opposite sex friends for young people in heterosexual relationships). This presented a dilemma of how to manage both: (a) one’s right to see one’s friends, alongside (b) a partner’s right to a monogamous relationship, and ease of trust in that. The dilemma stemmed from (i) the constructed insecurity and vulnerability of young people’s relationships; (ii) broad definitions of ‘cheating’; and (iii) assumptions that speaking to someone of the opposite sex would likely lead to, or was, an act of cheating:

“Ella: Especially maybe if there were male friends there as well then that would be a reason for suspicion because if he’s making her feel bad about spending time with other boys then that is manipulative behaviour because obviously if she is that committed to him she isn’t going to do anything to those other boys and he should trust her on that.

Int: What do you think [the difference is] if it’s male friends compared to female friends?

Sophie: I think it depends on like anything in the past, that if anything in the past happened [Holly & Sophie laughing], depending like how long they’ve been friends and the situation that they’re in.

Int: Okay, are you giggling ‘cos similar to something that’s happened to you two...

Holly: Yeah [all laugh].

[...]

Sophie: If they had a history.” (Ella, Sophie & Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A)

As this extract shows, one’s right to see opposite sex friends or another’s right to ensuring monogamy was problematic for the Trust and Fidelity Contract. Some speakers foregrounded the right to be trusted to uphold rights to text and see their friends (even those of the opposite sex) through assertions that one should be afforded trust and that cheating was unlikely. Participants outlined how a partner’s accusation of

mistrust could be used to manipulate and constrain one. However, others maintained that in some instances (e.g. *'if they had history'*) checking was warranted. Participants sought details of the relationship history (such as past relationship behaviours and potential love interests/rivals), and used this information as a lens through which to judge whether policing behaviours were warranted or not.

Talk constructed claims, rights and abuse of trust as highly variable and powerful in relationships. Talk around one's right to see friends or one's right to have concerns about the company one's partner is keeping constructed young people's relationships as particularly vulnerable to tensions around privacy and trust. Vulnerability was engendered through the very broad definition of cheating that was offered as normative (i.e. talking on social media). Cases were made which both warranted and problematised attempts to restrict a partner from seeing opposite-sex friends, suggesting these were not straightforward criteria by which to judge the healthfulness of a relationships.

#### **7.2.4 Less trust-worthy partners: Gender and Sexual orientation**

Young people were more likely to argue that checking behaviours were acceptable when the partner being checked on was: a man in a heterosexual or gay relationship, or a woman in a lesbian relationship. The cases for this acceptance is examined here.

Gay and straight men were deemed more likely to cheat on their partners. Men were characterised as less likely than straight women to respect monogamy. For example, Jessica said: *"gay males can have the stereotype of being quite provocative and experimental, there's been lots of kind of cheating and stuff like that within relationships, so I kind of understand the whole trust part"* (18-21, F, Undergraduate). Men were also deemed more likely to cheat due to biological drives: *"typically guys cheat on girls, and because apparently girls have like higher emotions and stuff and love the guy more and*

*all that stuff* (15-16, F, Sch B) and to foster cheating: *"I think some boys encourage their friends to cheat on girls"* (Sonia). These portrayals of men were used to justify why a man's partner (man or woman) might be warranted in restricting socialising and/or policing him:

"Sonia: I think some boys encourage their friends to cheat on girls.

Jessica: If they're single and they want another wingman, yeah, I don't think boys appreciate other boy's relationships with their girlfriends as much as a girl is like happy for their friend." (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Thus, for the greater good of the relationship, surveillance and checking behaviours against men could be accepted by young people given that men are judged more likely to cheat and so have a lesser right to privacy or personal freedom.

It was argued that trust could be harder to cultivate in same-sex relationships because of the commonness of same-sex friends: *"because like she's [her girlfriend] a lesbian all her friends are female it might be more like of a jealousy thing that she's kind of, scared she [her girlfriend] might cheat on her or just that, because they're all female she like might like them more kind of thing."* (Sarah, 18-21, F, undergraduate). The secretiveness of lesbian or gay sexual identities positioned peers as additional risks to same-sex relationships:

"because he's gay then he might, then the boyfriend might not like it when he spends time with other guys, just like because I know it sounds like awful of me to say this but not many people like openly come out as gay because of like what people will say, so if people find out that he is gay, like his friends, then one of his friends might be as well and he might end up cheating on his boyfriend and that might be a reason why he's so paranoid about it." (15-16, F, Sch B)

Same-sex relationships are presented as different to heterosexual ones in that there were different risks to the Trust and Fidelity Contract (e.g. same-sex peers) that one had to be aware of when making judgements about how acceptable a behaviour was.

For same-sex relationships not knowing which of a partner's friends could be a love rival was offered as legitimate grounds for restricting which friends one could see. This highlighted how sexual orientation altered the reading of potentially possessive

behaviour and isolation from friends. A partner's assurance of one's faithfulness was placed above one's right to see their friends.

Overall, checking texts and social media was deemed most acceptable for heterosexual women because men were deemed most likely to flout the Trust and Fidelity Contract. However, for gay men there was potential for a double whammy of restriction: being a man and more likely to cheat; and probably having a same-sex peer group. These findings suggest that restricting or controlling which friends a partner can see are more likely to be accepted when the individual is a man. For same-sex relationships, isolation from one's peer group may be accepted and rationalized through arguments that same-sex peer groups may heighten a partner's insecurity or jealousy.

Broadly, these findings highlight that although in principle young people asserted that *everyone* has a Right to Privacy, these rights were tempered by: (a) one's past behavior and how trustworthy they are, (b) how reasonable a partner's concerns about fidelity are, and (c) how trustworthy their friends are (namely how likely that the girlfriend/boyfriend's interactions with their peers could result in cheating). Thus, although looking for monogamy, trust and openness as markers of a healthy relationship were shared ideals, the young people's talk later identified qualifiers to this, showing how complex and shifting these ideals are in practice.

### **7.3 Permission: the central rule of checking**

So far, this chapter has highlighted the role of digital lives in ensuring the Trust and Fidelity Contract is being upheld and the debates that arose around Right to Privacy vs. Right to Monogamy, and when to limit access to love rivals. This section will explore the grounds for acceptable checking, centering around the importance of permission and the rules around *how* to check.



Checking of phones and social media was deemed acceptable if one had permission to check.

“Lucy: Yeah, about like the texts, I understand that he’d want to know what she’s texting to who, but he should just ask and not check it, that don’t make it okay [...] it’s her text, if they was supposed to be for him then she could like forward it to him or something, and he shouldn’t be going on her phone and checking what she’s been saying to people, he could just ask her so then he knows he can trust her.” (15-16, F, Sch B)

“Int: What about if he logged on her [facebook account]?”

Ella: Well that’s a straight up invasion of privacy, if anyone did that to anyone else without their permission then it’d be bad.

Holly: I’d agree with that.

Int: Okay, so logging onto an account isn’t good, but maybe looking on...?

Holly: It depends if they had the permission or not.” (15-16, F, Sch A)

Despite sympathising with the urge to see a partner’s messages. Messages were described as the person’s property and thus the partner had no right to see them without permission. The “*straight up*” abhorrence of an “*invasion of privacy*” drew upon shared cultural rights to a private life; the speaker invoked comparison with non-intimate relationships and that rules for privacy there should unequivocally apply in romantic relationships. Importantly, the speakers here did not problematise that a partner might want to know about the other’s social media activity (and hence rights to a private self could be blurred) but it was the looking *without permission* that was deemed a straightforward breach of the Trust and Fidelity Contract.

The situation around rights and permission to access one’s partner’s phone was highly complex. Gaining permission from one’s partner was essential. This presented complexity around shared and personal spaces:

“Caroline: I also think that he should ask her if he can check her phone instead of just checking it without saying anything, just why not just ask and be honest.

Int: What do you think the difference would be asking?

Caroline: Because then he’s got like her permission and I think there’s more trust there, like rather than him just checking up on her without her permission, I think that’s crossing the line I think really.

Jen: Yeah, ‘cos if you walk in and someone’s on your phone you’re going to be like, “What are you doing?” but whereas if someone says, “Oh can I go on your phone?” you’ll just hand it straightaway over like, “Yeah, there you go.” (15-16, F, Sch B)

Phones were talked of as powerful symbols of one's personhood. Therefore, someone else being on your phone constituted invasion and '*crossing the line*': "*if you walk in and someone's on your phone you're going to be like, "What are you doing?"*". The principle of wanting to check a partner's phone was in some ways accepted. However, checking without permission demonstrated a lack of trust. Notably implicit in this argument was that: asking is easy and permission would be given readily. Thus, not asking raised suspicions. Those who checked their partner's phones and social media *without* their permission were labelled '*psychotic*' (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A), '*weird*' (Jeremy, 18-24, M, Undergraduate), '*possessive*' (Livvy, 17-18, F, Sch B) and '*messed up*' (Dan, 18-21, M, Undergraduate).

This talk highlighted specific rules and expectations: that one should be made aware if someone else has been accessing their phone ("*Well like this is actually like psychotic checking texts and Facebook, like going on like without them knowing. I was on about like when you're with them and they know you're doing it*", Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A), and reiterated one's Right to Privacy particularly on social media ("*I mean like generally Facebook if you're looking through my Facebook wall that's all right but you shouldn't like log on and look at all her messages and stuff that's messed up*" Dan, 18-21, M, Undergraduate).

Thus, a relationship could be easily judged as "*messed up*" using the 'checking without permission' criteria. Although wanting to know about one's partner's activity was acceptable, along with the expectation that the partner would agree to being checked. Yet, there were gendered caveats to one's right to privacy and the rules of how to check a partner's messages that I will explore next.

### 7.3.1 Gender

As with most aspects of the relationship contracts gender was important. Section 7.2.5 of this chapter explored the role of gender in constructing how trustworthy one may be (i.e. a *potential* victim of abuse). I will now explore how gender affected the other side of the relationship, that is, how checking behaviours of the partner (i.e. *potential* perpetrators of abuse) were interpreted, and what this tells us about the rules for checking, and ultimately how relationships are judged as healthy or not.

Although women were assigned more rights to check given men's likelihood of cheating, some speakers argued that girls were more likely to check without gaining permission because they were *'insecure'* and *'sneaky'*. Notably some explained women's *'sneakiness'* was due to women possessing less power than men in relationships which made women's efforts to gain permission to their partner's phone harder ("*a girl is much less likely to go up to her boyfriend and say, "Can I check your phone?" Because he'll just be like "No"*". Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Gender differences in how one might check their partner's phone were cited by both male and female participants. Yet, there were cases where participants critiqued gendered caveats to the rules of checking:

Int: Okay. And then when you think about a situation where a man is like 'whipped' by his girlfriend, do you think it would be like this situation?

Yeah

Maybe not this bad maybe not hitting him [over speaking]

Definitely telling him not to go out with his mates and stuff like that.

Yeah, it does happen quite a lot, it's more like girl... like they make him feel bad and things like that maybe happens more because girls it sort of seems are allowed to get jealous and...

Get away with a lot more than they should do.

Int: Get jealous?

Yeah.

Yeah, stuff like that, they're allowed to check texts and stuff 'cos "oh it's just funny", and "oh why wouldn't you want me to like do that".

And then they go, "Well you're hiding something," if you try and stop them, and almost try and guilt you into it, but if you said that [overspeaking], if you were checking their messages and...

There just seems to be some sort of bias in a way.

It's weird.

Social bias." (15-16, M, Sch A)

Here, a group of male speakers discussed the idea that a man could be *'whipped'* by his girlfriend (much like *'being under the thumb'*) and that a girlfriend may *'guilt'* and manipulate her boyfriend into not seeing his friends and/or letting his girlfriend check his messages. Speakers argued that principles of Openness and Sharing could be used in a calculated way, particularly by women, to gain permission to access their partner's phone.

In this vein, some argued there was a gender double standard in the rules around if, and how, one could check their partner's messages, that meant women's jealous or controlling behaviour went unchallenged:

“Lydia: And checking his texts and Facebook, like women are often portrayed as being kind of like, like that in the media so it's kind of seen as okay but it's kind of it's not okay.

Int: So, when you say women are portrayed sometimes like that in the media, what do you mean?

Lydia: Like jealous and like...

Claire: Paranoid.

Lydia: Paranoid, yeah. Being a nag and stuff. But it's not okay for anyone to be like that.

Int: Why do you think it's not okay?

Lydia: It's an invasion of privacy.

Int: Uh huh.

Lydia: And it's very controlling.” (17-18, F, Sch A)

As argued by Lydia and Claire, women's manipulative and controlling behaviour was minimised and accepted using labels such as *'nagging'*, *'jealousy'* and *'paranoia'*. Such constructions, although arguably negative in their portrayal of women, positioned women as having the upper hand, subject to more lenient relationship standards.

On the one hand, these different standards were reasoned to be due to gender stereotypes of women as emotional and harmless, and men as sexually motivated. Thus, men were deemed more likely to disregard the Trust and Fidelity Contract and cheat on their partner. Characterisations of men as less trustworthy justified why heterosexual women were excused from the rules of checking. Women who checked

without permission were constructed as emotionally driven by love for their partner, not intending to cause harm but merely to keep the relationship going and ensure monogamy.

However, this construction of women was seen by many as unfair to men. One participant said: *'it's not right just 'cos she's a girl to check his messages, like he should be able to check hers as well. But if a guy said to someone, "Oh my girlfriend were checking through my messages"...You'd think it were normal'* (15-16, F, Sch B). As shown in this quote, and the previous extract, although participants argued that the same rules for checking should apply to men and women, in practice women's controlling behaviours were so normalised that they were rarely seen as a breach of the Trust and Fidelity Contract.

Moreover, heterosexual men seemed to have few ways to refuse women's demands to check up on them (*"they're [women] allowed to check texts and stuff 'cos "oh it's just funny", and "oh why wouldn't you want me to like do that"*, Male, 15-16, Sch A). Part of the difficulty seemed to be because women gave reasons for checking (such as humour and ensuring faithfulness) that were outlined in practices of Openness and Sharing and thus constructed as legitimate.

Yet in many relationships, healthy and otherwise, the humour of looking was characterised as merely as a pretext to check up on one's partner (e.g. *Sophie: "It's just like if you're friends with someone and it's like a joke. Yeah, so they're not being serious at actually looking at your text, they're just like joking about opening, who have you been talking to? Int: So, they wouldn't actually look at your texts? Holly: No, they'll look at your texts."* 15-16, F, Sch A).

Young people argued that upholding one's right to privacy, particularly as a heterosexual man<sup>49</sup>, was a difficult task:

"If it's like this in this situation, if she's checking my texts I'd just get to the point where I'd like [...] to be honest I'm not fussed if it means that you can live another day then [laughs] then do it [check my messages], like that's what I'd be like so I can see why he [the vignette character] might be like that. But I also... but if I disagree with it [the partner checking] but then I just think, well, fuck it [I'll just let her check my phone]." (17-18, M, Sch A)

This male speaker, argued that some men felt they had little Right to Privacy. In some cases, resigned to concede their Right to Privacy even if they did not want to ("*but if I disagree with it but then I just think, well, fuck it*"). Notably, the speaker positioned women as hasslers and men as needing to get used to this ("*if it means I can live another day*"). This extract highlighted how, despite young people seeing the importance of asking for permission to check, there was little choice for young men other than to grant these requests. This talk drew into question some aspects of the Trust and Fidelity Contract, both of which I will explore further in section 7.4.

In summary, in the beginning of this section young people outlined that checking was acceptable so long as one had their partner's permission to check. Without gaining permission checking was unacceptable and an invasion of privacy. This reasoning stemmed from constructions of the phones as symbols of young people's personhood to which only specific people should have access. As this section went on young people presented an increasingly complex relationship between phones/social media, an individual, and their partner. On the one hand sharing one's phone was constructed as positive, demonstrating a healthy level of intimacy with one's partner. On the other hand, the unacceptability of checking one's partner's phone without permission seemed

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<sup>49</sup> It could be the case that these assumptions were applied to women in lesbian relationships however this analysis could not say as there was no discussion of this type around lesbian relationships. Moreover, it was difficult for most young people to refuse permission to be checked as outlined in Section 3.

to stem from the idea that, if asked, it was *assumed* one's partner *would* grant one access to their phone.

Discussions of gender, brought into focus arguments that young people lacked the power to refuse being checked, particularly heterosexual men. Stereotypes of women as 'sneaky' were used to minimise invasions of privacy where women checked men's phones without permission. This lack of challenge to women's invasive, controlling behaviour was presented as an unfair gender-double standard. Young people presented the case that gendered caveats to the Trust and Fidelity contract left men with little language to assert their rights to privacy. These constructions presented a complexity to shared and personal spaces in young people's digital lives and romantic relationships, where checking was often constructed as a method of control and permission was just a guise.

#### **7.4 The 'nothing to hide' dilemma**

A central rule to checking a partner's phone was gaining permission to do so. However, as hinted at in discussions around gender, this section will explore how some participants' talk suggested young people, *regardless of gender*, had little choice other than to give their partner permission to check up on them. This section will explore the rules that underpin young people's, *males and females*, seeming obligation to give their partner permission and what this means for consent in young people's relationships. Consent here is defined as one's decision to grant or refuse someone permission to do something, specifically when one has the freedom to refuse a request without the fear of negative consequences. Permission is defined as 'the action of officially allowing someone to do a particular thing' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018)

As suggested in the previous extract, instances were constructed where some young people might grant their partner permission because they were without an alternative.

Being without alternatives is a position created by many pre-conditions and assumptions, which highlight the typically implicit rules about 'good' relationship behaviour. To make sense of this, the five main underlying rules will be detailed, synthesising and extending some of the points made so far in the chapter, namely: (1) a partner's right to see; (2) rights to be in a monogamous relationship; (3) breaches to Openness and Sharing and sharing demonstrating willingness to be policed; (4) suspicious behaviour; and (5) a cheater's lesser Rights to Privacy.

#### **7.4.1 A partner's right to see.**

Young people's seeming obligation to grant their partner permission to check stemmed from the idea that a partner had a right to access their phone under principles of openness and sharing. This countered the argument of an individual's right to privacy and transformed behaviours that could be considered invasive outside of a relationship as permissible within one. For example, when considering checking a partner's Facebook account, Dan points to blurred lines of acceptability when you are in a relationship: "*he's just a bit of a stalker but it's his own girlfriend I dunno*" (18-21, M, Undergraduate). He illustrates the tension between the two principle components of the Trust and Fidelity Contract (i.e. one's Right to Privacy versus a partner's Right to See).

#### **7.4.2 Right to be in a monogamous relationship.**

The right to see a partner's messages linked back to one's right to monogamy:

"[[I]f the boyfriend does think he's [his gay partner] up to something then I think that's fair enough, obviously it's annoying someone's checking your phone every morning but like once in like... when you have a feeling, just do it, I think it's fine 'cos if they've got nothing to hide then what's the problem." (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

As shown by Jessica, ensuring fidelity was the central point to checking. A partner had a right to see one's phone when they had suspicions of cheating. It was argued that one would only prohibit a partner checking if they had '*something to hide*', ("*if she's faithful to him then she wouldn't be bothered about him checking her texts and things*



*to be fair*", Dom, 15-16, M, Sch A). One's refusal to let their partner check their phone was argued to signify infidelity. Thus, as part of a partner's Right to Monogamy, a partner had a right to check one's phone to ensure their right to a monogamous relationship was being upheld.

#### **7.4.3 Breaches to Openness and Sharing and willingness to be policed.**

Refusal to abide by Openness and Sharing could be used to position the refuser as at fault:

Kirsty: It's like she's hiding something because if he has to like personally check by himself, then it shows how she's not like showing him anyway, if he has to like check them, like by himself and stuff.

[...]

Int: Are you saying Kirsty that when you're in a relationship you would like, you'd show your boyfriend your texts?

Kirsty: Yeah.

Int: And they show you theirs, is that what you mean?

Kirsty: Well if he wanted to see them then if you just ask, then they should just say yeah, otherwise it seems like they're hiding something.

Okay, and what do you think?

Lou: And like most of the time when you like normally text, you can normally text in front of them, so like they'd see them anyway, like...

Kirsty: So he wouldn't have to check up unless I've got something to hide.

Lou: He'd like just checked it though without like asking her, but like he probably should have seen them anyway when she were like texting when they were together or something, so like don't really hide it do you, just message.

Kirsty: It's like you could, to get next, like next to each other and then if you are messaging someone then obviously he can see your phone, and it's not, it's like an open relationship if that makes sense." (15-16, F, Sch B)

This exchange raises questions as to whose responsibility it is to protect trust in the relationship. Here, the responsibility is placed on the person being checked, not to have any secrets or cultivate distrust within the relationship (i.e. not text privately). This was echoed by Kahlid: *"if she trusts him then she would let him use her phone to check her stuff [...] So the fact that he's able to check her phone to begin with means that she must have some level of trust for him"* (Kahlid, 16-17, M, Sch C).

So, although permitting a partner access to one's phone signified a special level of trust, such access was *expected* in a relationship. This talk raised questions as to whether

gaining permission is gaining consent. It seemed that 'sharing' demonstrated one's willingness to police and be policed, something that it was difficult for young people to opt-out of. Moreover, as argued by Kirsty and Lou, the nature of young people's relationships and the prevalence of social media in them, meant one would always be able to see a partner's phone, unless they were deliberately hiding it. This positioned enacting principles of openness as casual not intrusive surveillance.

#### 7.4.4 Suspicious behavior.

Speakers also presented the case that certain behaviours raised suspicion. Participants, particularly secondary school aged, outlined several identifiable, suspicious behaviours linked to mobile phones, termed: '*being sly with their phone*', these behaviours included:

- **Hiding the screen from their partner when texting people** ("I'm confused because if like she could be texting people while he's with her, [...] saying that he has to check it, means that she doesn't show him anything on her phone anyway, so it's like she's hiding something in a way" female, 17-18, Sch B)
- **Not leaving their phone unattended or taking it to the toilet** ("when they can't leave their phone around you, like not that you'd go on it anyway but do you know when it's like they can't leave it there" Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B;
 

"Like when they take it to the toilet and stuff [laughs]" Milly, 17-18, F, Sch B)
- **Concealing their phone when their partner entered the room** ("Like if you walk in the room and they've got their phone out and put it away straight away" Sammy, 17-18, F, Sch B).
- **'Kicking off' when their partner goes on or near their phone** ("kicking off when like you go near it or something" Livvy, 17-18, F, Sch B;
 

"Like if you just wanted to check the time and they was like, "What are you doing, don't go on my phone" Sammy, 17-18, F, Sch B).

That so much of making sense of relationship behaviour centered around mobile phones was startling. Young people easily listed '*dodgy*' behaviour and why they were counter to principles of openness within the Trust and Fidelity Contract. '*Sly*' behaviour

raised suspicions as to what their partner did not want them to see (“*I’d feel like I should know what he’s [upto]*” Milly, 17-18, F, Sch B) and made one paranoid.

Checking in this instance was seen to be brought about by the ‘sly’ partner: “*like I’m not a psycho or owt like but [all laugh] it’d make me paranoid.*” (Caroline, 17-18, F, Sch B). This context presented checking as something one would only do if suspicion had been aroused: “*[I]f they’d been on their phone like, being sly like not wanting... not that you’d want to see it anyway like but if they did like didn’t want you on it sort of thing.*” (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B). That wanting to see a partner’s messages was not a spontaneous, unprovoked or manipulative desire – but rather only comes about when a partner is acting like they are in breach of the Trust and Fidelity Contract. In this way, checking was framed as the fault of the person being checked and necessary to cultivating trust.

#### **7.4.5 Cheaters lesser right to privacy.**

Young people’s focus on ‘sly behaviour’ mobilised talk that those who were, or ever had, cheated were less trustworthy and so did not have a right to privacy: “*if she thinks he’s been cheating on her and stuff like that then I can kind of get my head around the invasion of privacy*” (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate). In this way, one’s right to privacy was presented as conditional on past behaviour.

#### **7.4.6 ‘Nothing to hide’: Implications for permission**

With these five rules in mind, a young person’s refusal to grant their partner permission to check their messages was risky. In most cases, although permission was sought, asking assumed it would be granted. This draws into question whether permission constituted consent (i.e. where one could refuse the request without fear of negative repercussions). In one focus group, the interviewer asked participants what would happen if a partner did refuse:

“What if you asked somebody if you can look at their texts and they say no?

Makes you paranoid.

That’s when I’d check them without asking.

Yeah.

[Some participants laugh]

‘Cos like it makes you feel like you can’t trust them ‘cos they’re hiding something.

It’s like what are you hiding, why can’t you let me see...

You can’t trust them but like what Abi said, then you have asked and then you feel like by them saying no you feel like you’ve got more reason to check, but that’s still like not really okay but I feel like that’s more...

It’s not right but it’s more acceptable.

... [more] acceptable than just doing it in the first place. (15-16, F, Sch B)

Refusal to grant permission created a situation of panic and distrust. Speakers argued that if one refused to be checked. It was assumed that, that person had “*got something to hide*” (Aiden, 15-16, M, Sch A). Contrary to previous talk around the importance of privacy and the importance of gaining a partner’s ‘permission’ to check, refusal to be checked meant trust was lost. In some cases, this undermined an individual’s Right to Privacy (“*[if a partner refused to let me look] that’s when I’d check without asking*”).

Significantly, like the situation for men outlined in the previous section, young people *in general* had very few, if any, ways to refuse permission for being checked:

Milly: And I think as well in your mind you feel like you have to check it, if there’s a thingy there that you want to check it then really should you even still be in that relationship, if you feel like your partner’s not being faithful.

Anisha: But then if your partner wants to check something on your Facebook and you are trustworthy then what have you got to hide?

Milly: No, no I would let them, but I just think if you have them thoughts why are you thinking them in the first place. (Milly & Anisha, 17-18, F, Sch B)

As demonstrated by Milly and Anisha, asserting one’s Right to Privacy was insufficient grounds to refuse checking even amongst peers. Strikingly, counter to other discussions where only certain individuals had a lesser right to privacy, if *anyone* refused to be checked these lesser rights were applied to them. Notably, Milly’s technique of turning the focus of the situation back on to the partner wanting to check and evoking one’s Right to Trust in Monogamy was insufficient to refuse being checked. Instead it was reasonable to assert that one should oblige in reassuring their partner

that they are upholding the Trust and Fidelity Contract, that they can be trusted and are being faithful.

These findings suggest that although speakers made distinctions as to who had a right a privacy, young people seemed unable to justify individuals who were faithful and *do not want* to be checked. It also highlights that the idea of 'gaining permission' from one's partner to check, in a seemingly healthy relationship, is a formality rather than an effort to gain genuine consent, as young people had no way to legitimately refuse such requests. Thus, it seemed being checked was an integral part of the Trust and Fidelity Contract and was not something young people could opt-out of.

That said, it is worth making a distinction here. The talk detailed above was most often employed by younger speakers (15-18 years old). Further, checking which was reasonable could not be refused, i.e. not too frequent and in situations where one had concerns either due to past insecurity, betrayal, or a partner who had cheated before. However, checking that was 'excessive, controlling' and aggressive, was unacceptable and *could* be refused. Where relationships were deemed unhealthy, or abusive the issue of an individual consenting to be checked was noted: "*in this situation you couldn't say no to him because he's already beaten her up so if she says 'no' then that's another slap around. So, it just makes it worse.*" (Faheem, 15-16, M, Sch C). This suggests that, unlike 'healthy' relationships, in unhealthy relationships one could refuse to be checked. However as noted by some speakers, young people may still oblige in such situations due to fear of violence.

The '*nothing to hide*' argument made asserting one's Right to Privacy almost impossible. Yet, speakers presented some ways to rebuff it. It was argued that one could let their partner check to prove them wrong and once absolved of suspicion one could question the partner who wanted to check. Alternate arguments were to argue

that their partner's request to check showed they did not trust them and thus breached the Trust and Fidelity Contract. But as illustrated by Milly above, this argument held no weight. Another rebuttal was a 'tit-for-tat' scenario where one should let their partner check so long as they could check their partner's messages. This was a compromise as both partner's privacy was breached. Some speakers argued out that if one's partner (despite originally asking to see one's messages) refused to have their own messages checked this would raise suspicions of fidelity. Following this some participants argued that this compromise was '*childish*' (Lucas, 15-16, M, Sch C) and did not resolve the main issue which was a lack of trust in the relationship. Thus, there were few, if any, workable ways for young people to refuse their partner permission to check their phone.

As shown in this section even in healthy relationships young people, particularly the younger speakers (15-18 years old), felt obliged to let their partner have access to their phone. In younger participants' construction of the Trust and Fidelity Contract it seemed Openness and Sharing, and one's Right to Monogamy eclipsed another's Right to Privacy. That is, although it was initially outlined that those seemingly abiding by the Trust and Fidelity Contract could sustain their Right to Privacy, it was not workable for one to uphold these rights *and* refuse their partner permission to check their phone or social media.

In contrast, assertions of one's Right to Privacy were more likely to be upheld in the older age groups (i.e. 18-24 years old). The older speakers' constructions of the Trust and Fidelity Contract seemed less focused on Openness and Sharing and more accommodating of one's Right to Privacy and a greater focus on Trust in Monogamy leading to conceptualisations that *not* checking was a greater measure of trust and a healthy relationship.

Moreover, young people in most cases did not seem to view one's inability to refuse being checked as a problem. This suggests that although many young people recognised one's Right to Privacy in practice it was difficult to assert such rights. Likewise, although one had a Right to Privacy this was overshadowed by a partner's right to be in a monogamous relationship. These findings suggest that young people are less likely to recognise coercion and manipulation when it comes to surveillance behaviours if the potential victim has given their partner 'permission'.

### **7.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the various rules that young people drew upon to diagnose, problematise or remedy relationships. These nuanced rules and contexts rationalised why different uses of social media could be healthy or unhealthy. Notably, the same behaviour (e.g. checking a partner's texts) could be deemed healthy or potentially abusive. Such distinctions highlight the importance of context to young people's sense making of relationships.

These findings suggest that technology has created new contexts, rules and expectations in young people's relationships, and how it is a prime site to play out the Trust and Fidelity Contract. For example, policing and being policed was normal, in part because texts and social media were such an accessible source of information and a straight-forward way to verify a partner's fidelity. In this and other ways technology has created new boundaries in young people's relationships through ideals of Openness and Sharing.

However, values of openness and sharing were in contention with principles of privacy resulting in some grey areas and competing needs within relationships that young people must navigate. In grappling with these quandaries and applying these specific rules we can see how digital lives, and access to technology, provides power to those

in relationships and how certain groups (such as women) may be privileged and others (such as men) may be disempowered. These dynamics could be useful in highlighting hotspots to which young people's relationship and sex education should speak to.

The chapter outlined how various rules can culminate to diminish young people's Rights to Privacy in a relationship and render the act of asking for permission meaningless. That is, requirements for young people to uphold principles of Openness and Sharing foregrounded young people who were distrusted by their partner as to blame. In this way, although Openness and Sharing was initially presented as an endearing display of intimacy and trust (as outlined at the beginning of this chapter) there is also a more sinister and coercive element to this principle, as this right was almost impossible for young people to refute.

Likewise, although it was deemed unacceptable to check a partner's messages without permission it seemed almost impossible for young people to refuse such permission. In this way the subtler ways in which a partner could control or coerce their partner, for example through arguments of: what do you have to hide? Or 'it's just for a laugh', often went unchallenged by young people. This highlights that young people may struggle to identify controlling and coercive behaviours in their own, and their peers, relationships.

These findings also tell us a lot about power in young people's relationships. They highlight the power information stored on mobile phones and social media has over relationships. Granting access to such information transferred a lot of power to one's partner. It allowed partners to police whether their girlfriend/boyfriend behaved as they should (i.e. that they upheld the Trust and Fidelity Contract). It also took power away from the person being checked up on. It reduced their privacy and had the potential to reduce their ability to be separate from their partner, to have their own conversations and their own friends, characteristics of IPV.



In relationships where one person had cheated on their current or previous partner, their current partner was granted more power, i.e. had a greater right to check up on them. This presents some issues when we consider how loose the concept of cheating seemed to be. For example, talking to or messaging someone of the opposite sex constituted cheating. Notably, cases where someone physically cheated on their partner, e.g. kissing someone else, were never discussed. Such broad definitions run the risk of being exploited by abusive partners and potentially normalised by peers and/or the victims themselves. That is, rather than greater power being afforded to partners in a few relationship circumstances (i.e. to partners with a girlfriend/boyfriend who has cheated in the past), it could apply to all relationships where someone had merely texted someone of the opposite sex (if heterosexual) or the same sex (for same-sex relationships) whilst in a relationship.

Moreover, if a partner felt insecure or had experienced a past betrayal they were often afforded more power in the relationship (e.g. rights to check up on their partner, or rights to stop their partner from seeing friends). This raises questions about characterisations of 'valid' victims and perpetrators. These findings suggest that young people may accept controlling or coercive behaviours where the potential victim is believed to have behaved wrongly (cheated; spends too much time with their friends or has friends who may be a bad influence), or the perpetrator is vulnerable or hurt (a partner who is insecure, or has been cheated on).

Checking behaviours were not accepted when a partner was unfairly flouting their power, signified by displays of aggression, affecting fear or harm, or when checking was disproportionate (e.g. overly frequent). Thus, not all checking was okay and in such cases young people noted how an individual may be unable to consent to being checked on. Yet acceptance was conditional, as gender influenced judgements of

unequal power relations. Young people's use of gender stereotypes to infer power, i.e. assumptions that heterosexual women have less power in relationships, may mean women's manipulative and coercive behaviour is more likely to be accepted by young people. This highlights how young people's sense making of relationships may be viewed through a gendered frame.

## Chapter 8. Duty and Obligation Contract

*I will support you and stand by you, so long as you do the same for me within reason.*

The vignette scenario that participants discussed set out a situation where a friend (herein referred to as the 'help-seeker') came to peers (i.e. the focus group participants) for relationship advice. When trying to make sense of the vignette behaviours the help-seeker described within their relationship, young people drew on a third contract of Duty and Obligation. The Duty and Obligation Contract posited that: 'I will support you and stand by you, to make this relationship work'. The Duty and Obligation Contract implied that people in relationships have a duty to make the relationship work, and that a part of this was to support and help one's partner. Such duties and obligations extended to young people's understanding around when it was okay to seek relationship advice and from whom. The Duty and Obligation Contract had implications for the two people in the relationship but had a sub-contract about the expectations of external stakeholders in the relationship, such as friends (labelled here as the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract).

This chapter will first outline the Duty and Obligation contract before exploring its usefulness in understanding perspectives on IPV, particularly under what circumstances a breach to the contract is either cause for concern, or a legitimate response to an unhealthy relationship. I will then explore the Duty and Obligation contract; followed by the Peer Duty and Obligation contract presented as three stages of incrementally more intensive help-seeking. This chapter will also highlight connections between the contracts, as love, happiness and trust are all presented as the foundations of a healthy relationship, aspects of which the Duty and Obligation Contract speak to.

## 8. 1 The Duty and Obligation Contract

The Duty and Obligation contract implicit in young people's talk suggested that parties in a relationship agree that 'I will support you and stand by you, to make this relationship work'. Implied here is that healthy relationships work on people taking responsibility and making the required effort. In some cases, this manifested in the expectation that one should prioritise their partner above all else including friends.

The 'I will stand by you' aspect of the Duty and Obligation contract was related to ideas of support, honesty and loyalty one had to their partner, explored below in one's duty to (i) talk to their partner and (ii) spend time with their partner. Other aspects of 'I will stand by you' were most apparent in stages of help-seeking, explored in section 8.3. The 'I will support you' aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract was conceptualised in three key ways, namely one's duty to (i) spend time with their partner; (ii) talk to their partner; and (iii) to make their partner feel good. Notably, parts of the 'I will stand by you' aspect of the Duty and Obligation contract and the 'I will support you' overlapped. Not doing these things in a relationship was deemed problematic, and potentially indicative, of a troubled relationship. Each of these will be explained in turn.

### 8.1.1 Duty to spend time with partner

Spending time with one's partner, and not spending extended periods of time with friends, was presented as an essential duty in a healthy relationship:

'if she's like spending like more time with [her friends] than him, like pushing him away if that makes sense [...] if she's spending like weeks on end with her friends instead of her boyfriend then obviously he'd feel pushed out and stuff' (15-16, F, Sch B).

Young people did not expand on why spending time together was so important (e.g. order to develop the relationship, to get to know each other). Young people's time was constructed as having to be divided between their partner and their friends.

Foregrounding one's duty to spend time with their partner, rather than their friends, as highlighted in Chapter 7: Trust and Fidelity contract. This raised the possibility that partners could restrict how much time young people spent with their peers. However, young people maintained that one had a right to see their friends (*'but if she's not [spending all her time with her friends] then it's pretty bad saying that [the boyfriend saying that she shouldn't go and see her friends]*, 15-16, F, Sch B) as explored in the Trust and Fidelity contract, maintaining one's right to see friends was in tension with loyalty to a partner (this extract is about a male friend in a gay relationship):

“Int: can you think well I can see why your friend is sad, which is different to the previous things, so can you think that anything jumps out of you particularly for this situation?”

Participants: What I said earlier about like them being friends with the people of the same sex because that's what they're more likely to do, it might hurt them a bit more because their boyfriend will feel like they're being unloyal to them when really they're just being friends with them and it's like just because of who their friends are” (15-16, F, Sch B)

Here, the speaker outlined how knowing who to give their time to (partner or peers) was a delicate balance, with the potential for 'hurt' and judgements of being disloyal. It was argued one's partner must take priority over friends for a relationship to work. A partner being jealous of peers was presented as understandable but not acceptable.

Not spending enough time with one's partner was positioned as symptomatic of an unhealthy relationship signifying disrespect of one's partner and/or disinterest in the relationship. This talk characterised time allocation in the relationship as tricky, and that unrealistic expectations of one's partner not to see friends was in tension with a duty to make the relationship work.

### **8.1.2 Duty to talk**

Young people constructed relationships as likely to face problems and as therefore naturally deteriorating if unmaintained. Talking about the relationship and relationship

problems was positioned as a central duty to sustain the relationship, ("*you've always got to talk about things and sort them out 'cos otherwise you won't get anywhere*". 15-16, F, Sch B). Obligations to work at the relationship also included requirements to be trusting, open and honest ("*if you're in a relationship you should just, if you know like, you know that you can be honest and like share anything*", Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A). Partners had an obligation to be easy to talk to, and to listen to their girlfriend's/boyfriend's concerns without being defensive. These positive relationship characteristics could be built up over time ("*She should be able to talk to him 'cos like quite solid, they're been going out a year, so she should feel she should talk to him.*" Holly, 15-16, F, Sch A).

Not talking in a relationship was argued to signify that there was "*something wrong*" (Ella, 15-16, F, Sch A) and was a major breach of the Duty and Obligation Contract as it signified one was not willing to '*work at*' the relationship: "*he doesn't want to talk about the relationship, well like either you have to or you can't be in the relationship anymore*" (15-16, F, Sch B). Unwillingness to talk was also presented as a warning sign for breaches to other contracts (i.e. the Love and Happiness contract and Trust and Fidelity contract). That is, not talking about the relationship or problems was taken to indicate that the partner who did not want to talk: (i) was unfaithful or (ii) was unhappy, insecure and/or worried their partner would leave them. The latter was presented as a more understandable reason for not wanting to talk. Nonetheless, all reasons were deemed a breach of the Duty and Obligation contract. Gender also affected reasons for not wanting to talk as (discussed further in section 8.2 of this chapter).

### **8.1.3 Duty to support one's partner**

Part of the Duty and Obligation contract included an agreement to support one's partner. It was a one's duty to "*be like encouraging [...] mak[e] them [their partner] feel*

*better about themselves*" (Sammy, 17-18, F, Sch B); and *"satisfy each other's needs"* (Lucas, 15-16, M, Sch C) – to build one's partner up and be positive about them. It was argued that relationships had their ups and downs and it was normal to be annoyed about how one's partner behaved. Thus, some criticism of one's partner was acceptable but being unkind was not.

Young people defined appropriate and reasonable criticism as that intended to be in a partner's best interest. In contrast, criticisms of one's partner that were offensive, insensitive, unconstructive and/or unwelcome, were not acceptable. It was posited that if a partner was critical or made their girlfriend/boyfriend feel bad it was a breach to the contract: *"[you] shouldn't ever like kick your partner down or make them feel bad"* (17-18, F, Sch B), as this would not build them up. Young people felt that the part of vignette scenario, where the friend's partner called them 'self-centered and immature', was unacceptable and a breach to the Duty and Obligation contract. Jen explained that in a relationship: *"you don't try to criticise [your partner], you try and give them more constructive criticism, when if they want it, but then most of the time you want to give compliments to your partner"* (17-18, F, Sch B), thus young people had an obligation to be positive about their partner.

One's duty to support their partner connected to the Love and Happiness contract in that people are expected to try to make their partner happy. However, the Duty and Obligation contract focused on one's duty to *support* their partner, to build them up, to be positive about them and make the relationship work. In this way, the Duty and Obligation contract related to more mature relationship expectations: that both partners would begin working as a team to make the relationship work, to rely on each other and become interdependent.

Relationship obligations to support one's partner implied that any critical behaviour was misplaced and signalled an unhealthy relationship: "*I don't think that's correct because they don't have to be with you if they don't want to be*" (Sophie, 15-16, F, Sch A). Young people presented the case that partners who complained or criticised did not have the right to try change their girlfriend/boyfriend and should not expect them to change. Thus, criticising one's partner was judged harshly and evoked little sympathy or acceptance by young people. However, the partner was not entirely disempowered. Partners were constructed as having the freedom to change the situation, for example by leaving the relationship or supporting their girlfriend/boyfriend to change, if their girlfriend/boyfriend wanted to.

In summary, the Duty and Obligation contract outlined young people's obligation to support and be loyal to their partner. Young people in healthy relationships were expected to spend time with their partner, to talk to them and to encourage them. Some of these tasks were easy. For example expectations that a healthy relationship was one where one was open, honest and trustworthy – qualities needed to make a relationship work - talked to their partner and listened to their partner's concerns were presented as relatively simple to uphold.

## **8.2 Importance of communication**

The expectation of talking provided a forum in which young people could resolve relationship conflict with their partner and find ways to make the relationship work. Likewise, building one's partner up was constructed as quite easy. However, young people discussed that being positive about one's partner could be a challenge, but it was asserted that being annoyed with one's partner was acceptable in a healthy relationship. Constructive criticism of a partner was permissible, however any comments that were malicious or harsh were a breach of the Duty and Obligation



contract. Other aspects of the Duty and Obligation contract, i.e. spending time with one's partner, were presented as harder to uphold.

Young people presented the case that distributing one's time between friend's and one's partner was could cause conflict. The Duty and Obligation contract had no clear-cut way in which young people should allocate their time between their friends and their partner. It was deemed understandable for a partner be jealous of friends, to restrict who one could see and how much. In relation to potentially abusive relationships this talk raised the possibility that young people may be stopped from seeing their peers, through behaviour such verbal restrictions from one's partner, or their partner's manipulation or jealousy, which if not at the extreme, could be normalised. I will now outline how the Duty and Obligation contract was modified based on gender and sexual orientation.

### **8.2.1 Communication as gendered**

At times, young people appealed to the gender of parties in the relationships, and occasionally they oriented differently to the Duty and Obligation contract on this basis. Here, Livvy appeals to the notion of different duties for men and women, drawing on biblical notions of obeying and honouring, but struggled to apply these principles in the vignette describing a lesbian relationship:

"[In a relationship] the woman's supposed to obey the man, whatever the man wants and then the man is supposed to honour the woman by showing her respect and treating her nicely, but here [lesbian scenario], well not here in this one [the lesbian scenario] but in the first one [where the boyfriend is behaving in unhealthy ways toward their girlfriend] you can see that that ain't happening and the man isn't honouring the woman." (Livvy, 15-16, F, Sch B)

Livvy drew on the traditional marriage contract, which is presented as well aligned with the Duty and Obligation contract. Livvy presented the case that *how* one fulfils the Duty and Obligation contract (honouring vs obeying) is gendered. However, Livvy went on to

argue that the marriage contract was not so relevant to young people in the present day, and specifically that expectations of women obeying men were outdated.

Gender was also oriented to in deliberations about the acceptability of criticism in the relationship, itself a part of the Duty and Obligation contract to talk and make the relationship work. In a lesbian relationship, it was argued that critical comments would be particularly hurtful, as shown here young people used female-female friendships to make sense of lesbian relationships:

"Izzy: Like the girlfriend's critical of her and if girls are critical of other girls it's kind of seen as being really bitchy and horrible, you might take it worse than like for example if a girl was saying it to a guy or something. [...] If a guy said something horrible, not horrible but just like made a passing comment...

Claire: I kind of brush it off.

Izzy: You just kind of brush it off, whereas if a girl said it you'd kind of be a bit more...

[...] Lydia: Because you feel like they would understand that it's really not that nice and so they're doing it because they actually want to be hurtful, whereas if a guy says he doesn't like your eyebrows you might just kind of like... [Overtalking]

Claire: Well yeah, exactly. My eyebrows are my eyebrows but if a girl says it then it's like..." (15-16, F, Sch A)

Women were positioned as having a greater awareness of how hurtful their comments could be. Thus, women's criticism of their partner, (particularly their girlfriend), were less permissible, '*harsh[er]*' and her '*probably being mean*', thus '*more likely to have an effect*' and be '*more damaging*' (Lydia, 15-16, F, Sch A). Thus, there were some cases within the Duty and Obligation contract where women's criticism was more likely to be deemed to breach the 'I will support you' aspect of the Duty and Obligation contract.

These accounts foregrounded gendered expectations of women (but not men) to be agreeable, nice and (in relation to honouring) to behave in a servile manner. In contrast, men's critical comments were less likely to be deemed a breach the Duty and Obligation contract. Notably, if a man criticised a woman's intelligence it might not be so easily dismissed. Yet, men were more likely than women to be presented as naïve of the hurtfulness of their comments and excused of their culpability in saying such things with

lower expectations placed on men in relation to hurtful comments and the Duty and Obligation contract. These differences further highlight the higher expectation placed on women to be agreeable.

In other cases, expectations of men within the Duty and Obligation contract were greater than those of women. Expectations of men to not be physically abusive were specified in the Love and Happiness contract (Chapter 6a). However, for heterosexual men, the 'I will support you' clause of the Duty and Obligation contract implied expectations of men to be protectors in relationships: "*a mans supposed to be protective and you know not abusive*" (Jen, 17-18, F, Sch B). Thus, men's violence against women was a major signifier of an unhealthy relationship as it evidenced not only a breach of the Love and Happiness Contract but also a breach of their protector role.

In summary, the Duty and Obligation Contract set out the assumption that people in relationships had duties and responsibilities to make relationships work by spending enough time with your partner, to talk your partner, and to build your partner up. These three features are what stand out for young people. Arguably different duties may stand out for older adults such as teamwork and intimacy. In this way, it could be argued that young people make sense of IPV by attending to the extent that a party is fulfilling these three duties, in effect configuring a checklist against which a partner's behaviour can be judged. Moreover, the expectations outlined in this checklist might also be gendered. Another aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract related to the responsibilities young people could draw on from others, such as peers, to making the relationship work. The next section will explore this and how peers could be drawn into a sub-contract of Duty and Obligation to friends who are seeking help from relationship issues.

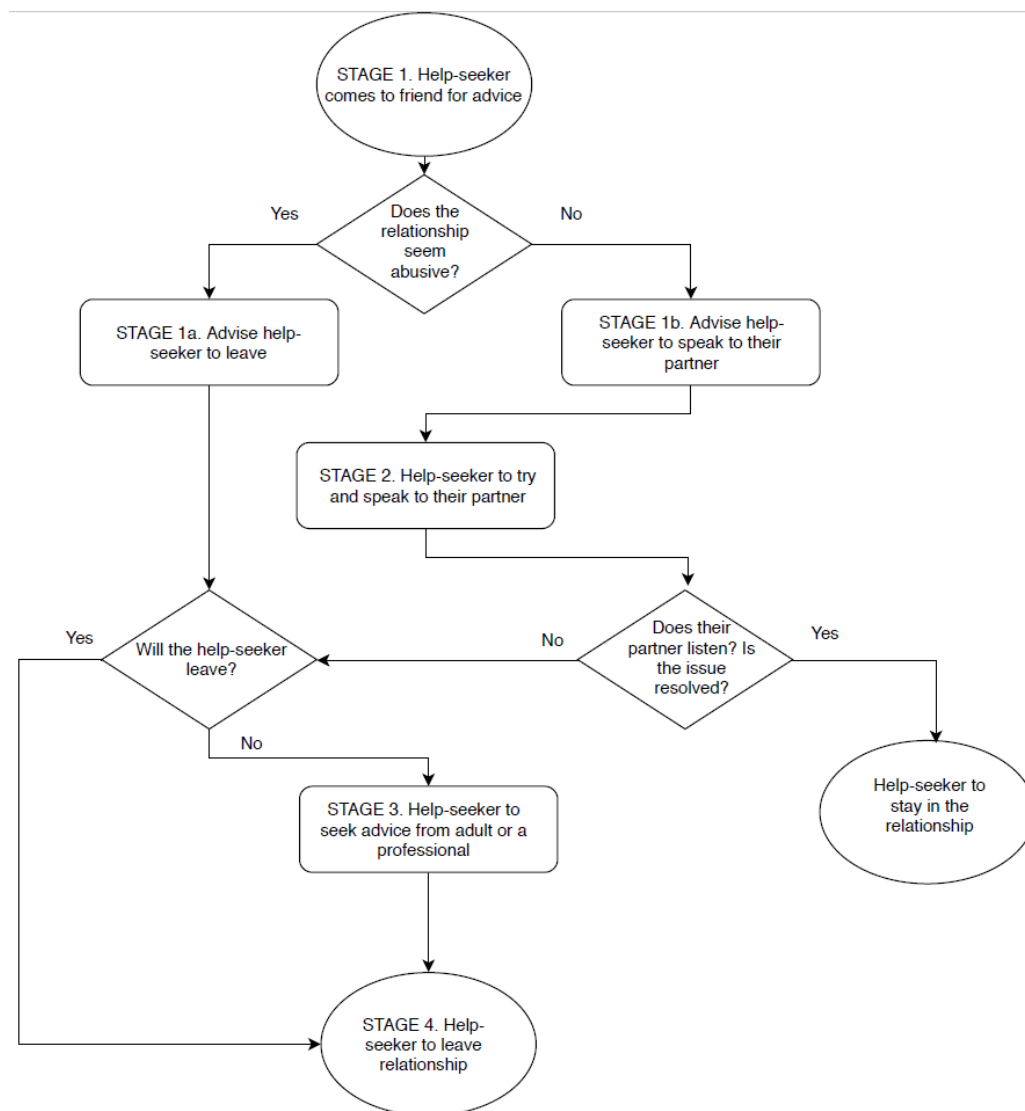
### 8.3 The Peer Duty and Obligation Contract and Stages of Helpseeking

The Duty and Obligation Contract set out expectations that parties should do what they can to make their relationship work. This included getting help from others and in increasing order of seriousness. The focus group instruction to consider what advice participants would give to a friend in this situation potentially primed young people to talk about friends. Nonetheless, young people constructed peers as playing an important role in resolving relationship problems, hence referred to as the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract. This obligated friends to help the relationship to work, or to steer towards relationship termination if judged unhealthy.

There were three stages of help-seeking that participants talked about. These allowed an individual (and peers) to judge whether the help-seeker had done everything they could to support and stand by their partner. Only after this would leaving be approved. The three stages were: (i) speaking to a friend, (ii) talking to one's partner and (iii) seeking formal advice (See Figure 8.1). This section will first outline the three stages of help-seeking described by young people, referred to by Tom as a '*step-by-step process*' of help-seeking. I will then explore each stage in turn and draw out what this tells us about the Duty and Obligation Contract, the Peer Duty and Obligation contract and young people's sense making about IPV.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Due to the vignette used in this study depicting a situation where a friend is coming to their peer for advice. The first stage of help-seeking outlined by young people was the help-seeker asking for advice from a peer.



**Figure 8.1.** Flowchart of the Stages of Help-seeking

#### 8.4 Stage 1 Peer Support

Focus group participants responded easily to the proposed context in which they were being approached as peers to advise on relationship problems. In general, the young people argued that help-seekers should get multiple views of the situation to ensure they were viewing the relationship rationally. As part of 'making it work', they proposed that an individual had a duty, in *some* cases, to go through multiple stages of help-seeking to make the relationship work. If it help-seekers could demonstrate the relationship was not workable they could leave. In this way, young people privileged a

rational, systematic approach to relationships and the Duty and Obligation contract. This section will focus on the first stage of help-seeking: seeking advice from peers. The section will draw out the Duty and Obligations expected of individuals, and the Peer Duty and Obligation contract. Young people argued that it was important to share their relationship concerns with their peers:

“[T]alk to people, and they [the help-seeker] shouldn’t keep it to themselves because it’ll just gather and gather and it’ll get worse and it’ll make them feel self-conscious and it’s not good on a person to feel that bad because it’s led to some really severe stuff in the news.” (17-18, M, Sch B)

Sharing relationship issues with peers was argued to alleviate the weight of problems and worries. Peers were assigned a key role in establishing which relationship behaviours were acceptable or not. Peers judged whether one, and one’s partner, were adhering to the Duty and Obligation contract. As outlined by Graham any young person seeking relationship advice from their peers, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, were: *“looking for that kind of [pause] vindication. [...] they’re all looking for someone to say, yes or no [the behaviour is un/acceptable]”* (18-24, M, Undergraduate).

This approach championed a public, socially-led element to making sense of relationship behaviours and identification of IPV. As this section will come to explore, this construction of relationships and collective sense making raises the issue that peer group norms could skew relationship norms - where unhealthy behaviours were normalised or common - IPV could go unchallenged. The collective sense making also highlights how a young person, when presenting a case of potential IPV to their peers, may need ‘*evidence*’ to prove their partner is not behaving appropriately, they are not being supported by their partner and/or they could no longer make the relationship work.

Help-seekers, on their own, were positioned as unable to accurately judge whether the relationship behaviours they were experiencing were acceptable or not. In contrast to the Love and Happiness contract (where love was seen to inhibit the *victim*’s recognition

that the behaviours were abusive) the Duty and Obligation Contract drew out the ways *public expectations* of help-seekers to support their partner and make the relationship work were a barrier to help-seekers leaving unhealthy relationships.

Stage 1 help-seeking was split into two broad categories: (1a) where peers believed the help-seeker was in an unhealthy relationship but the help-seeker did not see the behaviours as abusive; and (1b) where the help-seeker felt their relationship was unhealthy and sought advice from peers, but their peers were unconvinced that the relationship was unhealthy.

When the help-seeker was believed by peers, barriers to help-seeking included expectations of a help-seeker to support their partner, to talk to them, to stand by their partner, to try and make it work. This presented a Peer Duty and Obligation contract to the help-seeker that: 'I will support you and keep you safe'. Where the help-seeker was not believed aspects of the Peer Duty and Obligation contract presented barriers to help such as the expectations of peers to be impartial when the help-seekers cases were not convincing. Here, the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract became: 'I will support you to help make your relationship work'. Notably, young people presented various versions of the Peer Duty and Obligation contract depending on how truthful the help-seekers account was deemed to be as this chapter will discuss. I will now discuss the two aspects of Stage 1 in turn.

#### **8.4.1 Stage 1a: Naïve help-seeker**

In some cases, the help-seeker (i.e. the potential victim of IPV) was constructed as partially, if not wholly, unaware that the relationship behaviours (physical violence, emotional abuse, isolation) they were experiencing were not acceptable. As a brief recap, as discussed in Chapter 6c, the help-seeker could be constructed as naïve of how unacceptable the behaviours were, or presented as being held in the relationship

(due to love, emotional manipulation and/or fear of violence). Young people also discussed how such situations were complicated by victim blaming and expectations from outsiders that the potential victim (or help-seeker) should leave the relationship. In this way, the help-seeker was constructed as vulnerable from both their abusive partner and those outside the relationship.

With these difficulties in mind, it was a peer's role to support and persuade the help-seeker to see that their partner's behaviours were abusive and to come to a stage where they could find the confidence to leave the relationship (*"it would be just giving enough support and enough advice that she feels that there's someone there and she's got the support network that she needs without not giving enough and then something happening to her, something to make it worse."* Graham, 18-21, M, Undergraduate). Here the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract was: 'I will support you and keep you safe'.

If and how to keep the main character safe appeared gendered. In particularly high-risk cases (where there was a high level, or threat of, physical violence) if there was a close relationship between the peer and help-seeker it was, sometimes, permitted for the peer to intervene (e.g. talk to their friend's partner or defend their friend):

"[I]t depends how close the gay male was to me, like how close I was as friends, who my mate who's gay, like we're very close, so it's probably because of that that I'm sort of quite like protective, so [...] if he was being hit then I think I'd be probably willing to intervene as well." (Jeremy, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

However, a peer's duty to keep their friend safe and their likelihood of intervening largely depended on gender and sexual orientation of the friend:

"I wouldn't intervene in the first situation [man being abusive to a woman] because I think that the man or the boyfriend would assume that I was trying to crack onto his girlfriend or steal his girlfriend off him and then I think that would make the situation worse. If I was really close with [the lesbian main character] I probably would intervene, or maybe say something if like... or if I'd just seen her hit her or something like that, I'd definitely intervene, or if there was an atmosphere or if my friend wanted me to intervene then I would. And with the male who's being abused by a female, then [sighs] probably wouldn't intervene because I'm not sure... unless my friend wanted me to, that's the only time I'd intervene because I would see it has



his problem to sort of sort out [...] But I think it'd probably be his problem that he'd want to sort out to avoid sort of emasculation." (Jeremy, 18-24, M, Undergraduate)

Intervention by male peers in heterosexual relationships was discouraged as it could rouse suspicions of infidelity for heterosexual female help-seekers, or evoke feelings of inadequacy and emasculation for heterosexual male help-seekers. Thus, the rules for intervention were presented as complicated and it was not often suggested, bolstered by the characterisation of relationships as private.

*Relationships as private.*

In the vignette scenario, the help-seeker told participants that they did not want anyone else to know about the situation. Although the Peer Duty and Obligation contract gave peers a role in helping, portrayals of relationships as private were taken up as complicating the situation. Young people outlined relationship problems as "*something very personal and very private*" (Jeremy, 18-24, M, Undergraduate) that you "*wouldn't want people to know*" (Ceri, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). In these cases, the Peer Duty and Obligation contract became: 'I will support you and keep you safe discreetly and/or with your permission'.

Part of standing by one's partner was keeping relationship problems private. Seeking help or advice from peers was argued to be very sensitive: "*I think it's maybe a sense of betrayal, sense it may be a bit, a tiny bit insidious to go behind the person's back*" (Graham, 18-24, M, Undergraduate). Thus, help-seeking could be characterised as a breach to the 'I will stand by you' aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract. Help-seeking "*could come back to*" their partner (Tom, 18-24, M, Undergraduate), who, upon finding out could "*get angry*" and "*make [the situation] worse*" (Ceri, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). In this sense, when relationships were presented as private, the Duty and Obligation contract was a *barrier* to help-seeking.

When young people foregrounded one's duty to stand by their partner and positioned relationships as private, too much involvement of peers in resolving relationship problems was argued to risk pushing the help-seeker away, making them less likely to share their concerns and seek support ("*she's worried about maybe too many people getting involved. Maybe if like she has more friends who knew about it someone might feel really strongly about it and try and get involved as well*" Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

At this point, the Peer Duty and Obligation contract became: 'I will support you and keep you safe *discreetly and with your permission*'. Here, nuances in the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract of *how* to provide support and keep a friend safe became important. Young people argued relationship problems should be kept between those in the relationship or shared with only a few close peers: "*you wouldn't want like everyone knowing your business*" Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Peer intervention without permission was presented '*over-stepping*' one's role as a friend. Interference with the relationship without permission, too direct or forceful advice and/or a lack of discretion in supporting the help-seeker were all deemed a breach to the Peer Duty and Obligation contract.

In some cases, it was constructed as difficult to fulfil the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract, specifically how to support the help-seeker and keep them safe but *not interfere too much*: "*Like personally, and I think in a way like part of me would want to get involved but part of me would want to just like say, "oh it's not my business"*" (Jenny, 18-21, F, undergraduate). This positioned the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract as at the boundary between public and private. In some cases, these issues were resolved by presenting the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract as expectations that a peer provided advice to aid the help-seeker to realise that they should leave the relationship but not interfere any more than that (see also Chapter 6c).

These examples are taken from scenarios where the partner was constructed as abusive, and secrecy presented as necessary for safety. However, even in situations where the relationship was not deemed abusive, young people's advice often orientated to keeping relationship issues private. As part of the 'I will stand by you and support you' aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract young people advised their friend to talk to their partner first to resolve the issue between the two of them before involving anyone else.

In summary, the Duty and Obligation contract for those in the relationship and the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract were placed in a precarious space between: (a) relationship problems being private and (b) relationship problems needing some public judgement. These findings highlight the contrasting role of the Duty and Obligation Contract and the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract in facilitating and inhibiting help-seeking behaviours in young people's relationships.

The Peer Duty and Obligation Contract highlights the importance of help-seeking and peer advice giving in establishing healthy relationship norms and calling out unacceptable and/or IPV. It also draws attention to the cases and reasons why involvement of peers is permitted to ensure relationships are healthy (e.g. when there is a high risk to safety, when requested by the friend in the relationship) and how young people, as peers, feel they can get involved in other's relationships (e.g. to guide their friend, to help make sense of relationship behaviours, to support and be there for their friend and help ensure they are safe). Limits of the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract, around issues of privacy, raise attention to the ways young people's help-seeking can be inhibited by the Duty and Obligation Contract. This raises concerns as to how characterisation of relationships as unequivocally private might inhibit help-seeking and isolate young people in unhealthy or abusive relationships.

#### 8.4.2 Stage 1b Help-seeker not believed: Importance of fairness and context

This section will explore Stage 1b where the help-seekers account of the relationship was judged not to be abusive, or was not believed, by peers. It was argued that peers should be wary that help-seeker's accounts of the relationship may not be entirely truthful. This section details how aspects of the Peer Duty and Obligation contract required peers to remain impartial and fair to the help-seeker's partner when supporting help-seekers who report relationship difficulties.

Young people asserted that peers had a responsibility to support help-seekers experiencing relationship issues (not IPV) to make their relationship work. Creating a Peer Duty and Obligation Contract of: 'I will be fair and support you to make your relationship work'. Young people argued there were 'two-sides to every story', peers were presented as having a responsibility to be alert to a help-seeker's potential culpability or tendency to 'twist the truth':

"it says that she also 'asks' him to do things, it's not like she enforces it on him, it's not like she's [...] I'm just trying to look at the other side of the story, maybe he was twisting a little bit just so [his] friends agree with him and so on, because if it says 'ask' it doesn't imply that she's beating him to do it, it just means that she's subtly asking him, so that's basically it [laughs]" (, 17-18, M, Sch B).

Young people privileged a rational account of events. One participant said: "*But she [the help-seeker] must be doing something, that's what I'm thinking, but is there another side to the story? Like she might be doing something that's putting him on the edge, making him think all that stuff*" (Faheem, 15-16, M, Sch C). This approach foregrounded a need for context and motives of the partner's behaviours, before judgements about the partner's rationality could be made or conclusions drawn as to whether the behaviours were abusive. As argued by Faheem, the vignette scenario, in only presenting one person's account, gave too little information or context to make these judgements.

Additional information, context, or motives of the partner's behaviour did not necessarily make the partner's behaviours acceptable but it helped young people to judge *how* bad the behaviour was:

"[I]t just says [in the vignette], "He's hit him on a couple of occasions," and he's worried but he doesn't like say what the hit was like 'cos he doesn't say it was like a violent hit, like it could just be a tap, rather than a hit it probably isn't, but it could be, it doesn't like say because it says in the previous paragraph they're arguing and he shoves him but it doesn't say that he hit him in the argument and if that was the case [if he hit him in an argument] then that'd be like more unacceptable 'cos he sounds more violent." (Sophie, 15-16, F, Sch A)

Seemingly unprovoked behaviour was presented as irrational and deemed the worst. Where the partner's behaviour could be in response to the help-seeker's previous actions, it was more likely to be deemed permissible:

"The emotional behaviour also depends on what's happened in the past because if say if they've had a history of like we said, of with the last situation and obviously he might just be reciprocating for what she might have done to him in the past, obviously that doesn't make the behaviours right, but it could explain why he feels he has to behave towards her in that way, and why he feels he has to take such control over her" (Ella, 15-16, F, Sch A).

Here young people's classifications of the partner's behaviour as abusive or unhealthy were contingent on judgements about the help-seeker's culpability and blameworthiness. In this way, the fairness aspect of the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract allowed partners to have some input before their behaviours could be judged. This presented peers as having a duty to discourage and vet false accusations of abusive behaviour.

That participants were interested in the broader context in which the fictional vignette circumstances (reportedly) occurred, suggested that young people were obligated to view help-seeker's disclosures as fallible accounts and that their partner's account may be very different.

"I think circumstance is always going to make it more understandable because you don't see their, her justifications, you don't see the entire relationship. If you go into specifics he says that his girlfriend's very critical of him, critical of what? Critical of maybe, I don't know, him smoking weed with his friends, could be something

extreme as that, that she's not, that she's not comfortable with either so it could be a two-way street. But if you're looking at it face value it's not okay because he feels small in the relationship." (Claire, 17-18, F, Sch A)

Seeking additional context was an opportunity for peers to judge whether the help-seeker was adhering to their duties and obligations to support and stand by their partner. For example, Claire above draws upon the help-seeker's duty to spend time with his partner. Such context allowed peers to verify if their friend was being 'antagonistic' (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate), being annoying or was incompatible with their partner ("*has she got that kind of a personality? [...] he's having a bad reaction to her personality.*" Jenny, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Here, help-seekers were assigned a burden of proof to provide sufficient evidence that their partner's behaviour was abusive.

Broadly, this approach evoked the victim- perpetrator dichotomy in which young people restricted victim status to those constructed as entirely innocent - only having harm done *to them*- and rational. In contrast, perpetrators were presented as irrational individuals who enact harm on others but are not *at all* harmed or victimised. As shown in the extracts above, if a help-seeker was judged to have provoked their partner they were not deemed a victim. Likewise, if a partner had been wronged by the help-seeker the partner's behaviour was not judged to be abusive. These findings suggest that young people constructed abusive behaviours as contingent on context rather than indicated by specific behaviours in isolation. It suggests that victims of IPV who are somehow blameworthy are less likely to receive peer support or to be believed.

In summary, this put help-seekers in a tricky position in that, not providing context opened one up to skepticism about the impartiality of one's account. On the other hand, providing context – unless the behaviour was constructed as irrational – risked peers understanding and then condoning the problematic behaviours. Thus, the Peer Duty

and Obligation Contract of 'I will support you to make your relationship work and be fair' could work to the disadvantage of young people experiencing IPV seeking help from their peers.

*Gender and likelihood of being believed.*

When seeking relationship advice and support help-seeker accounts were viewed through a gendered frame, with some types of people portrayed as more likely to embellish their accounts. Heterosexual men were most likely to provide a truthful account. One male participant explained that:

"[I]n some cases the male side maybe less [likely to be lying] than the female, because... Like he may be embarrassed, they both may be embarrassed but in my opinion, I think the male would be more embarrassed" (17-18, M, Sch B).

Here, gender indicated how much a help-seeker had at stake in disclosing abuse. Young people posited that expectations were placed on men to be stronger than women, thus a heterosexual man had little to gain in disclosing experiences of abuse from their girlfriend. In contrast gay men were judged to have less at stake and so were less likely to be trusted:

Int: do you think that in the gay man situation that your friend should seek help?

Jenny: No.

Int: Why do you think that?

Jessica: I just think like they are just being over the top and obviously the one that's shouting has got his knickers in a twist and they need to both calm down, have a little chat and they'll be fine." (Jenny & Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

In some cases, gay men's accounts were more likely to be judged as an over-exaggeration. The reason for this was not entirely clear but it could be due to construction of gay men as weak and/or keen for gossip and 'drama'. However, within the same discussion these young women went on to say that:

Jessica: I find in this situation that quite surprising 'cos like when gay guys usually have like a group of girlfriends that they're like equally as close with, and like all have a gossip and stuff so I'm quite like, I think that'd be maybe a bit different to the other ones where they don't want to talk about it, I think that's a bit...

Sonia: Yeah, my hairdresser will tell me all his relationship problems and we're not that close, like I just go in for my hair, I think gay people are just like very eccentric

with how they speak, so I think maybe if he doesn't want people to know it may actually be serious...

Jessica: ...Serious...

Sonia: ...because he feels like he can't speak about it." (Jessica & Sonia, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, if a gay male help-seeker wanted the relationship problems to be kept a secret, it was presented as more likely to be a truthful account as it went against assumptions that gay men seek gossip and drama. Requesting such discretion signalled to peers that the help-seeker needed genuine support.

In summary, in fulfilling the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract, peers were more likely to be skeptical of a help-seeker's account if they did not provide motives or context for their partner's behaviour. In seeking rationality, without context or motive to the partner's behaviour, this perspective assumed the partner's actions *were* rational, and the *victim* was omitting these aspects to present a more favourable account. Yet, providing these motives and context risked rationalising the partner's behaviour and evoking peer sympathy and understanding for the partner. Young people drew on stereotypes of gender and sexual orientation to make judgements as to how likely the help-seeker was to be exaggerating or lying about the potentially abusive behaviours. These findings show that speakers draw upon a notion of credible people and credible accounts to operationalise their peer obligations 'correctly'. The findings suggest that sense making of IPV quickly become characterised as involving multiple stakeholders who have differing levels of power and responsibility.

### **8.5 Stage 2: Duty and Obligation of help-seeker to talk to their partner**

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, communication and talking about the relationship was constructed as a central aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract to make the relationship work. When a young person sought advice from their peers about relationship issues, but their account was not deemed to indicate abuse (due to the



believed truthfulness of their account, lack of context or motives for behaviours; like the Rough Patch discussed in Chapter 6b) the help-seeker was advised to speak to their partner about it.

### 8.5.1 Importance of talking

Talking was an important aspect of making a relationship work:

‘I think it’s down to just like you’re both agreeing to make the changes that you need to make, and making compromises, ‘cos I think like I split up from a relationship like last year and it just went really badly like in the end and then after I split up I started to change into a different person and I thought if I was this person in that relationship, things would have gone better’ (Jenny, 18-21, F, undergraduate)

Although young people had argued that one should not change for their partner it was reasoned that one should ‘*make the changes that you need to make*’ if *both* partners agreed. In this way, making the relationship work was presented as a mutual effort. In most cases talking was recommended as the best way to resolve relationship issues: “*it’s all just down to talking, finding out what’s gone wrong, resolve it.*” (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

#### *Partner as naïve.*

The need for the couple to talk linked to young people’s constructions of the partner (the potential perpetrator of abuse) as naïve of their unhealthy or abusive behaviour. Talking was a way for help-seekers to enquire about the motives of their partner’s behaviour:

“Maybe like on occasions where he does encourage her to drink or smoke or tells her that she’s immature or something she could just like, say, “I don’t like it when you say that” and kind of gauge what his reaction is and if it’s a bad reaction like, he shoves her or shouts at her even more than she can kind of tell that he’s not going to change like, he’s like a bit set in his ways , but if he’s like “Oh sorry, I didn’t mean to, I didn’t know”, like he might not realise that he’s doing it if she’s not spoken to him about it, he might not really, even notice that he’s making her feel bad, just think it’s like a little comment or whatever but.” (Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

As outlined by Cara, talking was an opportunity for the help-seeker to collect further evidence to ‘*gauge*’ whether the partner’s unhealthy behaviours were abusive and intentional, or merely due to the partner being naïve of their impact. If the relationship was abusive talking could escalate the situation to physical violence or confrontation from the partner. In other cases, talking gave the potentially abusive partner a chance to rationalise their behaviour and tell their side of the story. Young people presented the case that a partner could be entirely naïve, acting in unhealthy ways because of their past experiences:

Patrick: Maybe once, maybe like if she’s never said anything about it, maybe something’s happened to him like in the past and he doesn’t understand that it’s wrong, so if she tells him and he understands and never does it again that’s okay.  
 Jake: Maybe from the home [...] like say his dad hit his mum or...  
 Patrick: She might never have actually said to him, like no-one could have said to him that it’s wrong so he maybe doesn’t understand. (15-16, M, Sch B).

In this way, it was presented as part the help-seeker’s duty to *tell* their partner that their behaviour was not acceptable. Talking was an opportunity for the partner to evidence their naivety and most importantly their willingness to change:

“Shelly: I think that’s the first step, whether she is willing to end it or not, just to talk to him, talk.  
 Sophie: And hear what he’s thinking.  
 Shelly: See whether he’s willing to change.  
 Macy: And if he’s not willing to talk then the only other option is  
 Shelly: Yeah, if he’s not willing to talk at all.  
 Harriet: I think if he’s willing to say sorry, like if he’s willing to be like, “I was in the wrong, I’m sorry.”  
 Shelly: “I’ll change.”  
 Macy: Yeah, work on it then that’s okay.  
 Int: Yeah.  
 Macy: But if he’s just not talking about it or he’s not admitting that he’s wrong, and he still gets angry then there’s no reason for her to stay.  
 Harriet: And like if he’s... if she... like we were talking about if she’s cheated on him and they haven’t talked about that either, that’s going to make it a lot worse, and if you get everything out in the open, and...  
 Shelly: I don’t think he’d be forgiven for hitting her, especially if it’s multiple times, I don’t feel like you can work on that.  
 Harriet: Yeah, but she can give a probation period.” (15-16, F, Sch B)

Young people used the partner’s acceptance (or not) of the wrongness of their unhealthy behaviour to indicate how likely the Duty and Obligation Contract could be

fulfilled. It was argued that a naïve partner would recognise their behaviour as unhealthy, apologise and change. These behaviours demonstrated that the partner was still willing to fulfil the Duty and Obligation Contract and ‘make the relationship work’. In contrast, a partner was in breach of the working at it aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract if they denied their wrong-doing or did not want to discuss the issue with the help-seeker.

When the partner was apologetic it was acceptable for the help-seeker to stay in the relationship. Here, young people made an implicit case that the help-seeker *should* forgive their partner’s behaviour and support their partner in trying to make the relationship work. Notably, there was no discussion as to whether the help-seeker should accept their partner’s apology. Forgiveness seemed to be assumed.

The frequency of unhealthy behaviours was important to judgements of naivety:

You don’t know whether this guy [heterosexual male partner] has had girlfriends before or whether it’s the first one and just like, I know that sounds a bit stupid, like you should know how it works, but you might... yeah, you should know from life not to hit your girlfriend, but or anyone for that matter [...] But at the same time if he hasn’t had it and no-one’s ever told him like directly, but I still there’s no excuse, especially when it’s happened multiple times.” (Morris, 15-16, M, Sch B)

Young people argued that if a partner frequently behaved in unhealthy ways ‘*there’s no excuse*’, and the help-seeker could, and should, leave. Here the Duty and Obligation Contract became: ‘I will stand by you and support you *to an extent*’. In this way, when making sense of IPV young people looked for the frequency of behaviours, the partner’s acceptance of responsibility and the partner’s willingness to change.

### **8.5.2 Communication and Gender: lesbian women’s ease of talking**

In a lesbian relationship the Duty and Obligation Contract, and the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract changed. In lesbian relationships talking, for some, was deemed the *only* solution.

“Int: Are there any aspects that make this situation [lesbian scenario] [...] particularly problematic to resolve?

Jessica: No, it’s all just down to talking, finding out what’s gone wrong, resolve it.” (18-21, F, Undergraduate).

Young people drew on gender stereotypes of women as non-violent to present the idea that gender influenced how one saw, and resolved, relationship conflict. It was deemed easier for two women to resolve their relationship issues compared to a man and woman: *“if two people are the same gender and it’s the same kind of situation they should understand each other a little bit better”* (Jenny, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Thus, for help-seekers in lesbian relationships the “I will support you and stand by you” aspect of the Duty and Obligation Contract was foregrounded.

The need to talk in lesbian relationships was furthered through the portrayal of lesbian relationships as niche:

“Faheem: You shouldn’t tell your friends. I think it’s just between you, your friends won’t understand the situation that you’re in, that situation.

Kahlid: Especially since lesbian like couples are not exactly, um, a common thing, yeah. They’re not, like you don’t really see them every day and although, I wouldn’t say, although I don’t have a problem with them and all that, they’re not widely accepted. So obviously when you have your friends they’re [lesbian relationships] not [common], let’s be honest...” (15-16, M, Sch C)

It was argued that, due to their ‘uncommonness’, lesbian help-seekers should rely on talking to their partner because peers would not understand the situation. In a lesbian relationship, the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract was diminished. The support peers should offer to help-seekers was down played. This was reflected in advice for gay help-seekers:

“Megan: Again, more difficult to advise it in a gay relationship if you haven’t had experiences of that and I think, yeah, just in terms of like people in society there is a bit of a stigma and there is still some like prejudice towards gay people so it’s harder to address like, seeking help, so they might be worried that they’ll be judged.

Int: Ok, um, and what would you advise your friend to do?

Sarah: Talk to him I think. Talk to him.

Int: Talk to him?

Sarah: Yeah. But if he won’t talk I don’t really know. I’m not sure.” (Megan & Sarah, 18-21, F, Undergraduate)

As above, (straight) peers had difficulty establishing how the Duty and Obligation Contract applied to gay relationships. Young people posited that the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract was heteronormative, and like the Duty and Obligation Contract, did not factor experiences and pressures specific to gay relationships - factors considered important in providing relationship advice. This account seemed sympathetic to the struggles same-sex couples may face, implicitly foregrounding the limitations of the Heteronormative Frame to making sense of relationships. Yet, this diminished a peer's duty to provide support and positioned the help-seeker as needing to resolve the issue with their partner.

These findings highlight that young people struggle to identify IPV in same-sex relationships. The findings suggest that a young person in an abusive, same-sex relationship could be excluded from their peer network, even when their peers mean well. This could have negative consequences such as stopping them from: leaving the relationship, recognising that the behaviours are abusive, and receiving social and emotional support from their peers.

### **8.5.3 Communication and Gender: when talking is not possible**

Although, talking was positioned as most important, getting one's partner to talk could be a challenge. Young people raised universal reasons as to why the partner may not want to talk to the help-seeker. The primary reason was that the partner was avoiding talking as they were worried that talking would result in ending the relationship: *'he's not being like mean about it, he just doesn't want to talk about it 'cos he doesn't want to end it'*. 15-16, F, Sch A). Other reasons for not wanting to talk firmly rested on gender.

#### *Heterosexual Men.*

Men were deemed to be less comfortable talking to peers or their partner about relationships: *"my boyfriend doesn't speak to any of his boyfriends about our trivial*

*arguments, but like if he's really upset and we're really not good then he'll speak to one or two people but he doesn't speak to people about pointless stuff.*" (Jessica, 18-21, F, Undergraduate). Young people outlined that there may be some difficulties in getting men to talk about relationships. Young people presented some ways the help-seeker could encourage their male partner to talk about the relationship. One tactic was raising issues just as they happen, this method linked back to constructions of the partner as naïve and placed a burden of proof upon the help-seeker:

"Yeah, like say it in the moment rather than bringing it up later it 'cos he might not want to talk about it later on but when it's just happened, it doesn't have to be like a lengthy discussion, just make him aware of what he's doing and see if he knows." (Cara, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

This approach positioned women as both relationships and partner coach. Women were tasked with working around their boyfriend's maleness to ensure that she adapts to him and his needs and finds ways for him to understand himself.

Another tactic was enforcing the Duty and Obligation Contract. If the boyfriend still did not want to talk about the relationship, regardless of his male disposition it was argued that the boyfriend should overcome his maleness and talk about the relationship to make it work. If he was not willing to do this the help-seeker had enough evidence to leave the relationship.

### *Gay Men.*

Gay men, like heterosexual men, were also deemed to be less comfortable talking. This raised the potential for physical violence between men to be permitted as a method of conflict resolution in a gay relationship:

Max: It's two men. Men handle things differently.

Kahlid: Women hold [laughs], no offence yeah, women hold grudges. I'm sorry, women like to draw things out to last. They make sure they last. But men, we like to, men like to handle problems there and then. If a problem can't be handled there and then they leave it.

Max: It doesn't get handled.

Kahlid: [...]and then you will not see them speak about it again, that's it. It's either you handle it on spot or it just doesn't get handled.

Samir: It's direct and aggressive

[...]

Kahlid: It's either, there's either no aggression whatsoever and it's just left or it's full aggression and then it's handled there and then, but either way after it's either handled or not handled you will never hear about it again.

[...]

Max: I'm saying this is just what men do. We're just aggressive towards each other, even if they do love each other, it's just a natural thing to show dominance.

Samir: It's just the alpha male. Who wants to be that alpha male out of both of them? Who wants to be classed as the most masculine, wears the trousers between the two of them? (15-16, M, Sch C)

Here physical violence in gay male relationships was rationalised and accepted as part of being a man. Men's physical violence was acceptable because men are men. Here, the Duty and Obligation Contract – to make the relationship work – for gay relationships, in some cases, permitted physical violence.

#### *Heterosexual women.*

Alternative vignettes generated alternative constructions of gendered responsibility.

Young people drew on gender stereotypes to rationalise why a heterosexual woman may not want to talk about their relationship:

"Int: [W]hat about with the girlfriend who's not being very nice to her boyfriend, what would you think would be going on there when she's saying that she doesn't want to talk about it?

Jessica: She's emotional at the moment, she just needs time out.

Would you agree Jenny?

Jenny: Probably she'd be saying, "I want to talk about it," whereas she does, 'cos we always say like, "I'm fine."

Jessica: He needs to probe and he needs to talk to her, and find out what's going on with her.

Jenny: We're just a bit sneaky I think." (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

A woman's lack of desire to talk was positioned as resultant of her emotionality or sneaky tactics to invite the man to probe for more information. In such cases, a greater onus was placed upon the (male) help-seeker to encourage their girlfriend to talk about the relationship.

These arguments highlighted how help-seekers had a duty to encourage their partner to talk about their relationship issues. On the one hand, heterosexual men were positioned as accountable (responsible) for lack of communication in relationships. On the other, women (lesbian or heterosexual) were expected to speak to their partner. In heterosexual relationships where women were help-seekers greater onus was placed on the women who was tasked with accommodating her boyfriend's maleness and providing guidance to encourage her boyfriend to talk.

### **8.6 Stage 3: Seek advice from an adult or formal agency**

Young people were unable to advise help-seekers in cases where (a) IPV was evident and the risk was high; and (b) for lesbian or gay help-seekers. In these cases, there was a third stage for help-seekers: to seek help from an adult or a formal IPV support agency.

Seeking help from an adult or formal support agency was presented as a '*daunting task*' and a '*huge step*' ("*Tom: An individual having to go to a stranger and say look, I'm being told that I'm potentially in an abusive relationship... Graham: It's a much bigger step.*" 18-24, M, Undergraduate). The act of involving additional people in the relationship issue could '*betray*' their partner and the Duty and Obligation contract, and could be challenging for a help-seeker to actually do:

'[I]t can be considered a huge step to even tell your mum or dad because you're so scared of the backlash of telling them, either from them or from the boyfriend so the whole going to a charity, [...] once you're there there'll probably be phenomenal help, the act of leaving the house, going to them or ringing their number is daunting, must be very daunting.'  
(Graham, 18-14y, M, Undergraduate)

However, it was argued this was necessary to resolve the problem ("*I suppose that sounds a bit daunting to go through by yourself so, but yes, obviously the situation's not right, it needs to be resolved doesn't it, so*" Tom, 18-24, M, Undergraduate). In cases where IPV was evident and risk high, part of the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract ("I



will keep you safe”) was for peers to support and encourage the help-seeker to progress to this stage of help-seeking.

### 8.6.1 High risk cases

When relationships were deemed by peers to be abusive or high risk young people advised help-seekers to seek formal sources of support: *“if she’s peer pressuring him into smoking and drinking which will conclude in the domestic violence then he should really... shouldn’t be really talking to a friend... talk to I would say a teacher or a parent.”* (17-18, M, Sch B). Notably, definitions of risk were open to interpretation. A risky relationship could be where there was controlling behaviour, physical abuse or risk of harm. It was deemed beyond young people’s, particularly secondary school students’, level of development to deal with such situations effectively:

“[W]hile [...] if it’s one of my closest friends, I may become very invested to the point where I become the main port of call for help and assistance and everything whereas in sixth Form, I may have possibly done that with my closest friends but there’s the difference that I probably wouldn’t have felt responsible enough or had the where-with-all enough to be the main help but would encourage them to find parents or what-have-you but I think that’s the point where you’re still, you’re still not quite an adult” (Jeremy, M, 18-24, Undergraduate)

It was argued that providing advice and support for help-seekers in high risk relationships was outside the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract. The peer’s role was to *refer* the help-seeker on and help them get support. Within the older cohorts (18-24 y) young people outlined that peers could provide support by finding helpline numbers and travelling to the appointments with the help-seeker, but only adults and formal agencies would be able to resolve the situation.

Here adults and formal support organisations were drawn into a collective Duty and Obligation Contract to support help-seekers and keep them safe. Adults were deemed to have greater life experience which suited them to fulfilling this role:

Claire: I feel like it would be very uncomfortable like at first thought to go talk to an adult but if it’s, they have more experience in how to handle and they might have,

[parents/adults] they're more in a position of authority to tell them [the help-seeker] what they think rather than the friend because the friend's worried about offending, whereas the adult's purely there for kind of making sure that your wellbeing is okay. I don't know I'm kind of going...

Izzy: And friends are probably a bit more biased, obviously the adult wants the best for the female but still the friend's probably more biased. (17-18, F, Sch A)

Asking for help from adults was constructed as 'uncomfortable' but essential in risky situations. Adults were positioned as above the constraints peers may have to advise within (e.g. worries of offending the help-seeker, having to skirt around the truth, being of equal authority and knowledge to the help-seeker). It was indicated that in high risk situations someone needed to take control of the situation and intervene (*'they're [adults] more in a position of authority to tell them'*; in some (less risky) cases the control and authority of adults was undesirable see Chapter 6c). These findings reveal that the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract was specific to providing advice to help-seekers in *low risk* unhealthy relationships. Riskier cases were beyond the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract where the responsibility was with adults and formal agencies.

### **8.6.2 Same-Sex relationship support**

As discussed in Chapter 6a young people positioned same-sex relationships in two competing ways, this had implications for advice given to help-seekers in lesbian and gay relationships. One construction of same-sex relationships took a universalist Abuse is Abuse approach that: all relationships were the same and so advice was transferrable regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Here, peers were presented as able to support help-seekers in gay or lesbian relationships and equipped to judge whether behaviours were acceptable or not. In these cases, the help-seeker in a lesbian or gay relationship did not need to go through Stage 3 of help-seeking unless the relationship was deemed high risk, which was rare.

The second approach was to construct same-sex relationships as different to heterosexual ones. This perspective viewed relationships through a Heteronormative

Frame (discussed in Chapter 6a) and posited that experiences in same-sex relationships were different to those in heterosexual relationships (e.g. power dynamics were more fluid, injuries were less likely for physical violence, behaviours enacted in a same-sex relationship could mean something different i.e. physical violence could be communication as explored in Stage 2 above).

Constructions of same-sex relationships as different portrayed relationship experience as *specific* to sexual orientation. This altered the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract to help-seekers in a gay or lesbian relationships. Peers were assumed to be heterosexual, their (heterosexual) relationship knowledge was deemed non-transferrable to same-sex relationships. As such straight peers were positioned as less able or comfortable to advise or support help-seekers in a lesbian or gay relationship:

Samir: I just don't know how you would talk about it [gay male relationship] because it's different.

[...]

Faheem: Like in the situation with like two gay people. I thought that one of them would just naturally be like the masculine one and one would be the feminine one. I had no idea it was like, you know. [...] I thought, yeah, one of them would be more female like and the other one would be but I guess that...

[...]

Lucas: But we don't know. We don't know anything about this.

Max: We don't know the ins and outs of the relationship.

Lucas: No clue about this kind of relationship.

Int: So, you don't feel like you've got that much knowledge of like same sex relationships?

Max: No.

Lucas: Not les[bian], maybe gay because being men you'd think it would be quite similar. (Samir, Faheem, Damien, Lucas & Max, 15-16, M, Sch C)

Some young people felt they had little or no point of reference as to what *should* happen in a gay or lesbian relationship and so could not judge if the Duty and Obligation Contract was being upheld. Moreover, (heterosexual) young people were constructed as possessing insufficient knowledge to fulfil the Peer Duty and Obligation contract, to support or advise help-seekers in gay or lesbian relationships. This reduced the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract. Notably, if the peer was the same gender as the help-seeker they could draw on their shared gendered experience to make sense of the

relationship. However, overall understanding of same-sex relationship was limited and the advice peers could give was also.

When it was suspected that the help-seeker in a lesbian or gay relationship was experiencing abuse, or needed further help, part of the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract was for peers to advise the help-seeker to seek help from an adult or professional service. In this context, *if* the relationships were deemed potentially abusive, lesbian and gay help-seekers were advised to seek help from a formal agency<sup>51</sup>, however this had some barriers.

*Barriers to same-sex help-seeking from adults.*

It was argued that help-seekers in lesbian relationships might be discouraged from seeking formal support due to fears that as victims of women's violence, they would not be believed:

Sarah: I think if it was a heterosexual relationship and it was like a boyfriend that was doing it, it would be seen as more worse by her family but I think her family would still judge it as bad but I think friends and, maybe even counsellors would not see as, it as seriously.

Int: And do you think it's just because of, just because she's in a lesbian relationship or particularly because it's a woman who's [being abusive]...?

Sarah: I think more because it's a woman, yeah. But also because it's a lesbian relationship and mainly because it's a woman doing it [being abusive] to her, yeah. (18-21, F, Undergraduate)

Here, young people made the case that a gendered frame to sense making of IPV was a barrier to help and support for female help-seekers in lesbian relationships. Young people foregrounded and critiqued the gendered aspect of interpretations of IPV. It was argued that (heterosexual) women experiencing violence from men were (incorrectly) presented as the most credible victims, and that compared to heterosexual women it

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<sup>51</sup> Behaviours were less likely to be deemed abusive in same-sex relationships.

was difficult for other help-seekers to justify their victimhood. In making this case, young people conflated the issues faced by female help-seekers in lesbian relationships with other victims of women's violence (i.e. male help-seekers in heterosexual relationships). It was argued that reliance on the gendered frame to identify perpetrators of IPV (i.e. male perpetrators) disadvantaged 'non-traditional victims' of abuse (i.e. men, and lesbian women).

In other instances, the heteronormative frame was foregrounded and critiqued as a barrier to support for all help-seekers in same-sex relationships. Young people positioned society as wrongfully accepting or down-playing the seriousness of IPV in same-sex relationships. The idea that same-sex relationships were fundamentally different to heterosexual ones was heavily criticised (*"Again more difficult to advise it in a gay relationship if you haven't had experiences of that and I think, yeah, just in terms of like people in society there is a bit of a stigma and there is still some like prejudice towards gay people so it's harder to address like, seeking help, so they might be worried that they'll be judged"*, Megan, 18-21, Undergraduate) and judged as outdated.

Young people asserted that these societal prejudices meant support for help-seekers in lesbian and gay relationships was limited. So such help-seekers should seek support from specific LGBT advice organisations. These organisations, due to their specific expertise were presented as a vital resource for supporting help-seekers in same-sex relationships experiencing IPV<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that few of the participants identified as LGBT or said they have used these services.

### 8.7 Leaving the relationship

The Duty and Obligation Contract posited that “I will stand by you”, however this was not absolute but presented as within reason: “I will support you and stand by you, within reason”. Young people were adamant that one *did not* have a duty to stay in a substandard relationship and should take full advantage of the freedoms of being young (e.g. no children, financial commitments, a time in their lives where they were learning what kind of partner they wanted).

If the help-seeker had worked through all the stages of help-seeking and they had evidence that their partner still was not upholding the Duty and Obligation Contract (e.g. the relationship was clearly abusive or high risk, the partner did not want to talk, or the couple had spoken but the unhealthy or abusive behaviour had not stopped) help-seekers had a right to leave the relationship (*“I think he should maybe speak to him and like if it’s a problem that he’s willing to, like if he can seek professional help and try and get, think it’s something that he can change then, if he feels like he like wants to work on it maybe they could try, and maybe do relationship counselling together. But if he’s not willing to do that then I’d say should break up with him.”* Megan, 18-21, F, Undergraduate).

In other cases where one’s partner was upholding the Duty and Obligation Contract but one was unhappy or wanted to be with someone else, they had a duty to their partner to end the relationship. Sustaining such a relationship, especially when someone was being unfaithful, was *“just using someone”* and *“greedy”* (15-16, F, Sch B). Regardless of one’s reasons for leaving the relationship, it was part of the Duty and Obligation Contract to one’s partner to adhere to the rules of leaving. When breaking up with a partner one had a duty to do it to their face and explain why. That is, even when a

relationship was abusive one still had a responsibility to remain respectful to their partner by leaving in the proper way.

### **8.7.1 Peer's duty and obligation to support help-seekers to leave**

In cases where help-seeker was eligible to leave the relationship (i.e. the relationship was high-risk or abusive, the help-seeker had worked through all stages of help-seeking, the partner was not willing to work at the relationship or had not changed) the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract involved peers advising and persuading the help-seeker to leave. As this section will now discuss young people argued it was important for peers to consider the help-seeker's gender when giving this advice.

Young people argued there were specific requirements for advice for men and women:

Lydia: Well exactly, basically the women one's we've said, "try and leave" but to like the male one we just said "leave", see I think you've got to kind of phrase it as if like it's a choice kind of.

Claire: And maybe I suppose more of like a rhetorical question again like if you're not happy why are you in the relationship? So, make them kind of come to their own conclusion because again you don't want to be telling her what to do because that is not, she might, like when a girl comes to you for advice it's often emotional support not action" (Lydia & Claire, 15-16, F, Sch A)

For female friends, indirect advice that talked around the issue and guided their friend to the right solution (i.e. leaving) was deemed most persuasive and effective.

In contrast, for male friends, it was argued that advice should be direct. Men were portrayed as solution-focused seeking advice for answers not emotional support. Young people cautioned that when advising men, it was important that peers did not 'emasculate' the male help-seeker by interfering with the relationship or mocking the situation. This need was emphasised by young people's arguments that it was especially hard for men, particularly heterosexual men, to disclose abuse:

"Samir: He [heterosexual male friend] might hesitate to tell his friends as well if he's being like abused...

Lucas: It might be a bit of personal shame...

[Overtalking]

Kahlid: Yeah. It's about a man's pride, yeah.

Int: Okay. What do you mean by a man's pride?

M?: Macho man.

Lucas: I can't think of a...

Kahlid: You can't really describe it. [...]. It's like for example something like this and a general man, even no matter what kind of man they are they would not, like it's like natural instinct for most men to think "okay, how should I be handling this situation as a man?" And if you're not handling that way, if you would feel like telling other people because you're not handling the way you feel like you should be handling it, you'd feel more ashamed of not how they think of you, more of yourself. Because if they're then like "oh we men shouldn't be doing this, I would do this since I'm a man", you'd be, you'd feel, what's the word? You'd feel...

Int: Emasculated?

Kahlid: Yeah. You'd feel like your masculinity, like you feel emasculated, yeah, and like you feel like a lesser, like a lesser being compared to all your friends because they're all men and they're like "oh yes, we don't let our girlfriends hit us because we're big men". But it's just, it's the same situation. It should be seen on equal terms." (Samir, Lucas & Kahlid, 15-16, M, Sch C)

As shown above, men were constructed as being held to particular standards and expectations. It was argued that men would, and should, maintain their '*male pride*' and '*masculinity*' by resolving their problems on their own. Male pride seemed to be presented as a societal expectation placed on men, that men then internalised ("*it's like natural instinct*"). In this way, the Duty and Obligation Contract became gendered with men expected to make the relationship work with little or no outside assistance.

This also impacted on the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract. It was portrayed as easier to enact the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract for female help-seekers because it was more acceptable, and expected, for women to experience abuse and seek emotional support from peers. In contrast male help-seekers issues were expected to remain private.

However, it is worth noting that some young people challenged this view. Some young people evoked a universalist perspective to assert that *all* people regardless of gender or sexual orientation should be able to seek help or support ("*But it's just, it's the same situation. It should be seen on equal terms*" Kahlid). Here, it was argued that when



giving advice peers should be open, and not pass judgement or make incorrect assumptions.

In summary, in many instances where there were problematic relationship behaviours leaving the relationship was the ultimate goal. For the Duty and Obligation Contract, in cases of unhealthy behaviours or abuse a young person may not be able to immediately leave, but work through the stages of help-seeking collect enough proof to show they have tried to uphold the Duty and Obligation Contract, and/or be guided by peers to realise that the Duty and Obligation Contract cannot be upheld. Young people also outlined rules one had to adhere to when leaving. In fulfilling the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract peers had to factor in the help-seeker's gender to provide the best advice. In this way, the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract was constructed as sympathetic and sensitive to the gendered needs of help-seekers.

### **8. 8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Duty and Obligation contract outlines that young people construct three facets as important: to spend time with one's partner; to engage in open communication, and to support them. These characteristics were constructed as demonstrative of one's willingness to work at the relationship. Young people's use of a Peer Duty and Obligation contract highlighted that young people experiencing relationship issues may rely on their peers for support and advice to make their relationship work. Accusations of abuse are not taken lightly, placing a burden of proof on victims.

The Peer Duty and Obligation contract was complex. Peers had a duty to protect help-seekers, to keep the help-seeker safe (only when they ask or when they need it), to be discrete, to aid the help-seeker to make their relationship work and to vet accusations of abuse. Help-seeker's accounts of IPV were positioned as fallible, with 'two sides to

every story' and a burden of proof was placed upon help-seeker to collect enough evidence that the partner behaving intentionally behaving badly, and was not willing to change. In this way, to leave the relationship the help-seeker had to evidence the partner's unwillingness to change. If otherwise forgiveness from the help-seeker seemed assumed to be given to the partner.

The Peer Duty and Obligation Contract outlined the expectations of peers to support help-seekers which could be difficult to navigate. Young people had to help and support the help-seeker, to keep them safe whilst not interfering too much, being discrete and considering how to modify their advice based on the help-seekers gender. Gender and sexuality foregrounded or downplayed different elements of the Duty and Obligation Contract and the Peer Duty and Obligation Contract. These findings suggest that these contracts were not one-size fits all but gender specific with men and women, and heterosexual and same-sex relationships, held to different standards.

Gender was used to minimise problematic behaviours in certain relationships. For example, that some people – based on gender and sexuality – talk more than others. Women were constructed as better at verbal communication raising the potential for issues in lesbian relationships to be presented as easier to resolve. Heterosexual women were presented as expected to work around men's maleness and coach the relationship and their partner. Constructions of men as violent and inept at verbal communication normalized physical violence in gay relationships. Likewise, women's violence against men was constructed as provoked by the male victim. In some cases, these constructions held the potential to portray perpetrators of IPV as naïve, placing a duty on the victim to highlight that the behaviour was abusive.

Young people presented help-seeking as in three stages that young people may have to work through to leave an unhealthy relationship. These stages highlighted peers as

important to young people in making sense of relationships and drew upon principles of the importance of talking, a burden of proof, and constructions of perpetrators as naïve .

The fact that young people's sense making of IPV relied on context and motives could be helpful and unhelpful to identification of IPV. On the one hand, it demonstrated young people's pragmatism is dealing with relationship conflict and fairness in providing an opportunity for the partner to have their say and be aware of their misbehaviour. This could be symptomatic of the newness of intimate relationships and thus peer's likelihood of giving others the benefit of the doubt. On the other hand, this approach to making sense of IPV placed a burden of proof on potential victims of IPV. If peers did not deem a relationship to be unhealthy or abusive it was the help-seeker's (i.e. the IPV victim) responsibility to collect more evidence that the relationship was abusive. This could result in young people experiencing low risk IPV enduring abusive behaviours and being dismissed by peers.

Young people felt comfortable and able to support a friend experiencing low-level abuse in a heterosexual relationship. However, when potential abuse arose in same-sex relationships or was high-risk young people felt out of their depth and relied on adults and formal support agencies. This highlighted the ways in which young people encouraged and discouraged help-seeking in relationships. In turn providing insights into how young people's understanding of relationships and the arguments drawn upon by peers (e.g. burden of proof, two sides to every story) could inhibit, or discourage, help-seeking in potentially abusive relationships.

The Peer Duty and Obligation contract was constructed as heteronormative, with young people asserting that much advice for IPV and relationship issues and standards could not be applied to lesbian or gay relationships. These differences could be interpreted

as demonstrating an awareness of the heteronormative frame. That is, young people were sympathetic to the specific difficulties young people in same-sex relationships, such as homophobia and isolation. Here, the heteronormative frame was critiqued and used to justify the need for formal LGBT support services. Young people felt unable to advise when relationships were abusive and high risk or were same-sex. Heterosexual relationship rules were not transferrable to same-sex relationships unless presented as universal (i.e. Abuse is Abuse). These findings suggest that the threshold of severity for same-sex relationships is higher. For example, this data shows they ways young people can construct man-man physical violence okay and minimize woman-woman violence as easily resolvable through talking. In this way IPV in same-sex relationships may be minimized and left unchallenged.

This presents some issues for support of help-seekers in same-sex relationships. Firstly, seeking formal advice was not taken lightly by young people and was a big and daunting step. Secondly, young people outlined that there are additional barriers to Stage 3 help-seeking for young people in same-sex relationships such as lack of understanding, worries about judgement and stigma. Thirdly, these findings highlight a desire for LGBT specific formal support organisations, which are in short supply.

Broadly, it seems that given these ways of making sense of relationships and the limits to the Peer Duty and Obligation contract young people experiencing abuse in same-sex relationships are less likely to receive the support they need. Championing a universalist approach to relationships (i.e. healthy and unhealthy behaviours are, more or less, the same regardless of gender and sexual orientation) could increase informal social support for young people in same-sex relationships experiencing relationship difficulties. Young people's critique of gendered, heteronormative sense making of IPV suggests that young people would welcome this universalist perspective. However, young peoples sensitivities to the heteronormativity of sense-making and how this could

exclude same-sex relationship experiences is also important and further highlights young people's desire for inclusive ways of making sense of relationships. In this way both universal and stigma aware approaches to sense making should be championed. However, the differences of same-sex and heterosexual relationships should not be over stated.

## Chapter 9: General Discussion

This thesis aimed to explore how young people make sense of IPV to inform RSE in the UK. With a growing emphasis on RSE there is a need for evidence on young people's perspectives of relationships and what RSE should cover. This thesis aimed to explore: (i) how young people make sense of relationships, (ii) the arguments young people draw upon to make sense of healthy and unhealthy relationships, (iii) what characteristics young people use to identify IPV, and (iv) the significance of gender and sexual orientation to this sense making. This research is novel in that it aimed to capture how young people identify IPV, the arguments they drew on (e.g. gendered strength, nothing to hide, love as complicated) and grey areas all in young people's own words. The research focuses on young people's use of Social Contracts to make sense of relationships and IPV.

To recap, the research used a sample of 53 male and female students aged 15-24 years (secondary school and sixth form students: 23 males and 16 female aged 15-18 years, and undergraduates: four males and 10 females aged 18-24 years). Data was collected using single-gender vignette-based focus group discussions<sup>53</sup> and analysed using Discursive Psychology. This research is novel in that there are few studies with this age group that elicit discussions about IPV and relationships specifically in relation to gender and sexual orientation.

The analysis outlined how young people use Social Contracts to make sense of relationships. Participants drew on three key Social Contracts: (1) Love and Happiness, (2) Trust and Fidelity and (4) Duty and Obligation. Each Social Contract laid out basic

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<sup>53</sup> In two cases due to the small number of male participants in the university sample the method of data collection was interviews.

rules and expectations of young people in relationships and were used to identify if a relationship was healthy or unhealthy. Factors, such as gender, sexual orientation, context and trustworthiness, modified the significance of aspects of these contracts and in some cases resulted in different variations and applications of the Social Contracts to relationships.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first will summarise the main findings of each analysis chapter and compare findings to existing literature. The second will focus in on and draw out four key findings and their implications for RSE. Finally, I will outline the strengths and limitations of the study and conclude.

### **9.1 Summary of findings and relevant literature**

A strength and challenge of this research is that young people's sense making of IPV is relevant to various aspects of research (e.g. violence against women, feminist theory, men's rights, education, legal critique). An effort has been made to capture the broad relevance of findings to various fields of research, however Social Contracts and Social Contract Theory (although noted where relevant) are not covered in detail as a primary aim of this research was to draw out implications for RSE.

#### **9.1.1 Love and Happiness Contract 6a**

The first analysis chapter outlined the Love and Happiness contract of: 'I will love you and make you happy and you will love me and make me happy'. Young people outlined that love and happiness were of the utmost importance to a relationship, findings reflected in other studies (e.g. Booth, Crouter & Snyder, 2016). In discussions, it seemed that gender and sexual orientation affected how one wanted to be loved and made happy. Physical violence was presented as a key signifier of an unhealthy relationship and unacceptable behaviour, as reflected in other studies (Cyr, McDuff & Wright, 2006; Smith, Winokur & Palinski, 2005; McCoy et al., 2011).

Discussions about gender and sexual orientation complicated these assertions. A predominant argument against physical violence was the harm one could cause to their partner. This relied on a 'gendered strength' argument (see also Hamby & Jackson, 2010). It highlights how young people use concepts of power to make sense of IPV. These ideas of power were firmly gendered and heteronormative, findings reflected by others (Cannon, Lauve-Moon and Buttell, 2015; Donovan & Hester, 2011). Segal (2006) argues that gender relations of dominance and submission, are "*the symbolic equation of masculinity with power and femininity with powerlessness*" (p. 273), congruent with Pateman's (1988) conceptualisation of the patriarchal order.

#### *Gendered strength*

The 'gendered strength' argument validated heterosexual women's victimhood, but presented a challenge to non-traditional victims (i.e. men and lesbian women, see also Barnes, 2010). Rohrbaugh (2006) states that arguments of gender strength make interpretations of IPV and power in same-sex relationships murkier. In the present study, reliance on this argument led into reasoning that physical violence experienced by non-traditional victims '*could be worse*' and in same-sex relationships inferred gender parity of power presenting an 'equal fight' scenario.

Donovan and Hester (2011; 2014) found IPV in same-sex relationships was constructed as a '*fair-fight*'. Similarly, Walters (2011) found lesbian victim/survivors of IPV expressed that heteronormative perceptions of IPV obscured and normalised IPV in same-sex relationships (see also, Duke & Davidson, 2009; Kubicek, McNeeley, & Collins, 2015; Lev & Lev, 1999). These findings highlight that young people's sense making of IPV was gendered, but subsumed within a Heteronormative Frame.



In the present study, other than drawing on arguments of gendered strength, it was hard for young people to rationalise the Heteronormative Frame. Use of the Heteronormative Frame was presented as automatic and emotional. Warner (1991) speaks to this notion, as summarised by Sumara and Davis (1999), '*heteronormativity creates a language that is "straight."* Living within heteronormative culture means learning to "see" straight, to "read" straight, to "think" straight' (p. 202).

#### *Limits of the Heteronormative Frame*

In some cases the Heteronormative Frame was presented as too simplistic for young people's constructions of relationships. Young people made efforts to validate all types of victims of IPV using the gendered frame and gender stereotypes, e.g. young people validated gay men's victimhood through constructions of men as strong and violent - what Schilt and Westbrook calls a '*masculine-coded act*' (2009, p. 458) - to construct male perpetrators as dangerous. Heterosexual men's victimhood was validated in constructions of women as more likely to enact psychological manipulation and emotional abuse. But, these constructions seemed unable to validate *all* types of victimhood at once, and became complicated and contradictory. Other research demonstrates such contradictions when accounting for gender (e.g. Holth, 2014; Moulding, 2006).

It could be argued that these findings indicate the ways in which gender was constantly being reconstructed and modified. However, in the present study most often young people drew on common gender stereotypes to re-construct non-traditional victims as valid.<sup>54</sup> Research by Sanger and Lynch (2018) also reflects on the limits of the

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<sup>54</sup> That is; young people in many cases constructed men (i.e. the perpetrator) as strong validating gay men's victimhood, women (i.e. the victim) as weak validating lesbian women's victimhood. However, often the gender stereotypes offered within the heteronormative frame could also be used to minimize IPV in same-sex relationships – e.g. men as strong thus gay

Heteronormative Frame to make sense of IPV, in lesbian relationships. The authors found sense-making drew on heteronormative scripts, “*these scripts not only make control and violence possible, but also normalize it through linking it with established and familiar societal norms*” (p. 212). These findings add weight to this thesis that the application of the Heteronormative Frame to same-sex relationships (and arguably heterosexual relationships) was insufficient to problematise IPV in same-sex relationships.

In some ways, the present study reflected gendered perceptions of perpetration reported in Sanger and Lynch’s (2018) study. In the present study women’s violence against men was portrayed as warranted, accepted and excusable under the rationale that the victim was somehow blameworthy. These findings are echoed by Noonan and Charles (2009), and work that have found young men’s disclosure of IPV to peers is more likely to be minimized (Gallopini & Leigh, 2009; George, 1994; Kay & Jefferies, 2010; Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Lombard, 2014; Walters, 2011; Weisz et al., 2007)<sup>55</sup>.

In contrast to Sanger and Lynch’s (2018) study young people in the current research critiqued the heteronormative frame, presenting assumptions of heterosexual women’s victimhood as overlooking heterosexual men’s victimhood. Young people constructed the different rights given to women and men as unfair and a Gender Double Standard. This is reflected in other (non-discursive) work in various contexts where women are presented as at a disadvantage (Allison & Risman, 2013; Axinn, Young-DeMarco & Ro,

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men would not be harmed by violence, women are weak thus heterosexual men and lesbian women would not be harmed by violence.

<sup>55</sup> This is not to say that heterosexual women do not face barriers to seeking support – there are many such as victim blaming (Dragiewicz, 2011; Merry, 1995, 2003; Stubbs & Wagmann, 2015) which is discussed in section Victim-perpetrator framework

2011; England & Bearak, 2014; Fugere et al., 2008; Gaunt, 2012; Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill & Livingstone, 2013).

*Abuse is abuse*

The ‘abuse is abuse’ argument allowed young people to position all victims, regardless of gender, as valid. Research by Donovan and Hester (2014) into lesbian and gay adult’s perceptions of relationships and IPV found that many LGBTQ people endorsed arguments of equality and universalism that “*everybody regardless of sexuality, is ‘the same’ and wants the same things*” (p. 86) and felt that this was congruent with their perceptions of themselves. These findings provide support for a universalist approach to education and discussions about IPV.

Such an approach would be congruent with young people’s constructions of IPV as ‘abuse is abuse’ and arguments which endorsed universal relationship standards regardless of sexual orientation or gender. The argument that ‘abuse is abuse’ seems to be a novel finding<sup>56</sup>. That said the premise behind this argument - that all experiences are human thus do not need to consider gender or sexual orientation – speaks to a human rights rhetoric (limitations of this approach are note in section 9.2.2: Heteronormative Frame).

### **9.1.2 Love and Happiness Contract 6b: Rough Patch Diagnosis**

Chapter 6b of the Love and Happiness contract outlined the ‘Rough Patch’. The Rough Patch centered on ideas of forgiveness, learning and improvement in one’s partner. In diagnosing a Rough Patch young people constructed valid victims and perpetrators. Perpetrators were often male, aggressive, dominating, controlling, volatile, nasty and a

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<sup>56</sup> That is not to say that it is a new emerging argument but rather there does not seem to be other academic papers exploring this argument

bully. Victims were vulnerable, often female and blameless. Simplistic gendered narratives of victimhood in the context of IPV are noted by other academics (e.g. Barnes, 2010; Brian, 2010; Comack & Brickely, 2007; Hird, 2000). These constructions mirror the Victim-Perpetrator Framework (Brenner, 2013). Brenner (2013) critiques the simplistic nature of the Victim Perpetrator Framework. She outlines that the framework constructs harm as one-directional. It presents an overly simplistic view of power and does not accommodate these two contrasting accounts of truth. These findings suggest that young people, like other populations, can draw on simplistic gendered notions of victims and perpetrators. However, as outlined in Chapter 6c, in other cases young people's constructions of victimhood afforded much complexity. The implications of this are discussed in Section 9.2.3: Victim-Perpetrator Framework.

Young people diagnosed a Rough Patch, and differentiated it from IPV using the universal, genderless indicators of worth, such as frequency of unhealthy/unacceptable behaviour<sup>57</sup>, context of the behaviour and the partner's intention or motive. These characteristics are drawn upon in definitions of crimes associated with domestic abuse.<sup>58</sup> Research into playfighting in young people's relationships highlights the importance of context to judgement of a behaviour (Fredland et al., 2005; Livingston, 2009<sup>59</sup>). Eigenberg and Policastro (2016) reflect this and caution that academics and educators should be mindful that young people may use context to make sense of IPV but not necessarily condone such behaviour. In this way, consideration of wider factors

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<sup>57</sup> Frequency is constructed as important to judgements of the severity of IPV behaviour in academic research (Marshall, Jones & Feinberg, 2011; Molidor & Tolman, 1998; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn & Saltzman, 2007) suggesting it is a useful tool of sense making.

<sup>58</sup> For example, the offense of Controlling or Coercive behaviour in an Intimate or family relationship – as outlined in Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015- describes the offence as: '[if person] A repeatedly or continuously engages in behaviour towards another person, B, that is controlling or coercive; [and if person] A knows or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on B' Crown Prosecution Service (2017).

<sup>59</sup> Livingston (2009) found acceptance of playfighting was dependent on factors such as size, initiation and how one's partner responds. These findings reflect the sense making of young people in the present study.

such as context and intention, could be pragmatic and suitable ways for young people to make sense of IPV.

However, research by Lelaurain et al (2018) found young people drew on context to make sense of abusive behaviours often proposing if... then... scenarios that rationalised IPV (see also Barter, 2009; Sears et al., 2007; Wood, 2004), suggesting that some contexts may rationalise and excuse IPV. The concept of a 'Rough Patch', have been used in relation to marital hardships (de Marneffe, 2018; Sandfield & Percy, 2003) but there seems little use of this specific term in research with young people. Other studies, although not in relation to a 'Rough Patch' specifically report similarities to the idea that young people may normalise abusive behaviours (Barter, 2009; Burton, Kelly, Kitzinger & Regan, 1998; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2014).

*Temporariness of behaviour and cycle of abuse*

Young people's constructions of a Rough Patch as temporary evoked ideas of forgiveness, naivety, remorse and apologies by the perpetrator. Such constructions of relationship hardships could be likened to that outlined in Walker's (1984) Cycle of Violence, where abusive relationships go through three phases. (1) 'tension building' where issues escalate between the couple; (2) 'acute-battering phase' where violence occurs; and (3) the 'honey-moon' period where the perpetrator is loving and caring, apologetic<sup>60</sup>, and excuses behaviour (e.g. I did not mean to do it, I won't do it again).

Men convicted of IPV offenses draw on similar discourses of remorse and disassociation. For example, Wood (2004) found male perpetrators of IPV constructed their violence as non-abusive because it is limited to specific contexts. Other studies,

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<sup>60</sup> Working models such as those used in IPV support agencies highlight that the perpetrator may ignore or deny the violence took place in this phase.

such as Alves et al (2017) detail accounts of relationships of latent coercion (characterized by hidden forms of control, apologies and remorse and making promises) making leaving relationships difficult. Some of these explanations for violence – which are not only physical but also non-physical forms of abuse - resonate with young people's constructions of a Rough Patch.

In this thesis, it could be the case that Rough Patches are not a helpful way for young people to identify IPV. However, young people also drew on judgements about the likelihood that a situation would escalate into their judgements of whether a relationship was worth it and if it was undergoing a Rough Patch. This could be argued to be part of young people's assessments as to whether the relationship is undergoing a cycle of violence. Moreover, considering the great onus placed on a young person in making accusations of IPV, the Rough Patch diagnosis could provide young people with a space to disclose and seek peer support for unacceptable behaviours without being held to the same high standards of making an accusation of IPV (e.g. a fear of judgement, a burden of proof and breach the Duty and Obligation contract) or identifying as a victim.

#### *Rough Patch as a tool*

The Rough Patch was presented as a tool to renegotiate the contract and affirm more positive respectful relationship norms. A survey-based study by Weisz et al (2007) found help-seekers disclosures of more severe IPV peer responses were more likely to be avoidant. When issues were seen as general relationship troubles peer responses were more likely to be nurturing. These findings give credence to the idea that young people may be using the Rough Patch diagnosis as a tool to seek relationship advice. That downplaying potential the potential that behaviours may be abusive could enhance the quality of support a young person receives from peers. More research is needed to investigate this and its implications. Thus, although no firm conclusion can be drawn as

to whether the Rough Patch diagnosis is a useful or harmful way tool for young people in making sense of relationships this discussion highlights a need for young people to have education on *how* to have healthy relationships.

### 9. 1. 3 Love and Happiness Contract 6c: Complexities of Love

Chapter 6c explored the complexities of the Love and Happiness contract, specifically: (i) reflections on the effectiveness of love as a measure of relationship health, and (ii) who is the best placed to judge if a relationship is abusive - the victim or relationship outsiders?

#### *Love as confusing*

Taking the first issue, in contrast to a healthy relationship, the importance of love to the Love and Happiness contract in unhealthy or abusive relationships was presented as complex. Young people constructed the possibility that victims could genuinely love their partner which would make leaving the relationship difficult. This perspective is reflected by Gelles & Strauss (1988) who argue that love and violence can, and often do coexist in a relationship. They argue that to think otherwise is unrealistic, and damaging and undermining to victim's experiences of love for their partner<sup>61</sup>.

A survey study by Donovan, Hester, Holmes and McCarry, (2006) found narratives of love and happiness were often drawn upon by victim/survivors, with 'wanting to make their partner happy' and 'wanting to make their partner feel loved' cited as personal impacts of abuse. Studies with heterosexual young people also reflect this<sup>62</sup> (Power, Koch, Kralik & Jackson, 2006), and adults (Anderson, Gillig, Sitaker, McCloskey, Malloy

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<sup>61</sup>As outlined in chapter 6a, physical violence was presented as 'crossing the line'. These findings suggest although this could be a useful way for young people to think about relationships and love, in practice young people as peer support should supplement this approach with sympathy.

<sup>62</sup> It is noted that focus on victims leaving abusive relationships can foster a position of victim blaming, this is discussed later in section 9.2.3: Victim-Perpetrator Framework.

& Grigsby, 2003<sup>63</sup>). In this way, young people's sense making seems sympathetic to victim/survivor's constructions of IPV and demonstrate some of the ways presentations of the Love and Happiness contract as complex could be used to explore questions such as 'why doesn't she leave' with young people.

Young people argued that in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, it was hard for peer's/outsideers to judge if the Love and Happiness contract was being upheld. This reflects research with survivors of IPV (Cruz, 2003; Donovan and Hester, 2014 p. 121). Young people in the present study portrayed love as being used to manipulate victims and constrain their choices. Donovan and Hester (2014) echo this, they outline that perpetrators of IPV may disguise their abuse as acts of love and use love to create rules about the relationship. Jealous and dependent relationship behaviours could be interpreted and experienced, by both partners, as love and commitment opposed to control. These findings are reflected in research of heterosexual relationships (Papp, Liss, Erchull, Godfrey & Waaland-Kreutzer, 2016; Power et al., 2006). Thus, young people's critique of the Love and Happiness contract and the limits of Love and Happiness as a measure of worth are congruent with victim's experiences of love. These ways of making sense of IPV could be a useful facet in young people's recognition of IPV.

To account for the above young people established ways of judging relationship worth beyond love, focusing on how healthy and workable the relationship was. Young people accounted for potentially manipulative behaviours a partner enact in the name of 'love' by judging how likely a partner was to change, how intentional and rational the

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<sup>63</sup> Other reasons stated in Anderson et al's study (such as lack of places to stay, lack of money, partner promised to change, and lack of police help) were not discussed in the present study. This discrepancy could be due to participants in the present study lacking of experience of IPV or due the differences in the context of, and responsibilities in, relationships between adults-adult and young people-young people.



behaviour seemed. Focus on psychological abuse is reflected in other studies with young people (Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013; Reeves & Orpinas, 2011; Sears et al., 2007). However, in the present study some aspects of power and coercion in young people's digital lives were presented as normal, as discussion in the next section 9.1.4: Trust and Fidelity Contract.

*Victims as blinded, outsiders as rational vs. Sympathetic constructions of victims*

Lastly, Chapter 6c outlined young people's debates about who was best placed to identify IPV, those in the relationship or those outside of it? In most cases, victims were portrayed as 'blinded'. Outsiders were posited as able to make impartial, rational relationship assessments. These accounts privileged an objective perspective and positioned truth as obscured from those in an abusive relationship. These portrayals of access to the truth are similar to constructions of victims and perpetrators in IPV research and distorted relationship norms (e.g. Whiting, Oka & Fife, 2012; Persampiere, Poole & Murphy, 2014).

Such research often takes the implicit position that individual's (victim or perpetrators), whilst in an abusive relationship can only access a distorted truth that accepts or normalises abusive behaviours. Likewise, in the present study, like other research on RSE, a similar position is taken: that there is *a better way* of making sense of, or identifying, IPV that we (as researchers) know and want to confer onto others to prevent IPV. Thus, my point is not to refute these claims per se, but to highlight that this position of objective outsider is one we, as researchers, bystanders, peers, survivors, often occupy.

In other cases, portrayals of outsiders as objective were challenged. Young people contended that victims were in a double bind facing multiple pressures, from their

partner and outsiders. Both were constructed equally as harmful. In these cases, young people took up a position that ‘it’s her choice’<sup>64</sup> and that the power and control over how relationship issues were resolved and should be left with the victim/help-seeker. This argument challenged ideas that victims are vulnerable and powerless and resonate with feminist ideas of consciousness raising where women are aware of, resist, and fight back against, injustice (Campbell, 2014; Campbell & Manning, 2015). Some academics argue this creates an overly simplistic view of power and victimhood (Butler, 1993; Campbell & Manning, 2015), that can raise the potential for victim blaming (e.g. Stubbs & Wangmann, 2015), however the accounts young people presented accommodated much of this complexity.

Young people’s constructions of the Love and Happiness contract and nuanced portrayals of victimhood, highlight the multiple constructions of victims, truth and power available to young people. These findings and details of such arguments seem to be novel. More research is needed to replicate these findings. The findings suggest that RSE should engage with, and cultivate young people’s ability to accommodate such complexity in their language, and how they construct truth and power afforded to victims. Victims do not need to be constructed as *either* empowered/ informed, *or* disempowered/blinded, but can be *both* empowered/powerless *and* informed/blinded. This is discussed further in Section 9.2.3: Victim-Perpetrator Framework.

#### **9.1.4 Trust and Fidelity Contract**

Chapter 7 explored the Trust and Fidelity contract of: ‘we will each be faithful in this relationship and we will trust each other to be so’. It had three key aspects: (i) Monogamy, that one would be faithful to their partner; (ii) Trust in Monogamy, that one would be trusted by their partner to be faithful; and (iii) Openness and Sharing, that

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<sup>64</sup> Note the pronoun ‘her’ is used as this talk was only evoked for heterosexual female victims.

there would be no secrets or resistance to sharing. This chapter explored relationships in young people's digital lives and much discussion oriented to the competing importance of one's right to privacy and one's right to see their partner's mobile phone and social media<sup>65</sup>. Monogamy was important to the Trust and Fidelity contract for all age groups, reflected in other studies (Bragg et al., 2018; McGeeney & Hanson, 2017; Noonan & Charles, 2009; Worth, Reid & McMillan, 2002). However, the constructed importance of the other two aspects of the Trust and Fidelity Contract depended on gender.

#### *Trust in Monogamy: Checking as IPV*

Older participant's (undergraduates 18-25) predominant focus within the Trust and Fidelity contract was Trust in Monogamy. Participants argued that one had a Right to Privacy and so, should be trusted by their partner to be faithful. 'Checking up on' a partner 'crossed a line' and was constructed as a breach to principles of Trust in Fidelity. Reflection of these Rights to Privacy, and concerns about such are evoke in other studies with young people (Blank, Bolsover & Dubois, 2014; Boyd & Hargittai, 2010).

Constructions of checking as unhealthy or unacceptable behaviour are reflected in other studies. Stonard et al (2017) found young people constructed checking as unhealthy, controlling, signifying a lack of trust and a breach of one's privacy. These ideas are raised in other (non-discursive) work on IPV that presents checking as abusive, amongst adults (Devon, 2015; Williams 2015) and young people (Baker & Carreno, 2016; Bonomi & Eaton, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Frampton & Fox, 2018; Havard, 2017; Reed, Tolman & Sayfer, 2015; Stonard et al., 2014).

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<sup>65</sup> The relevance of these two competing views of privacy see to draw up debates around government surveillance and privacy, discussed below.

Woodlock (2016) outlines that technology can be used '*to create a sense of the perpetrator's omnipresence, and to isolate, punish, and humiliate domestic violence victims*' (p. 584). Dragiewicz et al (2018) argue that these are not new forms of IPV but the same behaviours enacted in the digital realm. Thus, the present study's findings suggest issues of jealousy and surveillance in young people's digital lives are both substantive, and used by bystanders when making judgements about whether a behaviour constitutes IPV.

*Sharing and openness: Checking as acceptable*

Younger participants (secondary schools and sixth form 15-18) foregrounded the Openness and Sharing aspect of the Trust and Fidelity. Participants argued Openness and Sharing demonstrated trust and intimacy in a relationship. Having access to, and sharing a partner's phone was characterised as part of a healthy relationship and intimacy. Other studies present mobile phones as a connection to others (Blair & Fletcher, 2010; Subramanyam & Greenfield, 2008) and the digital world as a key part of young people's romantic relationships (Haimson, Andalibi, De Choudhury, & Hayes, 2017).

In this thesis, it was argued that one's right to see their partner's phone to establish trust, was more important than an individual's Right to Privacy. Stonard et al (2017) also found young people justified checking as a way of verifying relationship fidelity. In the present study, this culture of policing was rationalised by presentations of young people's relationships as transient, insecure and at risk from peer interference, rumours and infidelity. This was also found by Adams & Williams (2014) and Cruz and Firestone (1998). In the current study, definitions of 'cheating' and infidelity were broad, including talking to a potential love rival, also found by Adams and Williamson (2014). In addition, research presents social media as encouraging jealousy amongst young people (Baker & Carreno, 2016; Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais, 2009; Reed, Tolman & Sayfer,

2015). These findings suggest that constructions of young people's relationships as at risk of infidelity enables checking and policing of relationships to be justified.

Despite one's right to see their partner's phone young people in the present study outlined rules for checking. A central rule was gaining permission before checking their phone, portraying checking behaviours as consensual. Checking without permission, in various contexts, was objectionable. People who did so were labelled as 'psychos' and 'weird', findings reflected in other studies with young people (McGeeney & Hanson, 2018; Stonard et al, 2017). The finding that permission was significant in young people's digital lives in constructions of checking as unhealthy (or not) seems novel to the present study. Despite a 'need for permission' young people presented refusing to be checked as a breach to the Trust and Fidelity contract in that one was assumed to have cheated on their partner.

*Nothing to hide: Surveillance and right to privacy*

Initially a young person's diminished right to privacy was presented as a gendered phenomenon that 'manipulative', 'sneaky' heterosexual women used. Stonard et al (2017) reflect this. They found that young people reported that girls/young women were more likely to check and monitor their partner's phone, to 'demand passwords' and to check 'too frequently'. However, unlike the present study, young people in Stonard et al's study drew on positive female stereotypes to explain girl's increased likelihood to check (e.g. that girls cared, were protective and took a greater interest in the relationship).

In the current research, young people's talk went on to construct permission to be checked as hard to refuse, irrespective of gender. The 'nothing to hide' argument was used to contest one's refusal to be checked, positioning a refuser as in breach of the Trust and Fidelity contract. The use of this argument by young people in relation to

romantic relationships and their digital lives, seems to be a novel finding.<sup>66</sup> Arguments of ‘nothing to hide’ link to discourses around Rights to Privacy and government surveillance, where, surveillance is positioned as for the greater good (i.e. protection of society). Thus, the argument employed is that one should not mind foregoing their privacy if they have nothing to hide (Marmor, 2015).

Young people in the current study did not seem to have adequate language to assert their Right to Privacy in response to the ‘nothing to hide’ argument. Other (non-discursive) work on young people’s digital lives more generally, reflects the idea that young people have a diminished right to privacy (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Salter, 2015, see below). Marmor (2015) outlines more generally that Rights to Privacy are hard to articulate and as such there can seem no need for such a right. Similarly, research by Murumaa-Mengelet et al (2015) argues that the rhetoric of ‘nothing to hide’ is employed by citizens to cope with the constant stress of anticipating actors and institutions invading one’s privacy within routine automatic information sharing online. Research outlines that young people may have the discomfort about feelings of surveillance online from institutions such as parents, educators, employers (Duffy & Chan, 2018). This suggests difficulties articulating one’s right to privacy is not restricted to young people’s sense making of relationships. Yet findings of young people’s constructions of checking of phones as consensual *whilst* at odds with a lack of choice to refuse these requests<sup>67</sup> seem novel to the present study.

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<sup>66</sup> Notably, a young person’s in Stonard et al’s study (2017), uses the phrase ‘nothing to hide’ in a quote used however this was not further elaborated on by the authors. It was used in the context of giving a partner permission to log on to their social media account.

<sup>67</sup> Feminist arguments of broader factors inhibiting an individual’s ability to give consent are relevant here but are discussed in Section 9.2.4.

### 9.1.5 Duty and Obligation Contract

Chapter 8 explored the Duty and Obligation contract, which outlined: 'I will support you and stand by you to make this relationship work'. The Duty and Obligation contract was the only Social Contract to apply to those within and outside of the relationship (the Peer Duty and Obligation contract). For those in the relationship, the Duty and Obligation contract outlined one's responsibility to make their partner feel good, to spend time with them and to talk and listen to them. The importance of these facets to relationships is also reflected by Noonan and Charles (2009). However, unlike the present study, young people in Noonan and Charles' study outlined gendered expectations of providing emotional support and spending time together.<sup>68</sup>

#### *Importance of talking*

The importance of talking within the Duty and Obligation contract highlighted young people's communicative approach to conflict resolution, reflected in other studies (Noonan & Charles, 2009) and unacceptance of physical violence (Cyr et al 2006; Redhawk-Love & Richards, 2013). Young people outlined gendered elements to talking, presenting women as possessing a greater propensity for verbal communication. Portrayals of verbal communication as gendered are repeated in popular psychology work (Pease & Pease, 2001) and academic work on men and masculinities (Vogel, Wester, Hammer & Downing-Matibag, 2014).

These gendered constructions amended the terms of Duty and Obligation contract in different types of relationships (i.e. gay or straight). For example, presentations of men as deficient in their ability to verbally communicate rationalised physical violence as a

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<sup>68</sup> In Noonan and Charles' (2009) study young people (11-14) presented girls as providers of emotional and social support, and boys material support. They constructed a boy's good treatment of his girlfriend at risk of ridicule; in contrast girls who acted in such ways were constructed as a 'good girlfriend'.

form of communication in gay relationships. Other (non-discursive) literature cites this as a reason for men's perpetration of IPV (Neel & Edwards, 2015; Vogel et al 2014).

For gay relationships communication has been presented as a key aspect of relationship maintenance (Hass & Stafford, 1998) but there is little academic research reflecting men's lack of communication as a reason to physical violence in gay relationships. However, lack of communication has been cited as a reason for IPV in lesbian relationships (McClennen, Summers & Daley, 2002). As such, although constructions of gender and verbal communication are reflected in other literature, the significance of this in explaining gay men's physical violence is hard to determine.

In this thesis, the seriousness of relationship difficulties in lesbian relationships was downplayed through arguments that women should talk through their issues and they would be resolved. These findings are reflected in a study by Sanger & Lynch (2018) where descriptions of women as caring, emotionally intuitive, respectful and supportive of their partner raised the potential for constructions of lesbian relationships as a 'utopia'. In this way, young people's gendered constructions of verbal communication could inhibit disclosures of IPV in lesbian relationships, as has been found in work with LGBT survivors (e.g., Baker et al, 2013; Barnes, 2010; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008).

In heterosexual relationships women were tasked with making the relationship work and encouraging their male partner to do the same, by working around men's maleness to encourage communication. This is reflected in work by Noonan & Charles (2009) in which young people presented girls as expected to provide emotional and social support to their boyfriend. These findings are also reflected in a study of IPV in Butch Femme lesbian relationships (Sanger & Lynch, 2018). In other cases, in this thesis, men in heterosexual relationships were positioned to blame for their girlfriend's unhealthy behaviour for not listening to her needs. The framing of male victims as



culpable or blameworthy is reflected in other studies (Carlyle, Scarduzio & Slater, 2014; Lehrner & Allen, 2018; Noonan & Charles, 2009; Robertson, & Murachver, 2009; Scarduzio, Carlyle, Harris, & Savage, 2016; Stewart, Moore, Crone, DeFreitas, & Rhatigan, 2012). Broadly these findings suggest that given the importance of communication to young people's resolution of relationship conflict, gendered portrayals of ability to communicate can dismiss and minimize victim's accounts and may hinder identification of IPV.

### *Stages of help-seeking*

Stages of help-seeking was another aspect of the Duty and Obligation contract. There were three stages: (1) seeking advice from peers; (2) talking to one's partner; (3) and seeking formal help if IPV was high risk. Similar stages are reflected in work by Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub (2005).<sup>69</sup> I will briefly overview these three stages outlined in this thesis in relation to other literature.

#### *Stage 1a. Victim as naïve.*

Stage 1a of help-seeking from peers, constructed help-seeking as instances where peers believed the relationship to be abusive but had to convince the help-seeker of this, constructing the victim as naïve. Young people explored how the Duty and Obligation contract could present barriers to help-seeking such as betrayal of one's partner and a breach of their duty and obligation to stand by their partner. Other studies reflect how victims may have feelings of guilt and betrayal of loyalty to an abusive partner when seeking help (Donovan & Hester, 2011; Morrison, Luchok, Richter & Parra-Medina, 2006; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2009).

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<sup>69</sup> Liang et al outline three stages of help-seeking: (1) defining the problem, (2) taking the decision to seek help, and (3) selecting the type of support. Stage 1 and 2 in the present study seem to reflect Liang et al's Stage 1 identifying the problem – or rather testing if the behaviour is IPV. Stage 3 in the current study is similar to Stages 2 and 3 in Liang et al's.

The Peer Duty and Obligation contract accommodated these barriers. Young people outlined that it was a peer's duty to gradually guide help-seekers to this solution rather than force them to leave. Research suggests that such an approach is helpful for victims and decreases likelihood of negative outcomes for help-seeker well-being (Edwards & Ullman, 2018; Sylaska & Edwards, 2013).

These constructions presented the Duty and Obligation contract as occupying a precarious space of being public – with standards publicly decided and enforced, and private – and private - with private conflict resolution encouraged. This is highlighted by Mooney (2007) who argues that violence against women is simultaneously public *and* private. In this way, the barriers young people constructed to peer help-seeking are both, substantive, and issues invoked by bystanders when considering help-seeking behaviour.

*Stage 1b. Burden of proof placed on help-seeker.*

In Stage 1b of help-seeking, peers constructed help-seekers as less credible, and/or lacking sufficient evidence of abuse or unhealthy behaviour. Here, the help-seeker was positioned as needing to provide further evidence. The legal system places a burden of proof on defendants (i.e. potential victims). This concept is linked to the idea that one should only be judged to be guilty if is 'beyond reasonable doubt' that they committed a criminal act (Cerulli, Conner & Weisman, 2004). Research reflects a burden of proof being placed in victims of IPV usually in a negative sense. For example, some academics present thresholds of evidence as unfeasibly high for victims of violence, leading to low rates of conviction and lack of justice for victims (Bradshaw & Marks,

1990; Clark, 2010, 2011; Lievore, 2005<sup>70</sup>). In this way Stage 1b and 2 outline how legal applications of proof are drawn upon by young people to make sense of, and identify, IPV.

Young people rationalised this stance through presentations of the Peer Duty and Obligation contract as one where peers were required to maintain impartiality and be aware of trustworthy accounts. Here, relationship accounts were constructed as having two different sides. This discourse is reflected in academic analysis of 'he said, she said' rhetoric around cases of IPV which construct individual's accounts as limited (Hartley, 2001; Lucken, Rosky & Watkins, 2014; Pearson, Moracco, Agnew-Brune & Bowling, 2018). Some academics argue that such portrayals of victim accounts can deligitimise victims (Eckstein, 2005; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013).

These findings highlighted the collective nature of sense making of relationships. In most cases there needed to be a consensus as to whether the relationship behaviours were acceptable or not. This could be positive as verifying with others allows dissemination of knowledge and support. On the other hand, it could be damaging as young people could unknowingly encourage distorted relationship norms, that normalise harmful and abusive behaviour, as found in other studies (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Lavoie, Roitaille & Herbert, 2000; Witte & Mulla, 2013). So, the ways young people made sense of IPV mirrored legal constructions foregrounding the importance of rationality and fairness, however these constructions may not adequately account for complexities of victimhood and limitations of the premise of a burden of proof.

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<sup>70</sup> There is literature that outlines that victim/survivors of violence (i.e. child abuse, sexual violence, IPV, etc) seek justice in forms outside of the criminal justice system such as: validation of their account, feeling believed, voice and control (Abrahams et al., 2018; Clark, 2010, 2011).

*Stage 2. Talk to partner.*

In Stage 2 help-seeking, potentially abusive partners were constructed as naïve of their own behaviour. Help-seekers were tasked with highlighting unhealthy or abusive behaviour to their partner as part of making the relationship work. Constructions of naïve perpetrators is reflected within research about rape (e.g. Lockwood Harris, 2018). In contrast to constructions of IPV in the present study, research on IPV often positions perpetrators as *aware of* the manipulative, controlling nature of their behaviour. In this way, the present study's findings are novel. However, they resonate with a focus on victims of IPV to resolve the situation and victim blaming (Berns, 2017; Stubbs & Wagmann, 2015).

*Stage 3 Adults and professionals.*

In Stage 3 help-seekers were advised to seek support from an adult or professional service. This stage was presented as only necessary in high risk cases of IPV or suspected IPV in same-sex relationships. Young people constructed their knowledge and advice as insufficient to deal with same-sex relationships and high risk, clearly abusive, situations. Here, adults and formal IPV support agencies became an important resource for young people. It was presented as a peer's duty to encourage the help-seeker to seek this level of support but beyond young people's duty and capabilities to provide such assistance themselves.

Research reflects the importance of more established forms of support in riskier cases of IPV. When IPV is less severe victims are more likely to seek informal support (Weisz et al., 2007). As relationships become more controlling and violent, victims - particularly women – are more likely to seek support from formal IPV organisations such as shelters, crisis centres and professionals (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Leone, Johnson & Cohan, 2007). In this way, young people's constructed limitations on their capacities to advise and support help-seekers reflect help-seeking preferences of victims and young

people. Constructed duties of peers to encourage formal help-seeking but *not* provide this support themselves suggest that the Duty and Obligation contract accounts for the need for expertise in high risk abusive situations. However, studies argue that young people do not have adequate support or knowledge to support formal help seeking (Fry et al., 2014; Weisz et al., 2007), this is discussed further in Section 2.

Young people in the present study had a dearth of ways to make sense of relationships and IPV outside of the heteronormative frame – this limited the advice and support young people could give help-seekers in same-sex relationships. Young people assumed peers were heterosexual and constructed their (heterosexual) relationship experiences as non-transferrable to same-sex relationships (the limits of the heteronormative frame are discussed further in section 2.9.5: The Duty and Obligation Contract).

In some ways, this was presented as young people's recognition of the privilege and dominance of the heteronormative frame. Other studies highlight the importance of consider the heteronormativity when identifying of IPV in same-sex relationships (Barnes, 2010; Finneran & Stephenson, 2013; Goldenberg, Stephenson, Freeland, Finneran & Hadley, 2016; Khan & Moodley, 2013; Shuckerow, 2004), and how victims of IPV may face unique barriers such as homophobia (Kay & Jefferies, 2010; Donovan & Hester, 2014). These findings, although counter to those in Chapter 6a, outline how constructions of help-seeking of young people in the present study accounted for the dominance of a heteronormative frame.

Despite accounting for the heteronormative frame, young people in the present study had little access to constructions of a non-heteronormative, healthy relationship. This is reflected in other studies with LGBT groups that find heteronormativity often structure same-sex relationships (Barnes, 2010; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Kubicek, McNeeley,

& Collins, 2015; Sanger & Lynch, 2018). Research by Rohrbaugh (2006) presents IPV in a same-sex relationship as having difference to that in heterosexual relationships – i.e. threats of outing, stress and isolation due to homophobia and stigma. Young people in the current study did not seem to have access to types of IPV specific to same-sex relationships. These findings suggest that the amount and quality of relationship support young people in lesbian and gay relationships can get from their peers is lacking.

## **9.2. Key findings and Implications for RSE**

This section will draw out the findings stated above in relation to findings from the analysis chapters. Use of Social Contracts will be discussed to introduce four broad themes: (1) heteronormative vs universal frame (Men's right and LGBT rights), (2) the victim-perpetrator framework, (3) digital lives and the importance of consent, and (4) Duty and Obligation.

### **9.2.1 Use of Social Contracts and Grey Areas**

Young people used three Social Contracts to make sense of relationships: Love and Happiness, Trust and Fidelity, Duty and Obligation. Gender and sexual orientation were also employed to consider how to apply these Social Contracts. Within these contracts young people drew on multiple arguments such as Gendered Strength, Nothing to Hide, Right to Privacy, Love as Complicated, etc. Gender, frequency, context and intentions were all used by young people to identify if a relationship behaviour was abusive or not. Young people's use of Social Contracts to make sense of relationships seems to be a novel finding which has important implications for RSE. For example, as I will discuss, education could be delivered in ways that are congruent with young people's sense making.

The Social Contracts employed by young people outline that they are constructing healthy relationships as those where there is love, happiness, trust, intimacy, fidelity, good social support and a desire to make the relationship work as a team. These positive aspects of relationships are noted in other studies (e.g. Bragg et al., 2018; McGeeney & Hanson, 2018; Noonan & Charles, 2009; Worth, Reid & McMillan, 2002). Young people's sense making also accommodated complex accounts of victimhood. Schools and educators should note these and build on them.

The study highlights grey areas that young people need support with, which RSE will need to consider moving forward. A primary aim of this research was to highlight implications for RSE as such the following section will focus on these, noting Social Contract Theory and other Social Contracts when relevant to implications for schools.

The Social Contracts illuminated areas of young people's sense making where they may need further support. There were grey areas in young people's sense making – where young people were uncertain as to what was healthy/unhealthy, acceptable/unacceptable, permissible/unforgivable. These manifested as questions and discussions around four main areas, which will be discussed in turn:

(1) *Heteronormativity*. How important is gender to relationships and what ways are there to understand gender outside of the heteronormative frame?

(2) *Victim-Perpetrator Framework*. How should we judge who is a victim and who is a perpetrator? What is the significance of gender? How helpful is the heteronormative frame in constructing victimhood?

(3) *Young People's Digital Lives and the Importance of Consent*. Is it okay to check my partner's phone? Is this an example of openness and sharing or is it a betrayal of their privacy? Does it show distrust, or intimacy?

(4) *Limits of young people's knowledge and need for guidance.* What happens in a same-sex relationship? When should a help-seeker get support from a peer, adult or professional?

This section will discuss these key findings and outline implications for RSE, schools and practice. Following growing consensus that IPV prevention efforts need to be focused on multiple levels (individual, inter-personal/peer, community, organisational and society; Flood, 2011a) these recommendations speak to some of these levels.

### **9.2.2 Heteronormativity: The Heteronormative Frame vs. abuse is abuse**

Across the Social Contracts gender was important, however many discussions, particularly around the Love and Happiness contract centered on competing constructions of *how* important gender was to relationships. Young people made considerable efforts to construct relationships and IPV in a way that was fair for all victims. The contrast of: (i) the importance, and use of, the Heteronormative Frame with, (ii) critique of the Heteronormative Frame, from a humanist universalist position, has been noted in other research amongst young people (e.g. Bragg et al., 2018). In the present study, young people asserted that the victimhood of non-traditional victims was overlooked, focusing on men's rights and LGBT rights. I will outline research on the significance and critique of the Heteronormative Frame and then RSE implications of the findings specifically in relation to men's rights and LGBT rights.

In the present study sense-making relied on the Heteronormative Frame. Dominance of the Heteronormative Frame invalidated non-traditional victimhood, reflected in other research (Barnes, 2010; Boonzaier & de La Rey 2003; Finneran & Stephenson, 2013; Goldenberg, et al., 2016; Hlavka 2014; Jackson, Witte & Petertic-Jackson, 2001; Khan & Moodley, 2013; Shuckerow, 2004). Young people drew on the argument of 'abuse is abuse' to validate non-traditional victims, however this argument did not always account



for complexities of gender and sexuality. These findings could suggest that young people should only be encouraged to draw on universal ways of making sense of relationships. However, academics argue that de-gendering IPV would be detrimental to achieving equality as it de-politicises the issue, fails to consider relations of power and historical oppression (e.g. Flood, 2011a, Dragiewicz, 2008, 2011) and can distort the suggested solutions to violence (Bern, 1999; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Stark, 2007).

A common feature in young people's employment of the universalist argument that 'abuse is abuse', and the various particularist arguments of 'gendered strength' and others, was the desire to validate different types of victims. Young people's sense-making privileged ideas of equality, drawing on multiple ways to construct victimhood in various types of relationships. The importance of equality is reflected by Bragg et al (2018) who found many young people who supported gender equality, gender diversity and the rights of sexual minorities and were critical of gender inequalities but also presented a need to hold on to gender binaries.

Tensions between the Heteronormative Frame and universal humanist arguments such as Abuse is Abuse are captured by Bragg et al. (2018): "*the contextual contingency of gender r/evolutions continuously rubbed up against sedimented sexist, homophobic and transphobic sentiments, of discrimination and violence*" (p. 422). Thus, to make sense of IPV young people draw on two dominant and contradictory discourses (heteronormative and universalist). The juxtaposition of the two discourses speaks to the wider societal context young people are living in, where the system is patriarchal and heteronormative and can only be changed gradually. Exploration of men's rights and LGBT rights could present more practical ways of bringing the Heteronormative Frame into focus.

### *Men's rights*

Young people presented lack of focus to men's rights and victimhood in relation to IPV as a pertinent issue in the present study. Within the field of IPV and family violence, this is a contentious issue. For many, constructions of men's forgotten rights are characterised as a 'backlash against feminism', the idea that within society men are at more of a disadvantage to women (Jordan, 2016), constructions used by participants in the present study. Many academics, such as Mansbridge and Shames (2008) characterise the backlash against feminism as negative, as a resistance of men "*to change[s in] the status quo [...] a reaction by a group declining in a felt sense of power*" (p. 623- 625), where masculinity is in crisis and men feel helpless, uncertain and confused (Clare 2000; Lazar, 2014, Mann, 2008).

At this extreme, the men's rights discourse poses a risk to feminism. Pease (2008) reports how in Australia gender mainstreaming of IPV unintentionally ignited men's rights activism for law reforms around IPV and family law. Others suggest that the discourse of men's overlooked rights can create a false sense of gender parity in IPV victimisation (see Bouchard, Boily & Proulx, 2003; Flood, 1999) and discredit female victims (Flood, 2011b). Further, Segal (2006) challenges constructions of men are disempowered, noting: "*men appear to be emerging as the threatened sex; even as they remain, everywhere the threatening sex*" (p. 727; see also Ragatz & Russell, 2010). These arguments present men's rights discourse as anti-feminist. In contrast to these constructions, in the present study, young people presented men's rights as *within* the feminist agenda.

### *Men's rights and feminism.*

Participants in the present study presented men's rights as a gender equality issue. If one defines feminism as the pursuit of gender equality, this argument subsumes men's rights into the feminist agenda. This is reflected by other academics who present

women's propensity for violence as overlooked or dismissed at the expense of men *and women* (Barnes, 2010; Espinoza & Warner, 2016; Hird, 2000; Karlsson, Lalen, Kaakinen & Antfolk, 2018; McCauley et al., 2018). Likewise, research suggests women's violence against men is more likely to be condoned, excused and minimized, than men's violence against women (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Russell, 2017<sup>71</sup>). Notably these differences could be due to perceptions of women's violence as self-defense (Hester, 2013). However as outlined by Barnes (2010) to tackle IPV feminism needs to make space for constructions of women as perpetrators. In these ways, it seems substantive that constructions of IPV can overlook men's victimhood and that this is a feminist issue.

A study by Dragiewicz (2011) investigated men's rights and anti-feminist discourse in relation to men's low reporting of IPV. The findings suggest that critique of feminism within men's rights discourse can reflect feminist values and aims. That is, reasons given for lack of men's reporting of IPV (e.g. men feared, and experienced, ridicule, shame, emasculation and mockery) - reflected by participants in the present study – strikingly, were congruent with feminism. Dragiewicz explains: “*this kind of enforcement of hegemonic masculinity is precisely what feminists mean to indicate when they discuss violence as a gendered phenomenon*” (p. 54).

In a similar way, but from the other side of the debate, Braithwaite (2004) argues that some contentious and difficult questions raised about feminism have been dismissed as ‘as a backlash against feminism’. Barnes (2010) raises issues with dominant constructions of IPV as men's violence against women as it obscures non-traditional victimhoods, such as lesbian women's experiences of IPV. As shown in the present

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<sup>71</sup> A (non-discursive) study by Wasarhaley, Lynch, Golding & Renzetti, (2015) suggests that male victims are more likely to be believed than females. These findings highlight the complexity of power and victimhood and need further exploration.

study taking an approach that considers gender *and* sexual orientation raises the potential for gendered issues become apparent not just in relation to women's right but men's, and LGBT people's rights.

These findings suggest that discussions of men's rights should be incorporated into RSE. Research suggests boys and men can be difficult to engage with IPV prevention education (Biddulph, 2008; Forrest, 2000; Forrest, 2007; Measor, 2007; Strange, Oakley, Forrest, et al., 2003). They can feel that RSE does not meet their needs (Parker, 2005), can portray men only as perpetrators of violence (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004) and can be challenging for boys to navigate in the restrictive context of masculinity (Haste, 2013; Noonan & Charles, 2009).

There are risks in involving men in the feminist agenda. Men's involvement may dilute resources for survivors of IPV (Bacchi, 2004; Lang 2002a; Sawyer, 2003), de-gender violence and oppression (Cornwall, 2000; Pease, 2008) and sideline women's voices and leadership (Lang 2002b). However, given the growing social currency of men's rights discourses it is not feasible to ignore this issue. Rather an emphasis is needed on gender equality aspects of talk to address the issue from a feminist and masculinities informed perspective (Flood, 2011a). This approach should acknowledge and discuss men's victimhood whilst considering complexities of power and rejection notions of gender parity of IPV (Flood, 2011a; Minaker & Snider, 2006). I will briefly discuss practicalities of this for RSE.

*Possible activities or interventions.*

Some examples of how this could be done could be to highlight the 'costs' of masculinity to men (Barker, 2006; Kleinmann, Copp & Sandstrom, 2006 p. 138) and ways masculinity can encourage risky behaviours and violence amongst boys and men (Ferguson et al., 2003; Katz, 2006; Messerschmidt, 2000; Sabo, 2004). This should be

balanced with discussions of men's privilege. For example, Flood (2011a) outlined how men benefit from a 'patriarchal dividend' (i.e. men's greater power, status and resources bourn from a society that favours men). Discussions of alternate constructions of power (i.e. that it cannot be possessed, but can be enacted and reproduced in ways that reinforce patriarchal gender relations; Pleasants, 2011) could create space to acknowledge that men's experiences of patriarchy are often contradictory encounters of power and privilege as well as isolation and emotional pain (Kaufman, 1994).

Another method suggested by Kleinmann et al (2006) is to make the familiar strange. For example, by substituting sex for other characteristics such as race and sexual orientation, like the vignette method used in the present study. Studies by Bragg et al (2018) and Flood and Pease (2006) note the influence of men who do not accept violence on decreasing perpetration of IPV. Examples of how this could be implemented include schools introducing peers in leadership roles and peers as educators (Barker, 2006; Flood & Pease, 2006). Emphasising men's personal connection to IPV is another method used to better engage men in IPV prevention issues (see Pleasants, 2011).

A final suggestion is to re-configure masculinity and concepts of strength to emphasise men's roles as protectors. Lazar (2014) outlines that critique of gender relations can result in men experiencing "gender vertigo"<sup>72</sup> (Connell 1999:136 as cited in Lazar 2014). Lazar suggests selectively re-aligning masculinity with a rhetoric of liberalism. Such methods are suggested by Katz (2006) and have been used in campaigns in schools such as Men Can Stop Rape in the US; and Men Of Strength (MOST) clubs. However, schools and educators should ensure that re-constructions of masculinity do not to play back into toxic masculine stereotypes such men as violent (Khalili 2011; Slater, 2016).

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<sup>72</sup> This is defined as instances where men become confused and disorientated about their identity

### *LGBT*

Use of the heteronormative frame resulted in an equal fight scenario being constructed around IPV in same-sex relationships. Ideas of sameness invoked by heteronormativity have been noted by others (Barnes, 2010; Donovan & Barnes, 2018; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Sanger & Lynch, 2018). As referenced in earlier in this chapter, the heteronormative frame can illegitimise victims of IPV in same-sex relationships. Donovan and Hester (2014) reflect this and outline that there is little information available to LGBT people, young and old, entering their first relationship about what a healthy relationship should look like. McGeeney and Hanson (2018) also highlight the need for wider support systems for LGBT young people who can feel isolated.

### *Role of schools and safe spaces.*

Schools have a key role here, to promote inclusive, safe environments and provide support to LGBT young people. Sumara and Davies (1999) argue that schools have an obligation to challenge and interrupt heteronormativity. They present schools as key to promoting social justice and “*broaden[ing] possibilities for perceiving, interpreting, and representing experience*” (p. 191). Utilising the young people’s arguments of ‘same but different’, and ‘abuse is abuse’, in RSE, amongst other things, could achieve this. Schools should aim to highlight the similarities and difference around gender and sexuality in experiences of IPV (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Rohrbaugh, 2006) and draw the Heteronormative Frame into focus and critique it, for example interrogating the ‘gendered strength’ argument.

Research with young people suggests that they want opportunities to learn about, discuss and critique gender (Bragg et al.,<sup>73</sup> 2018; Girl Guiding, 2013, 2018). In McGeeney and Hanson's (2018) study young people reported wanting more information about LGBT relationships, '*that come with a whole new power dynamic and sexual risks that staff are currently unaware of*' (p. 34). Other studies suggest a need for such education for general populations (e.g. Lombard, 2014; McGeeney & Hanson, 2018; Pino & Blazek, 2011) and LGBT people specifically (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; McGeeney & Hanson, 2018; Oliffe et al., 2014). Yet, school cultures felt by young people to be sexist and heteronormative can push interests exploring gender and sexual identities underground (McGeeney & Hanson, 2018). Young people want safe spaces to explore issues of gender and relationships (McGeeney & Hanson, 2018; Bragg et al., 2018) without these spaces it seems young people may not have avenues for discussion and exploration of heteronormativity and would '*bottle it up*' (Bragg et al., p. 425).

#### *Inclusivity in schools.*

Inclusive practices such as school policies, individual actions of teachers and expectations of pupils and staff are another way schools can challenge heteronormativity. Connell (2003) says that one way culture needs to change is through the creation anti-discriminatory norms. Research in the UK outlines that for many young people schools and universities can be sexist, homophobic and sexually violent (Bragg et al., 2018; Fixers, 2016; NUS, 2012). Bragg et al (2018) outline an atmosphere in schools of '*sedimented discrimination and violence*'. This describes how young people's readiness and awareness of gender and sexual identities are pitted against prejudice and stigma. In this way, there is a need for general education, to raise awareness of

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<sup>73</sup> In Bragg et al's (2018) study with young people, some participants reported working with their friend to be gender-inclusive, stop their own slut-shaming behaviours and find new vocabulary such as 'heteronormative', 'homophobia' and 'non-binary'.

these issues, and for schools and teachers to encourage young people to report these behaviours and ensure they feel safe to do so. Research finds that schools who are LGBT inclusive (i.e. have an LGBT inclusive curriculum, foster solidarity between LGBT and cis-gender pupils and staff) were viewed as safer for gender non-conforming peers (Toomey, McGuire & Russel, 2012). Actions and challenges to homophobic and sexist practices are also key to promoting inclusion in schools (Ferfolja, 2007).

In addressing the Heteronormative Frame young people can outline, explore and reject the ways in which gender and sexual orientation are relevant, or not, to sense making of relationships and IPV. This assertion is noted by Bragg et al (2018) who state that despite schools attempts at encouraging gender fluidity and challenging gender norms the structure of schools often reinforces heteronormative and binary notions of gender for example in uniforms, toilet, sports. Schools should take a broad inclusive approach to diversity, celebrating diversity and challenging prejudice of all kinds (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, location, etc.), as part of the school ethos and in lessons (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Fox & Ore 2010).

#### *Queer theory.*

Queer Theory could be effective in providing young people with space, opportunity and access to considerations relationships outside of the heteronormative frame. Sumara and Davis (1999) argue that in contemplating otherness queer theory broadens “*the possibilities for what might count as knowledge [...] not just knowledge about sexuality but knowledge about how forms of desire are inextricable from processes of [...] interpretation*” (p. 192). Given the increasing complexity of gender and sexual identities it does not seem feasible for RSE curriculum to keep up with and adequately explain *all* these developments. Yet, it is important for RSE to go beyond binaries of man-woman, gay-straight, male-female. Sumara and Davis (1999) argue that “*lives are not lived as stereotypes or categories*”. They argue that it is not enough for schools to merely inform



young people about gender and sexuality but opportunities for critical enquiry are also needed. For IPV specifically schools need to provide more information about same-sex relationships and sense-making of IPV outside of a Heteronormative Frame.

Thus, Queer Theory could present young people with the opportunity, language and skills to begin to consider gender and sexuality beyond the Heteronormative Frame. One option is for RSE to explore the main principles queer theory (e.g. gender as performance, issues of power, discrimination and stigma), and key aspects of emerging gender and sexual identities (e.g. lesbian relationships, gay relationship, bisexuality, transgender, gender non-conforming, pan sexuality) and direct students to additional information on queer identities.

Another activity could be creating events that are 'heterotopic' (Foucault, 1973 cited in Sumara & Davies, 1999). Sumara and Davies explain: "*a heterotopia is an event structure in which things not usually associated with one another are juxtaposed, allowing language to become more elastic, more able to collect new interpretations and announce new possibilities.*" (p. 205). This could be done in small groups settings (Barker, 2006) or by using literature (Blackburn & Smith, 2011; Sumara & Davis, 1999) to create these conditions. Both could be used as RSE activities (see Harrison & Ollis, 2015 for micro-teaching examples).

Educators should be mindful of the following when challenging the Heteronormative Frame. Firstly, activities should be sensitive to students' levels of outness' (Calton, Cattaneo, & Gebhard, 2016) and hypothetical so as not to encourage, or require students to identify as outside of heteronormative or gendered expectations (e.g. disclosure of sexuality, specific behaviours, beliefs, etc.). Secondly, teachers should be sensitive to the idea that conforming to heteronormative expectations and norms is a way of 'performing respectable citizenship' and reasserting one's respectability when

one is oppressed by multiple systems e.g. ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation (Sanger & Lynch, 2018 p. 212; see also Butler, 1990; Epprecht, 2012; Salo, Ribas, Lopes, & Zamboni, 2010).

### 9.2.3 Victim-perpetrator framework

In the present study, the significance of the Victim-Perpetrator Framework was a theme that emerged across constructions of Social Contracts and IPV. Rock (2002) argues that discourses shape our understanding of victims and “*interpretative work [is] going on at every level in bringing the categories victim and offender into play*” (p. 21). The present study’s findings highlight issues and difficulties about how young people make judgements about who is a victim and who is a perpetrator, and the significance of gender. In some ways portrayals of victimhood drawn upon by young people were limited and obscured by non-traditional victims and in some cases positioned the victim as to blame, also found by Eigenbeerg and Policastro (2016) and Lelaurain et al (2018). These findings suggest RSE should focus on unpacking and challenging ideas of blame and culpability (Jackson et al, 2001).

Young people constructed some perpetrators of IPV as naïve. This rhetoric is reflected in talk around IPV and young people. For example, a statement by Richard Garside, Director for Crime and Justice Studies in BBC news report in 2012, said a challenge of the [then] new law against Coercive Control “*will be to distinguish between the love-sick teenager acting in an immature and inappropriate way and the individual engaging in intimidating, dangerous and controlling behaviours*”. Thus, ideas that some perpetrators of IPV are more naïve, and thus less culpable than others are reflected in other areas.

#### *Constructions of (in)valid victims*

As explored in the present study, constructions of violence draw on ideas of intention and motive. They highlight how when using a Heteronormative Frame, some types of

people may be more likely to be constructed as perpetrators of violence, either due to their gender (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Kelly, 1996; Walters, 2014) or how trustworthy or credible their accounts are deemed (Donovan & Barnes, 2018; Haffejee, 2003; Hassouneh & Glass, 2008).

These issues could be explored with young people in various ways. Such as discussions of: traditional portrayals of victims and perpetrators (Bosoma, Mulder & Pemberton, 2018; Brenner, 2013)<sup>74</sup>, victim stereotypes in the criminal justice system and how these may reinforce and reproduce inequalities that contribute to, and maintain, norms that lead to said violence (Bern, 2004; Donovan & Barnes, 2018; Kwiatkowska, 2013; Lievore, 2003; Meyers, 1997; Schneider, 2000; Stubbs & Wagmann, 2015; Wasarhaley et al., 2015; Westmarland, 2015); or constructions of victims and perpetrators beyond binaries that of victim-perpetrators. For example, women within the prison system are victims of IPV and perpetrators of violence (Day, Gerace, Oster, O’Kane & Casey, 2018)<sup>75</sup>.

In these ways, RSE could dissect constructions of victims and perpetrators and the diversity of victimhood, violence and power. Although complex, this could encourage young people to begin to consider IPV and help-seeking beyond binaries of victimhood (Pleasants, 2007; Wiens & Dempsey, 2009). That, agency, power and blame are distributed; that one can (i) have inflicted harm (e.g. from cheating, breaking a Social Contract), (ii) possess and enact forms of power (ranging from survival to resistance), and (iii) may not be virtuous; but *can still be* a legitimate victim of IPV (Brenner, 2013;

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<sup>74</sup> The practicality of these discussions would need to be investigated as they should be suitable for the age of students and not discourage young people from seeking help from the police or other formal agencies.

<sup>75</sup> Although many of these examples refer to women, in practice examples for men should also be used, e.g. men, race or class and victimhood.

Campbell & Mannell, 2015)<sup>76</sup>. This may enable young people to begin to consider how they receive help-seekers accounts of IPV and victimhood, broadening constructions of 'valid victims' and presenting challenge to simplistic notions of victimhood and perpetration and victim-blaming or assumptions about victim credibility (Moudling, 2006).

Another area to consider victimhood could be focusing on credibility. Discussions of IPV interventions such as Clare's Law could be a relevant debating point. In the present study, in Stage 2 of Help-Seeking, the help-seeker, was positioned as having a duty to talk to their partner, under the rationale that there are two-sides to every story. This reflects debates around Clare's Law outlined by Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate (2016) who discuss the human rights importance that previous crimes are disclosed *only* when requested (e.g. due to an individual's right to form a relationship, right to control personal information; rights to respect for private and family life).

Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate (2016) and others outline how Clare's Law places the onus on the victim to find out about their partner's past behaviour and act on it. This reflects some of the assumptions made in the present study in Stage 2 of Help-Seeking which placed responsibility on victims to highlight and try to resolve relationship issues. Both cases bring focus away from the partner enacting problematic behaviour and position victims as both empowered *and* responsible to raise, and resolve the problematic behaviour. This is problematic as it can raise potential for victim-blaming (Bessant, 2002; Duggan, 2012; Merry, 1995, 2003; Stubbs & Waggman, 2015) and fails to consider the wider barriers to leaving. The present study suggests young people are aware of barriers to help-seeking this could be a way to engage with, and expand young

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<sup>76</sup> This could also be explored in relation to race and class.

people's constructions of victimhood specifically around disclosures and the burden of proof.

#### **9.2.4 Young people's digital lives and the importance of consent**

The Trust and Fidelity contract outlined issues around privacy and young people's digital lives. As noted by other researchers, and as attested to by the participants in the present study, adolescent relationships seem to be situated in a context of jealousy and hypervigilance, highlighting a need for clarity in young people's understanding consent and right to privacy.

##### *Consent*

Within RSE consent is a pertinent issue (Elliott, 2014; Kelly, 2017), with focus in the arena of sex, such as sexual intercourse, sexting, etc. Notably, there is a focus on young people's digital lives but it seems restricted to sexual activities, i.e. sexting (Döring, 2014). The findings of the present study outline a need to teach young people about consent *outside of* the sexual arena. To include consent in relation to checking phones and privacy.

RSE and education around consent needs to discuss broader issues around fears of infidelity with young people and risks of pressure and coercion in asking to see a partner's phone (discussed further in section 9.2.5: Duty and Obligation below). RSE should encourage communication where the person asking to check the young person's phone or social media is responsible for ensuring and verifying they have gained proper consent. Tangible socially acceptable ways to refuse their partner permission to check their phone should also be taught. Although, this should not be the main focus of RSE as it could raise potential for victim-blaming narratives.

Moreover, RSE should aim to construct consent as shifting and inter-dependent (Bauer, 2014). These constructions would be congruent with young people in the present study's attention to situational factors such as context, frequency and intention. This suggestion adds nuance to constructions of consent, which has been critiqued for being overly simplistic (Elliott, 2014; Lockwood Harris, 2018) and hard for young people to apply to real-world contexts (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2014 cited in House of Commons, 2015). It highlights the need to consider contexts and the significance of power in young people's negotiations of consent when sharing their phones with their partner, and in a sexual context (Elliott, 2014).

#### *Foregrounding the Right to Privacy*

An area that needs further investigation is how to foreground Rights to Privacy over Openness and Sharing in younger age groups (i.e. 15-18 years). One suggestion is to emphasise messages that phones are part of one's identity and so should be assumed to be private. Research highlights that young people are concerned about online privacy so this could link into online literacy and privacy on social media (Montgomery, 2015, Walrave et al., 2018). Education around technology needs to recognise broader forms of violence online such as upskirting and revenge porn (Barter, 2017; McGlynn & Rackely, 2015; Robson, 2018). It is also important to recognise the gendered nature of this, with negative outcomes such as bullying, ridicule and blame disproportionately affecting women (Barter, 2017; Ringrose et al., 2013) and research suggesting women are more likely to use surveillance (Burke, Wallen, Vail-Smith & Knox, 2011).

Another way could be presenting valid accounts of one's right to privacy. In the context of government surveillance and privacy Marmor (2015) outlines that rights to privacy can be hard to uphold in the face of the 'nothing to hide' argument. Marmor argues that a right to privacy is '*a reasonable measure of control over ways in which we present ourselves to others and the ability to present different aspects of ourselves, and what*

*is ours, to different people. This is an essential aspect of our well-being* (p. 7). For example, there are things one likes to keep private such as going to the toilet or having sex. Thus, foregrounding control over one's own identity could be a way to foreground one's Right to Privacy with young people. Schools and teachers should expand on reasons why one might want to maintain their privacy beyond infidelity, e.g. an embarrassing picture, personal information, desires for space and healthy boundaries, etc.

### **9.2.5 The Duty and Obligation Contract**

The present study and other research outlines the significant role of peers in issues around relationship fidelity, that they can contribute to contexts of gossip and jealousy. The Peer Duty and Obligation contract could play a key role here. RSE could draw out the duty and obligation that we should all help each other make our friendships and relationships work; to be amicable and supportive – not to bully, harass or spread rumours. McGeeney & Hanson (2018) speak to these sentiments when concluding that peers could support each other and minimize bullying by behaving in solidarity with victims and not sending on sexually explicit pictures.

RSE could discuss with young people how peers can exacerbate contexts of jealousy and surveillance (e.g. spreading rumours, one wanting to verify rumours), how this may make them feel and highlight young people's duty to *each other* as friends and peers. It could also highlight the power of peers to help each to other have caring, healthy, respectful relationships and friendships. This approach could link in to bystander intervention.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Cinquegrana, Baldry and Pagilaro (2009) note the importance of considering gender biases in bystander interventions.

Bystander interventions can equip young people with the skills to de-escalate risky situations and promote a shared responsibility for preventing IPV (Banyard et al., 2004; Flood, 2011a; Tabachnick 2009). Noonan and Charles (2009) outline that bystander interventions teach young people a variety of ways to deal with a range of situations depending on level of risk, personality traits, context, etc. They also highlight peer educators and counsellors as an effective way to disseminate information and advice. Others suggests development of scripts (Banyard, 2015) or theatre for bystander education (Plourde et al, 2015).

Stueve et al. (2006) argue that all adults who have contact with young people should be considered bystanders and supported to role model and encourage healthy relationships with young people even before they begin having romantic relationships. This could be achieved through training and information shared with teachers, parents, coaches, club leaders, etc., about healthy relationships and the grey areas in young people's sense making (see Banyard, 2015; Edwards, Rodenhizer & Eckstein, 2017).

#### *Practicality of challenging behaviours and the role of teachers and schools*

When implementing bystander interventions schools should be mindful of that: (1) often peers are situated at the interface of relationships as public and private, and (2) young people can feel they lack knowledge of how to respond to (potential and actual) disclosures of IPV.

Research suggests that young people feel uncomfortable challenging emotional or verbal abuse in their friend's relationship, online and offline, and are not sure how to do this particularly if they are not that close to the friend (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Oung people tended to blame victims rather than challenge the behaviour (McGeeney & Hanson, 2018) with men least likely to intervene (Sylaska & Walters, 2014). Authors such as Flood (2006) and Noonan and Charles (2009) note that men have a powerful



influence over peer networks and so should be a focus of bystander interventions. RSE should provide knowledge about support agencies, how they are accessed, the seriousness of IPV in various contexts and the tools and support to deal with disclosures.

Flood (2011a) argues that interventions should be embedded at all levels, accordingly it would be appropriate for schools and teachers to model respectful, trusting and appropriately private relationships with students. Teachers should clearly communicate with young people about how information will be used and shared when young people make disclosures or voice relationship concerns, as research finds young people can be reluctant to disclose issue to adults, due to concerns about confidentiality and staff gossip (O'Campo et al., 2007; Weisz et al., 2007).

Teachers and schools should present themselves as part the Peer Duty and Obligation contract highlight their role in creating responsive, inclusive, supportive, respectful environments. This would also provide re-assurance to young people that adult support is available when needed (e.g. at Stage 3 of Help-Seeking or before). This is particularly important for non-traditional victims of violence (e.g. men, and those in same-sex relationships).

Young people in the present study highlighted issues around gendered communication, this is something schools and RSE should consider. For example, research suggests that stereotypes of masculinity can discourage men from seeking help (Forrest, 2007; Katz, 1999). Forrest (2007) outlines that men can see use of services as a '*weakness, illness or failure to cope*' (p. 7). Moreover, as attested to by young people in the present study, difficulty communicating and expressing negative emotions has been cited as a

reason for IPV (Kelley, Edwards, Dardis & Gidyics, 2015<sup>78</sup>). Schools should teach young people about assertive communication and adaptive strategies for coping with relationship stress, conflict and anger in personal relationships (Kelley, et al., 2015.), in addition to bystander interventions.

### **9.2.6 Summary of recommendations for schools**

This thesis outlines that considerations of gender and sexual orientation in RSE is highly important. RSE should be taught in ways that, firstly, are gender-neutral. As the research outlines a need to teach young people about healthy relationship behaviours, and ways to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships independent of gender (e.g. trust, love, happiness, openness). Secondly RSE should also consider gender. Schools should instigate and welcome safe opportunities for young people to explore, critique and even challenge the meanings of gender to their relationships and understanding of IPV. RSE should endeavour to be intersectional, considering additional factors (such a sexual orientation) to create heterotopic events.

Other researchers highlight the role of schools in broadening possibilities for young people in how they consider relationships. To do this schools should ensure teachers have the knowledge and confidence to facilitate such sessions about gender and sexual orientation. Schools should ensure that teachers feel equipped to challenge behaviour and safeguard pupils when needed. The present research suggests it is important to acknowledge and engage discussions around arguments of 'men's forgotten rights' to involve young people with RSE, particularly young men. This could be achieved by exploring the multi-faceted and changing nature of power which has been shown to engage young men with issues of gender equality and IPV.

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<sup>78</sup> The authors also note the key role of acceptance of violence, also see Sulak, Saxon and Fearson (2014) in relation to disclosures.

When teaching young people about consent and/or safety using technology schools should explore young people's digital lives. Specifically, the acceptability of looking at phones in relationships and the importance of one's Right to Privacy. These discussions should emphasise the importance of the person checking to gain consent from their partner. These discussions could be linked in to lessons on internet safety – exploring how one's Right to Privacy may differ based on the relationship one has with the person checking (i.e. parent, peer, partner). Or in relation to sexual consent and intimacy in relationships with messages around boundaries, peer pressure and coercion. RSE should present valid accounts of one's Right to Privacy. For example, by exploring the importance of privacy to the preservation of one's public persona, or private and public aspects of one's identity.

Finally, RSE and schools should seize upon young people's ideas of Duty and Obligation – although not necessarily using these exact terms. This contract has three main areas of application. Firstly, to consider and explore with young people their role as peers for ensuring friends have healthy relationships and the importance of not feeding gossip or rumours. This would be in keeping with other current issues within schools and young people's digital lives such as sexting and revenge porn.

Secondly, the Duty and Obligation contract should be used to outline the support systems young people in unhealthy or abusive relationships can draw on. In the present study, young people outlined three stages of help-seeking (talk to a friend, talk to your partner, talk to an adult). Given this schools need to consider ways of building the skills of peer supporters, e.g. through bystander interventions. Schools should explore ideas of valid perpetrators and victims with young people and consider the knock on affects this may have for certain types of people gaining the help they need. Schools and teachers should consider what this may mean for the support, or lack of support,

available to vulnerable or marginalised young people. Schools should also provide clarity to young people on the steps they can take to access information and additional support needed to help a friend experiencing unhealthy relationship behaviours or IPV.

Thirdly, schools, teachers and staff should emphasise *their* role to keep young people safe, happy and healthy. It is of key importance that schools ensure teachers and staff know how to support young people in same-sex and heterosexual relationships experiencing problematic relationship behaviour or IPV. This is central to ensuring that young people as victims and peer supporters get the support they need, and can carry out Stage 3 of help-seeking. Finally, an effort should be made by schools to accept and encourage diversity, respect and equality.

### **9.3 Strengths and limitations**

The vignette-methodology was a strength of this research. The vignette design was useful, it allowed direct comparison between sexual orientation and gender and generated rich discussion. The vignette scenarios were easy to tailor to the age of the sample and generated discussions about current and relevant aspects of young people's relationships. Another strength of the present study was the ability to explore how young people make sense of the pertinent issues in their lives and emerging grey areas and dilemmas (such as use of technology, gender, sexual orientation and victimhood).

Wodak (2001), outlines that an aim of discourse analysis is to discover "*inconsistencies [...] and dilemmas*" in talk (p. 65), which this study has done, some of which are novel to this context. Chambers et al (2004) found that the official sex education discourse did not relate to young people's lives, a strength of this thesis is that it highlights how the language and arguments *young people* use can be used in RSE. Talk elicited in this study was not naturally-occurring, but in a controlled setting, using vignettes with an

adult female facilitator. It is likely that young people's talk about this topic, without an adult present would be different. Further research should consider the significance of gender and sexual orientation in young people's sense making of IPV in naturally occurring settings such as online and on social media. Likewise, the structure of the study encouraged young people to discuss gender and sexual orientation. That is not to say that such talk was forced these discussions, but young people may have drawn upon other factors had gender and sexual orientation not been prompted (e.g. age, ethnicity, culture).

A limitation of the study, particularly given the heteronormative critique of this thesis is the gender binary of protagonists used in the vignettes, i.e. the vignettes depicted a male or female protagonist. Bragg et al (2018) outline that structuring discussions with young people in this way could impose and reinforce gender binary categories. However, this method was selected to initiate, accessible discussions with a general population<sup>79</sup> of young people about gender and sexual orientation in relation to IPV. The present study found young people had limited ways of making sense of IPV in lesbian and gay relationships. These findings suggest that a focus group eliciting talk about other gender identities or sexualities in relation to IPV would have been further limited. However, as an area of growing significance to young people's lives this is a subject that needs further study.

The present research did not collect data on the sexual orientation of participants, as this was not deemed relevant and may have made participants uncomfortable. However, future research should investigate if, and how, sense making of relationships changes in LGBT populations of young people. Research suggests that the

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<sup>79</sup> That is, to the researcher's knowledge participants had varying levels of knowledge and interest in gender, queer identities and feminism.

heteronormative frame remains pertinent in LGBT relationships. Likewise, research should also be conducted with young feminists on their sense making of IPV, gender and sexual orientation. This research could highlight emerging ways people make sense of relationships and IPV outside of the heteronormative frame. These findings could be cultivated into IPV prevention campaigns and in schools.

Lastly, the present study focused on third-party sense making. This decision was made due to the importance of peers to young people's sense making of IPV and help-seeking. Use of Social Contracts in young people's sense making of relationships is novel to this context and demonstrates a value of the vignette approach and discursive methodology. The Social Contracts outlined in this research may be specific to third party sense making of IPV. That is, discussions focused on personal experiences may draw on different aspects or entirely different Social Contracts. Future research could explore the use of social contracts on sense-making of IPV with other groups such as adults and LGBT populations, or those who have experienced IPV.

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

To conclude, this research provides important insights into young people's sense making of relationships and IPV. Recent research has championed the importance of young people's perspectives (e.g. Pound et al., 2016). Yet, little research to date has investigated how young people make sense of relationships in relation to sexual orientation and gender, and what this sense making can tell us about young people's constructions of IPV in their own, and/or their peer's relationships.

This thesis finds young people draw on three key Social Contracts to make sense of relationships: (1) the Love and Happiness contract, (2) the Trust and Fidelity contract, and (3) the Duty and Obligation contract. Gender and sexual orientation were also significant to sense making. Constructions of gender and sexual orientation modified

aspects of the Social Contracts. Within the Social Contracts young people drew on multiple arguments (such as gendered strength, nothing to hide, right to privacy, love as complicated, gendered communication, men's over looked rights, etc.) to make sense of relationships and identify characteristics of IPV. Young people also used gender, frequency, context, intentions and sexual orientation to judge if a relationship behaviour was abusive or not.

Young people's talk highlighted key grey areas and dilemmas young people had to navigate and negotiate when trying to identify, justify or problematise abusive behaviours. Specifically, these were: checking of phones, dilemmas of love, diagnosing a rough patch, determining how truthful or trustworthy a help-seekers account was and supporting a friend experiencing IPV. As explored in this chapter, these findings provide a rare insight, and most importantly *an opportunity*, for educators and policy makers to tailor RSE to suit the needs and strengths of young people's current sense making of relationships, their arguments and their language. Critically these findings outline the grey areas young people need clarity about regarding relationships and IPV.

These findings outline that young people construct healthy relationships as those which are happy, loving, trusting, monogamous and supportive. Within the Duty and Obligation contract young people presented social support (such as peers and adult) as important resources for identifying IPV and making a relationship work. Young people's sense making was often dominated by a Heteronormative Frame. In many cases sense making drew this frame into focus, at times critiquing its limitations in accommodating non-traditional victimhoods. These findings suggest young people have access to complex and nuance portrayals of victimhood. However, victims were also constructed in ways that raised the potential for victim blaming and could inhibit help-seeking. These findings suggest RSE should draw upon and broaden young

people's constructions of victimhood to enrich understanding of IPV and ensure all help-seekers accounts are considered.

In the Love and Happiness contract sense making of relationships and IPV drew on competing discourses of heteronormativity and abuse is abuse. In many cases, young people's use of such argument was to validate all victims. However, sense making often drew upon gender stereotypes of communication, physical violence and physical power and size, to determine how severe unhealthy behaviours were. The argument of Abuse is Abuse was a useful way to validate non-traditional victims of IPV. It was employed to critique the Gendered Frame and talk around this focused-on men's rights discourse. Arguments that 'abuse is abuse' were also drawn upon to construct behaviours as abusive in same-sex relationships.

Yet, beyond this young people had very few ways of making sense of same-sex relationships without using a Heteronormative Frame. This could be why much of the nuanced discussion within abuse is abuse focused on men's rights. These findings highlight a dearth of ways available to young people to make sense of same-sex relationships outside of the Heteronormative Frame. Other research supports this as an area of need in RSE. Likewise, there needs to be more formal support for young people in same-sex who may be experiencing IPV in schools.

Finally, in the Trust and Fidelity Contract young people constructed dilemmas and competing arguments about one's Right to Privacy and one's Right to Monogamy. Consent was a key focus here. That is, young people presented granting permission to checked their partner's phone or social media as important, whilst also constructing themselves as unable to refuse to be checked. These findings highlight that consent education should incorporate broader areas of young people's digital lives, beyond sexting. Importantly, RSE should outline obligations of partners checking phones to



gain true consent or permission before doing so. Young people should also be given the language to refuse to be checked whilst also adhering to principles of openness, sharing and intimacy. RSE should present acceptable instances where one could assert their Right to Privacy, and expand on these to provide examples of upholding one's Right to Privacy whilst *also* having 'nothing to hide' (i.e. whilst being faithful). This could be done by outlining the importance and merits of boundaried, respectful relationships.

Young people can sometimes be positioned as ignorant, dependent and anti-social (Bessant, 2002). However, these findings emphasise the value of *asking young people*, and taking a child-centric approach to considerations of RSE. As these findings attest to, young people want to *engage* in debates around issues relevant to their relationships. We should encourage young people to consider gender and sexual orientation in contexts of IPV, to grapple with these big issues in a safe and respectful environment supported by inclusive and informed professionals and schools.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Study 1 - Vignette Scenarios 1-4

#### Vignette 1: Heterosexual Female

Your friend asks for your advice. She has been in a relationship with her boyfriend for a year and is beginning to feel unhappy, but she's not sure what to do. She says that her boyfriend is very critical of her - something you have also noticed. She says that he makes her feel bad about wanting to spend time with her friends, telling her that she is self-centred and immature, and she recently found him checking her texts and Facebook.

She tells you that he shouts at her, and on occasions he has shoved her in an argument. He also asks her to do things with him that she is not sure about, like smoking, or drinking. She tells you that he has hit her on a couple of occasions and she is worried that it will happen more often. You believe her. She says her boyfriend doesn't want to talk about their relationship.

She says that there are times when he is affectionate towards her, and that she usually feels happy with him. She doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and she isn't sure if she is being unreasonable and whether she just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships.

#### Vignette 2: Heterosexual Male

Your friend asks for your advice. He has been in a relationship with his girlfriend for a year and is beginning to feel unhappy, but he's not sure what to do. He says that his girlfriend is very critical of him- something you have also noticed. He says that she makes him feel bad about wanting to spend time with his friends, telling him that he is self-centred and immature, and he recently found her checking his texts and Facebook.

He tells you that she shouts at him, and on occasions she has shoved him in an argument. She also asks him to do things with her that he is not sure about, like smoking, or drinking. He tells you that she has hit him on a couple of occasions and he is worried that it will happen more often. You believe him. He says his girlfriend doesn't want to talk about their relationship.

He says that there are times when she is affectionate towards him, and that he usually feels happy with her. He doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and he isn't sure if he is being unreasonable and whether he just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships.

**Vignette 3: Lesbian Female**

Your friend asks for your advice. She has been in a lesbian relationship with her girlfriend for a year and is beginning to feel unhappy, but she's not sure what to do. She says that her girlfriend is very critical of her - something you have also noticed. She says that her girlfriend makes her feel bad about wanting to spend time with her friends, telling her that she is self-centred and immature, and she recently found her girlfriend checking her texts and Facebook.

She tells you that her girlfriend shouts at her, and on occasions her girlfriend has shoved her in an argument. Her girlfriend also asks her to do things with her that she is not sure about, like smoking, or drinking. She tells you that her girlfriend has hit her on a couple of occasions and she is worried that it will happen more often. You believe her. She says her girlfriend doesn't want to talk about their relationship.

She says that there are times when her girlfriend is affectionate towards her, and that she usually feels happy with her. She doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and she isn't sure if she is being unreasonable and whether she just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships.

**Vignette 4: Gay Male**

Your friend asks for your advice. He has been in a gay relationship with his boyfriend for a year and is beginning to feel unhappy, but he's not sure, what to do. He says that his boyfriend is very critical of him - something you have also noticed. He says that his boyfriend makes him feel bad about wanting to spend time with his friends, telling him that he is self-centred and immature, and he recently found his boyfriend checking his texts and Facebook.

He tells you that his boyfriend shouts at him, and on occasions his boyfriend has shoved him in an argument. His boyfriend also asks him to do things with him that he is not sure about, like smoking, or drinking. He tells you that his boyfriend has hit him on a couple of occasions and he is worried that it will happen more often. You believe him. He says his boyfriend doesn't want to talk about their relationship.

He says that there are times when his boyfriend is affectionate towards him, and that he usually feels happy with him. He doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and he isn't sure if he is being unreasonable and whether he just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships.

## **Appendix 2. Study 1 - Recruitment Plan**

### Recruitment Preparation (W/C 19<sup>th</sup> January 2015)

- Design and print posters
- Find society emails online
- Put posters up on campus e.g. in the Student's Union, libraries, School of Geography Notice Board, School of Psychology notice board, Social Sciences notice board etc.
- Go around campus asking departments if I am able to send a recruitment email to their students
- Email Leeds Society Facebook groups to gain permission to post an advert on their Facebook page.

### Online Recruitment (W/C 26<sup>th</sup> January)

- Email societies and sports groups to ask if I can send an email to their members or speak at a meeting
- Post an advert on Leeds Sports and Societies and residential groups' Facebook pages
- Send emails to school administrators willing to help me advertise my study

### Face-to-Face Recruitment (w/c 2<sup>nd</sup> February).

- Attend society meetings to advertise my study
- Approach students on campus asking them to take part, e.g. in the Engineering Café, in front of the Student's Union
- Re-posting on Facebook groups

Hopefully run a study Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February

### Revise Recruitment Plan (W/C 9<sup>th</sup> February)

Continue trying to recruit male participants with the most effective methods. If none are effective organise a meeting with Anna and Siobhan to think of more ideas.

### Appendix 3. Study 1 - Information Sheet (undergraduates)

Researcher: Emily Robson, Institute of Psychological Sciences, University of Leeds, UK

Email: pser@leeds.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Anna Madill

Email: a.l.madill@leeds.ac.uk

Information sheet: Version 1, April 2014

Ethics approval: 14-0315 Date: 19-Jun-2014

Hi! I'm psychology postgraduate at the University of Leeds conducting research into how people talk about, and understand relationships. This information sheet explains why I am carrying out this research and what it involves.

#### What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research is to understand people's perceptions of, and opinions about, relationships and, what is called 'intimate partner violence'. Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs between two people who are in a romantic relationship – who are 'partners' - and can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, punching) and/or psychological (e.g., sustained denigration and undermining). This study focuses on the perceptions and opinions of young undergraduates.

#### Why have I been invited to take part?

If you are undergraduate student aged 18-19 years old and have lived in the UK for at least 5 years, I would like to invite you to take part in this research. I am looking for both men and women to participate. Unfortunately, many young people have experienced intimate partner violence but you do not need to have any personal experience of IPV to take part. If you have experienced IPV, you are very welcome to participate and do not have to discuss any of your own experiences. Do please consider carefully, though, if discussing this topic with a single-gender group might be too distressing for you.

#### Do I have to take part?

No – it is entirely up to you whether or not you take part. If you are interested in taking part in the study, I will go through this information sheet with you to make sure that you fully understand what is involved, including the conditions of consent. You can ask me any questions you want about the study before you decide. If you would like to take part, you can decide if you would like to sign a consent form or just record your consent at the beginning of the discussion without having to give a signature or name (i.e., verbally at the beginning of the audio-recording). Giving consent does not mean that you have to do anything that you do not want to do. You can withdraw from the study at any time up to the point the research has been submitted for examination or publication, without having to give a reason, and you do not have to answer any questions asked or join in with any particular aspects of the group discussion.

### What does the study involve?

If you choose to participate in the study you will be invited to a group discussion with around 4-6 other people. The group will be single-gender and all will be undergraduate students aged 18-19 years old. Ground rules of respect and confidentiality will be set and discussed then the researcher will read out four short descriptions of a hypothetical relationship situation which involves, relatively low level, intimate partner violence. The group will be asked to discuss each situation and the advice you would give before moving onto the next. The discussion will be led by participants but facilitated by the researcher with prompts where it might aid the discussion. There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not have to discuss any personal experiences. It is expected that the discussion will last about 90 minutes and it will be audio-recorded with your consent.

### Where will the research be done?

All group discussions will be in a private room in the Institute of Psychological Sciences at the University of Leeds.

### What about confidentiality?

Audio-recording of the interviews will be kept on a secure university computer, locked with a username and password. Audio-recordings will be typed up into a transcript. This may be done by a person other than me. If this is the case, the transcriber will keep the content of the interview confidential and will not hold onto any of the material after completing the transcription. Care will be taken to make it as unlikely as possible that any participant will be identified in transcripts. For example, potentially identifying details will be omitted and pseudonyms (false names) will be used. I will ask your consent to be able to use quotes from the audio-recordings in reports of the research on the condition that your anonymity is maintained. If you chose to sign a consent form, I will give these to my supervisor for safe and confidential storage. If you give me consent to share your data for analysis with other researchers, they will only have access to the anonymised version of the data and know only very general demographic information about participants (e.g., approximate age).

There are some limits to confidentiality in all research activity. I may be obliged to alert relevant authorities if a participant reveals involvement in any serious criminal activity, intention to harm themselves or others, or if I have good reason to suspect that the participant is at serious risk of harm from others. If this is the case, I may tell you that I intend to seek advice and will, at the earliest opportunity contact my supervisor. However, I can reassure you that my research does not actively seek such information and, if I think you may be about to disclose something along these lines during the interview, I will remind you of my obligations.

### Are there any risks in taking part?

I do not expect there to be any significant risks in taking part. However, some topics related to this research may be sensitive. For example, we will be talking about, relatively low level intimate partner violence and this may remind you of upsetting experiences you, or someone you know, has endured. However, the study does not ask you to talk about such experiences and you are under no obligation to answer any

question or to join in with any aspect of the discussion. The interview is not anticipated to be distressing, but if someone becomes distressed during the interview I will offer to pause the interview until they collect themselves or they decide to leave. If a participant leaves the interview I will ask the rest of the group if they would like to continue and will contact the person who left by e-mail immediately following the end of the interview to thank them for participating, to ask about their welling-being, and to check if they would like their data withdrawn from the study.

#### Are there any benefits in taking part?

Taking part might be interesting and the research will provide the basis of a 3 year PhD on the topic of intimate partner violence between young people which is likely to have policy implications relevant to improving the support offered.

#### Ethics

The ethical guidelines for this research have been set out by the British Psychological Society code of ethics. These guidelines include ethical principles such as making sure you know what will happen and are happy to take part, explaining that you can stop the focus group at any time, and protecting your identity. If you have any complaints about my contacting you, or anything that happens in the interview, please contact my supervisor Dr Anna Madill who will be happy to discuss what action to take.

Thank you for considering taking part in this study. Emily

#### FREE SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

<http://www.leedsnightline.co.uk>  
<http://supportafterrapeleeds.org.uk>  
<http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk>  
<http://www.brokenrainbow.co.uk>  
<http://www.womensaid.org.uk>  
<http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk>

### Appendix 4. Study 1 - Consent form

Study title: Exploring perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence

The purpose of this form is to make sure that you are happy to take part in the research and that you know what is involved. If you are happy to sign this sheet, please also confirm each statement by putting your initials in the associated box. If you would rather give consent without signature, the researcher will ask you to confirm each of the following in the format in which the interview is being recorded (e.g., audio-recording) before starting.

I am between 18-19 years old (inclusive)	
I have read the participant information sheet or had the content explained to me by the researcher	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study	
I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions	
I have received enough information about the study	
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason but also that my contribution may be impossible to remove if it is in a report that has already been accepted for examination or publication	
I understand that I am free to end the research interview at any time without having to give a reason	
I understand that I am free to choose not to answer a question without having to give a reason	
I agree to the interview being recorded (e.g., audio-recorded)	
I grant permission for my data to be shared with other researchers on the condition that my anonymity will be maintained	
I grant permission for extracts from the interview to be used in reports of the research (such as journal publications, conference presentations, and educational meetings) on the understanding that my anonymity will be maintained	
I agree to take part in this study	

Participant signature Date
Name of participant
Researcher signature Date
Name of researcher: Emily Robson, University of Leeds

## Appendix 5. Study 1 - Ground rules and instructions

Study: Exploring perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence  
Vignettes

Ground rules:

- It is likely that people will express different opinions with regard to the relationship scenarios that will be presented; please treat everyone respectfully during the discussion – everyone will get a chance to put their point-of-view
- No personal experiences need be revealed and the interviewer may remind a participant of this during the interview as a check that they are happy to continue
- Any personal revelations will be treated by the group as confidential
- The interview is not anticipated to be distressing but if someone becomes distressed during the interview the interviewer will offer to pause the interview until they collect themselves or decide to leave
- If a participant leaves the interview the interviewer will ask the rest of the group if they would like to continue and will contact the person who left by e-mail immediately following the end of the interview to thank them for participating, to ask about their welling-being, and to check if they would like their data withdrawn from the study

**Instructions:** I am going to read out four short relationship descriptions – vignettes – in which a friend is asking for your advice. I will read them one at a time so that we can discuss each before going on to the next. I would like to know your opinion about the relationship situation described and what advice you would offer. There are no right or wrong answers and you may not be sure what to advise. I am interested to hear your thoughts and discussion with each other about these situations. It is likely that people in the group will have different opinions and an objective of this research is for group members to explore these in a constructive way that respects these differences.



## Appendix 6. Study 1 - Interview schedule

What is first reaction to your friend's account?

- How do you feel? What do you think?

To what extent do you think your friend's the unhappiness is justified?

- To what extent is your friend's partner behaving badly?
  - Why do you think this?
- Which aspects of their partner's behaviour are justified?
  - Why do you think this?

Are there are any aspects that make this situation particularly problematic to resolve?

- What makes this particularly problematic?
- How could this be overcome?

Why do you think your friend doesn't want anyone to know what they have told you?

- To what extent do you think this is justified?

Do you think your friend should seek help?

- To what extent do you think seeking-help is justified?
- What barriers do you think your friend thinks they might face in seeking help?
- How do you think these barriers could be overcome?

To what extent do you feel you could advise your friend?

- What makes it difficult to advise your friend?
- What makes it easier to advise your friend?

What would you advise your friend to do?

- Why would you advise this?
  - How do you know to advise this?
  - Where have you heard about this?

**ASK THE FOLLOWING ONLY AFTER CONCLUDING DISCUSSION OF ALL FOUR VIGNETTES**

Have you, or somebody you know, had a similar experience to that in the vignette?

- What happened?
- How was it resolved?

What do you think when I say the term 'Intimate Partner Violence'?

- What do you think this means? What behaviours would this include?

What do you think when I say the term 'Domestic abuse'?

- What do you think this means? What behaviours would this include?

Looking at the behaviours in the vignettes, are there any terms you think young people like you would use to describe them?

What words would do you think young people use to describe abusive relationships and behaviours?

**Appendix 7. Study 1 - Example two-part vignette scenarios****Heterosexual Female: Part 1**

Your friend asks for your advice. She has been in a relationship with her boyfriend for a year and is beginning to feel unhappy, but she's not sure what to do. She says that her boyfriend is increasingly critical of her- something you have also noticed. She says that he makes her feel bad about wanting to spend time with her friends, telling her that she is self-centred and immature, and she recently found him checking her texts and Facebook activity.

She tells you that he shouts at her, and on occasions he has shoved her in an argument. You have also seen her boyfriend push her. He also asks her to do things with him that she is not sure about, like smoking, or drinking. You believe her. She says her boyfriend doesn't want to talk about their relationship.

She says that there are times when he is really affectionate towards her, and that she usually feels happy with him. She doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and she isn't sure if she is being unreasonable and whether she just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships.

**ASK PROMPTS AND THEN ADD PART 2 PHYSICAL VIOLENCE:**

Part 2: "Your friend comes to you again and says they are still feeling unhappy and now says her boyfriend has hit her on a couple of occasions and she is worried he will do it again.

But, like before, she says that there are times when her boyfriend is really affectionate towards her, and that she usually feels happy with him. She doesn't want anyone to know what is going on and she isn't sure if she is being unreasonable and whether she just needs to learn more about how to be in relationships."

## Appendix 8. Study 2 – Schools invitation to participate, letter

[University address]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

University of Leeds Research in schools: How young people make sense of others' relationship problems

My name is Emily Robson and I am a student at the School of Psychology, University of Leeds. I am writing to invite you to take part in some exciting research we are undertaking in schools exploring the ways young people (aged 15-18) make sense of, and talk about, Intimate Partner Violence (also known as Domestic Violence). We are currently looking for two schools (one with indices of deprivation, and one with few) to take part in our focus group study and would like you to take part.

Intimate Partner Violence is any type of emotional, psychological, physical or sexual abuse inflicted on one romantic partner by another, regardless of, age, gender or sexuality. Young people (aged 16-24) are more likely to experience Intimate Partner Violence than older people, (Barter, 2009; ONS, 2014) and often the types of abusive behaviours they experience are also different. Recently the UK Home Office widened the working definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse to include young people aged 16 and 17. Young people often accept abusive behaviours due to a lack of experience and often seek advice from their peers, rather than adults, who can further normalise abuse vastly increasing the risk young people face. Yet there is little research investigating how young people make sense of, or understand, Intimate Partner Violence individually and with peers.

We have consulted with local domestic violence support organisation and Leeds City Council all of whom agree this project is of paramount importance in ensuring young people experiencing IPV are aware of it and are both able to, and do, seek help either from an adult, professional service, or their informed peers.

What is the study?

We need two schools (one with indices of deprivation, and one with few) to take part in our study. If you choose to participate we will conduct four focus groups, two with year 11 (one male, one female) and two with year 13 students (one male, one female), lasting up to an hour. Focus groups will be based around four relationship scenarios which we have used before to good effect. Students will be encouraged not to share very personal experiences but we ask for another member of school staff to be present (such as a teacher or teaching assistant) to support a students should they want to leave the group or disclose any personal experiences.

What taking part would entail?

We would require you to: 1.) Randomly select 16 (eight female, eight male) students from a tutor group to participate; 2.) Hand out and collect back parent/guardian consent forms (provided by us); 3.) Organise a time suitable for the focus group and; 4.) Find a teacher or teaching assistant to attend the focus group session along with the researcher.

We will provide you with a participation pack containing all materials. The researcher has a valid DBS check which can be provided upon request.

### Benefits to participating

Within our research unit at the University of Leeds we have found students list numerous benefits to taking part in schools-based research, such as:

- Enjoyment participating and engaging with university research
- Inspiring aspirations to go into further education
- Satisfaction in having their views included in research
- The opportunity to exercise critical thinking skills and a safe space to explore their own views, thoughts and feelings
- Practice articulating their own opinions and listening to those of others.

As a school, in return for taking part you will receive:

- An 'Investor in Research for Schools' Certificate
- A summary of our research findings giving you an insight into how your students think about this important issue and to highlight any student concerns

We also happy to offer talk or student support for:

- Psychology careers
- Research methods in psychology
- Essay writing skills
- Referencing
- Raising Aspirations
- University applications

### Research Time Scale

We aim to complete school recruitment by September; Send out student consent forms in September 2015; and run the focus groups from late September- October.

If you are interested in taking part or have any questions please contact me on the details below before [insert date]. We would be delighted to have you on board with this research.

Yours Sincerely,

Emily Robson  
School of Psychology  
University of Leeds  
Leeds  
LS2 9JT

Email: E.R.K.Robson@leeds.ac.uk; Tel: 0113 343 9196

Ethics Approval Code: 15-0171  
Ethics Approval Date: 02/07/2015  
Supervised by: Professor Anna Madill

School of Psychology,  
University of Leeds  
A.L.Madill@leeds.ac.uk

**Appendix 9. Study 2 –Parental (over 16s) study information and consent,  
Letter**

[University address]

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Re: University of Leeds, How Young People Make Sense of Others' Relationship Problems study consent form.

I am writing to you regarding research we are undertaking in the School of Psychology at the University of Leeds that we would like your teenager to participate in. The research is exploring how young people make sense of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), also known as Domestic Violence.

What is IPV?

Intimate Partner Violence is defined as any type of emotional, psychological, physical or sexual abuse inflicted on one romantic partner by another. It can happen in all relationships regardless of, age, gender, ethnicity, or income. Research has found that young people are more at risk of experiencing IPV than older people and often the types of abusive behaviours they experience are different to those of adult relationships. It has also been found that young people often opt to talk to their peers about IPV rather than an adult. The research we are undertaking at the University of Leeds is investigating how young people talk about, and make sense of IPV with their peers with the aim to use these findings to improve the services used by young people experiencing IPV and also to better engage and inform young people about this issue.

What will my teenager have to do?

We are undertaking this research in partnership with Leeds City Council PSHE and the support of local Domestic Violence support agencies with the aim to improve both the education provided to young people about this issue, and the services available to young people who may be experiencing difficulties in their partner relationships. Your teenager's school has agreed to participate in this research and your child has been randomly selected to take part in the study. The study is an hour long, single gender discussion with 4-5 other teenagers, facilitated by myself the research. I have been DBS checked. Discussion will be around four fictional scenarios about an individual asking for help with a relationship problem.

No disclosure of personal experiences from your young person is sought for this study. Rather, the focus is on the ways in which groups of young people are able to think about, and explore, what constitutes problems in young relationships. Participants will not be forced to answer any question they don't want to and can leave the study at any time without giving a reason. Although the study is not intended to be distressing and has been successfully piloted with other groups, should your teenager have experience of IPV we advise them to think carefully about whether they would feel comfortable discussing this topic in a group setting.

All teenagers are free to withdraw from the study at anytime without giving a reason. If your teenage wants to withdraw from the discussion the member of staff in the session will leave with them to check they are okay and then take them back to their lesson. There are no penalties for withdrawing from the discussion. However if they do withdraw we cannot remove their responses from the discussion.

### Confidentiality

All responses in the discussion will be kept fully anonymous. Transcripts will be anonymised and although extracts from the discussion will be used when the research is written up, there will be no details which could allow someone to be identified. Should a young person disclose harm, or a risk of harm, to themselves or another person, this will be reported to a named member of the school staff.

### What do I have to do?

If you are happy for your teenager to take part, you do not have to do anything. If you do not want your teenager to take part please complete the form below for them to return it to their tutor by XX/XX/XX. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at E.R.K.Robson13@leeds.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time  
Yours sincerely,  
Emily Robson  
School of Psychology  
University of Leeds  
Leeds  
LS2 9JT

Ethics Approval Code: 15-0171  
Ethics Approval Date: 02/07/2015  
Supervised by: Professor Anna Madill  
School of Psychology,  
University of Leeds  
A.L.Madill@leeds.ac.uk

University of Leeds, Intimate Partner Violence study: OPT-OUT 16+  
Parental/Guardian Consent Form

I do not want my teenager to take part in the Intimate Partner Violence focus groups study

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Form Tutor: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 10. Study 2 – Parental (under 16s) information and consent, letter**

[University address]

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Re: University of Leeds, how young people make sense of others' relationship problems study consent form.

I am writing to you regarding research we are undertaking in the School of Psychology at the University of Leeds that we would like your teenager to participate in. The research is exploring how young people make sense of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), also known as Domestic Violence.

What is IPV?

Intimate Partner Violence is defined as any type of emotional, psychological, physical or sexual abuse inflicted on one romantic partner by another. It can happen in all relationships regardless of, age, gender, ethnicity, or income. Research has found that young people are more at risk of experiencing IPV than older people and often the types of abusive behaviours they experience are different to those of adult relationships. It has also been found that young people often opt to talk to their peers about IPV rather than an adult. The research we are undertaking at the University of Leeds is investigating how young people talk about, and make sense of IPV with their peers with the aim to use these findings to improve the services used by young people experiencing IPV and also to better engage and inform young people about this issue.

What will my teenager have to do?

We are undertaking this research in partnership with Leeds City Council PSHE and the support of local Domestic Violence support agencies with the aim to improve both the education provided to young people about this issue, and the services available to young people who may be experiencing difficulties in their partner relationships. Your teenager's school has agreed to participate in this research and your child has been randomly selected to take part in the study. The study is an hour long, single gender discussion with 4-5 other teenagers facilitated by myself the research. I have been DBS checked.

Discussion will be around four fictional scenarios about an individual asking for help with a relationship problem. No disclosure of personal experiences from your young person is sought for this study. Rather, the focus is on the ways in which groups of young people are able to think about, and explore, what constitutes problems in young relationships. Participants will not be forced to answer any question they don't want to and can leave the study at any time without giving a reason. Although the study is not intended to be distressing and has been successfully piloted with other groups, should your teenager have experience of IPV we advise them to think carefully about whether they would feel comfortable discussing this topic in a group setting.

All teenagers are free to withdraw from the study at anytime without giving a reason. If your teenager wants to withdraw from the discussion the member of staff in the session will leave with them to check they are okay and then take them back to their lesson. There are no penalties for withdrawing from the discussion. However if they do withdraw we cannot remove their responses from the discussion.



Confidentiality

All responses in the discussion will be kept fully anonymous. Transcripts will be anonymised and although extracts from the discussion will be used when the research is written up, there will be no details which could allow someone to be identified. Should a young person disclose harm, or a risk of harm, to themselves or another person, this will be reported to a named member of the school staff.

What do I have to do?

Please could you fill out the form below indicating whether you are happy, or not, for your child to take part in the study, and return the slip to their form tutor by xx/xx/xxxx. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via email [E.R.K.Robson13@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:E.R.K.Robson13@leeds.ac.uk), or speak to their form tutor.

Thank you very much for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Emily Robson  
School of Psychology  
University of Leeds  
Leeds  
LS2 9JT

Ethics Approval Code:15- 0171  
Ethics Approval Date: 02.07/2013  
Supervised by: Professor Anna Madill  
School of Psychology,  
University of Leeds  
A.L.Madill@leeds.ac.uk

University of Leeds Study, Intimate Partner Violence study- OPT-IN under 16  
Parental/Guardian Consent Form

I consent/do not consent (*delete as appropriate*) for my child to take part in the intimate partner violence focus group study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Form Tutor: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 11. Study 2 - Ground Rules

Study: How young people make sense of others' relationship problems

Ground rules:

- It is likely that people will express different opinions with regard to the relationship scenarios that will be presented; please treat everyone respectfully during the discussion – everyone will get a chance to share their point-of-view.
- The discussion focus will be on the situations presented. We want to hear about what you think not any personal experiences. If a student begins to disclose any personal experiences I may remind them of this, or they will be able to discuss this with someone else, e.g. a teacher, outside of the group.
- The discussion will be kept fully confidential by the group.
- The discussion is not anticipated to be distressing but if someone becomes distressed during the focus group I will offer to pause the focus group until they collect themselves or decide to leave with a member of staff.
- If a student wants to leave the discussion a member of staff will go out with them and I will pause the focus group and ask everyone else if they are happy to continue.

**Instructions:** I am going to read out four short relationship descriptions – vignettes – in which a friend is asking for your advice. I will read them one at a time so that we can discuss each before going on to the next. I would like to know your opinion about the relationship situation described and what advice you would offer. There are no right or wrong answers and you may not be sure what to advise. I am interested to hear your thoughts and discussion with each other about these situations. It is likely that people in the group will have different opinions and an objective of this research is for group members to explore these in a constructive way that respects these differences.

## Appendix 12. Study 2 - Debrief and support exercise

Thank you for participating in this study. This study was looking at how young people, such as yourselves, make sense and talk about Intimate Partner Violence, also known as Domestic Violence.

### Definition

Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs between two people in a romantic relationship – who are ‘partners’ - and can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, pinching), psychological (e.g., sustained belittling, put-downs, and undermining), verbal (e.g., shouting, mocking, name calling) sexual (e.g., threats of sexual acts, or sexual acts, without their partner’s consent/ agreement), or financial (e.g., withholding money, controlling the finances). This study focuses on the thoughts and opinions of young people in secondary schools and sixth forms.

Research has found many young people experience IPV, and those who do experience it often confide in their friends, rather than an adult or professional service. Although it is good to tell others if you are experiencing abuse, sometimes friends can think abusive behaviours are okay when they are not, which can result in people accepting abuse as normal in a relationship. Sometimes you may not be sure if a behaviour is abusive or not, and nor may your friend, so it’s always good to confide in an adult that you can trust, or even a professional service or helpline.

Below is an exercise for you to think about and write down the people you could tell and trust if you were to experience a problem in your relationship, even if you weren’t sure if it was Intimate Partner Violence.

Should you have any questions about the experiment, discussion, or Intimate Partner Violence, please feel free to ask your tutor or use any of the contacts in this booklet.

### Types of support

**Family:** Which member of your family (e.g. your mum, auntie, cousin) do you feel you could confide in, or seek help from should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list them with their names below.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

**Friends:** Which friends do you think you could confide in, or seek help from should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list them with their names below.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

**School:** Which members of staff at school do you think you could confide in should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list them with their names below.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

**Formal Services:** Which formal services (e.g. the Police, a helpline, NSPCC, Banardos) do you think you could seek support from should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list them below with their names.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

**Online:** Where could you go online should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list these places, or what you would do below.

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)

#### Support Resources

**School:** Which members of staff at school do you think you could confide in should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list them with their names below.

- 1.) School Counselling Service
- 2.) Teaching Assistant
- 3.) Teacher/ form tutor
- 4.) Subject lesson teacher

**Formal Services:** Which formal services (e.g. the Police, a helpline, NSPCC, Banardos) do you think you could seek support from should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list them below with their names.

- 1.) The Police
- 2.) NHS 111
- 3.) Behind Closed Doors in Leeds
- 3.) NSPCC
- 4.) Banardos
- 5.) Childline - 0800 1111
- 6.) The Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90

**Online:** Where could you go online should you have a problem in a relationship? Please list these places, or what you would do below.

- 1.) Brook.org.uk – Ask brook text (07717 989 023) and web chat.
- 2.) BrokenRainbow.org.uk – relationship support for Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people experiencing abusive relationships
- 3.) Thisisabuse.org.uk – government resource dedicated to raising awareness about IPV in young people's relationships
- 4.) Women's Aid: The Hideout – this site was created by Women's Aid to help children and young people understand domestic abuse, and how to take positive action if it's happening to you. *They also have a quiz in case you aren't sure if you are experiencing abuse, called 'Is it happening to me?'*

- 5.) [www.IDAS.org.uk/theden](http://www.IDAS.org.uk/theden) - similar to the hideout this is a simpler interactive resource you could use, giving you advice about how to be safe should you or someone you love be experiencing abuse.
- 6.) The site – Information about Sex and Relationships, health and wellbeing, drink and drugs etc.
- 7.) <http://sexpression.org.uk/> - a collection of blogs, videos and news articles answering your questions about sex, relationships and other things.
- 8.) Teenissues.co.uk – a site where experts address “all the perils and pitfalls of being a teen”.

Ethics Approval: 15-0171

Ethics Date: 02/07/2015

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**Appendix 13. Example focus group transcript**

Int: Okay, so what's your first reaction to what your friend is telling you? How do you feel about it? Have you got any thoughts?

CARA: I'd be worried about her, it sounds like the beginning of, like it could get a lot worse.

KATE: Yeah.

Int: What makes you think that?

CARA: The fact that he's like shoving her sometimes and if they've been in a relationship for a year than he probably didn't do that before if she's only just starting to feel unhappy

KATE: It could eventually progress to him like hitting her or something, um, but then it's also a bit awkward that it says that he doesn't want to talk about their relationship which makes it a bit difficult to, try and give them advice.

Int: Okay, in what way?

KATE: Because the first thing that I would say would be to say to her "Talk to him about it" but if he's not going to then the only other real thing that I would suggest would be to break up with him but then she says that she normally feels happy with him so it's kind of a bit of a ((laughs)) ... there's not, I can't really think what else I would say to her.

Int: Okay, Lisa you were nodding when Kate was saying about?

LISA: Yeah, I would also say break up with him but, I would say "Try and talk to him" as in because he's forcing her to do stuff she doesn't want to do but, if he just refuses to talk about the relationship then there is no relationship to talk about, so.

## Appendix 14. Transcribers confidentiality statement

### Confidentiality Statement for Transcribers

Ethics Committee, Institute of Psychological Sciences, University of Leeds

The British Psychological Society has published a set of guidelines on ethical principles for conducting research. One of these principles concerns maintaining the confidentiality of information obtained from participants during an investigation. As a transcriber you have access to material obtained from research participants. In concordance with the BPS ethical guidelines, the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychological Sciences requires that you sign this Confidentiality Statement for every project in which you act as transcriber.

#### General

- I understand that the material I am transcribing is confidential
- The material transcribed will be discussed with no-one
- The identity of research participants will not be divulged

#### Transcription Procedure

- Transcription will be conducted in such a way that the confidentiality of the material is maintained
- I will ensure that audio-recordings cannot be overheard and that transcripts, or parts of transcripts, are not read by people without official right of access
- All materials relating to transcription will be returned to the researcher

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: Emily Robson

Project Title: Exploring perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence

Ethics Approval: 14-0315; Date Approved: 13/12/2014

**Appendix 15. Doc 1 Initial hierarchy of themes and codes**

Theme	Sub-theme	Category
Risk	Damage	
	Escalation	
	Gender	Size Man up Blame
Leave	Stages of help-seeking	
	Crying wolf	Blame Credible victim
It takes two	Antagonism	
	Man up	
	Need to talk	Two sides to every story
It could be worse	Same-sex equal fight	Female to male violence – could be worse
	Men as strong, women as weak	
Same but different		
Universalist- equality perspective	How is it (gendered) how it should be (humanist/universal)	
	Abuse is abuse	Universalist perspective of abuse
Love and happiness		



## **Appendix 16. Over-arching themes and categories; and questions for next stage of analysis**

### **Emerging themes and categories**

#### **Theme 1: Men are stronger than women**

Gender roles – women as harmless [Study 2 - S2]

Men shouldn't hit women [S2]

Ridicule of male victims/Man up [S2]

**\*COUNTER POINT\*** Men's forgotten/overlooked rights/ backlash of feminism [S2]

Physical and psychological violence – unacceptable and acceptable behaviours [S2, Study 2 potential link to bullying; power and coercion; Importance of happiness].

#### **Risk, Damage and Victim-Perpetrator Framework (VPF)**

Gendered risk

Escalation

Need to leave

#### **Rough patch**

Naïve perpetrator [S2] (links to VPF.)

Intentions to cause harm (frequency of behaviours; also links to VPF)

Damage – gendered damage (female physical and self-esteem; male psychological and worry/paranoia – link to infidelity of partner for male victims & perpetrators; perpetrator as damaged).

Just leave here (again???)

#### **It could be worse**

Same-sex IPV as equal fight – links to Anna's point of 'standards of behaviour' and victim-perpetrator framework & Edge of boundaries of IPV

Lesbian IPV as illegitimate violence (link to VPF)

Gay men as melodramatic or feminine

LG – cat fight

#### **Abuse is abuse (& reframing the situation; S2) - Social justice [contrary point]**

Same but Different – links to how things Ought to be and how they Are, this could also link to Anna's point [in summary of findings doc] about 'Standards of behaviour'.

**\*COUNTER POINT\*** Individual differences

#### **Discussion: limitations of the social justice vs. gendered perspective of IPV.**

#### **Theme 2: Relationships are private [S2]**

Two sides to every story / it takes two

Infidelity – links to victim- perpetrator framework blameless victim [S2].

Lying victim; crying wolf (Burden of proof)

It's complicated

Victim blaming:

You can't help someone who can help themselves, victim's choice to leave or stay

\*COUNTER\* Anything for love

Victim's responsibility to tell perp? [link to offense and abuse being personal and subjective? – does this fit here?]; women having lower standards;  
Naïve perpetrator – also links to gender roles? S2

### **Help-seeking - Stages of helpseeking;**

Limits of intervention and friends

\***Communication** (Importance of talking [S2]; type of support; easily accessible support; formal support)

Contrary to Importance of talking to perp in S2 is Just leave

Judgement; of abusive partner; judgement of bystanders as sexist or homophobic  
[what is at stake talking about these things]

### **Questions about Study 2 to consider during analysis:**

What was the importance of gender roles and gender stereotypes?

How were same-sex relationships constructed and IPV in them?

Did Intentions play a role in sense making?

Why was talking seen as better advice than leaving the relationship?

How did discussions around infidelity and social media surveillance manifest and what can they tell us?

Was there a discussion of a) Significance of the frequency of abuse? b) Gendered Damage? c) Just leave

Women should and do have the agency to leave, I would leave [women as having lower standards]. Vs. Anything for love rhetoric

### **Construction of the victim:**

Victims – particularly women as having lower standards.

You can't help someone who won't help themselves [repeated]

Constructions of the victim needing to realise this is abuse?

Is abuse constructed as obviously wrong, a grey area, or understandable that the victim can't see behaviour as bad?

d) Importance of happiness/ worth of the relationship. e) Rough patch? f) It's complicated g) It takes two h) Crying wolf i) Burden of proof j) Perpetrator as naïve or damaged

k) Importance of talking:

(i) objectivity of the outsider; (ii) danger of crossing boundaries of friendship; (iii) secrecy to ensure too many people don't interfere; (iv) simple construction of talking : talk to someone, see behaviour is wrong, then leave; (v) discussion of friends role in aiding the realisation of abuse;

(vi) difficulty of admitting abuse linked to difficulty due to love of and desire to stay with one's partner; (vii) disclosure of abuse as betrayal of the partner.

### **Vs. Judgement from friends:**

For not being in a strong relationship, being a push over, or tainting friend's view of their partner if they were not prepared to leave.

Any discussion of judgement of bystanders and the influence of sex and sexuality making discussions a tricky issue (e.g. being presented as homophobic or sexist; vs. social justice).

**Questions regarding Helpseeking:**

a) was counselling suggested? b) were women depicted as better advice givers? c) a form of easily accessible support? d) any mention of police? e) limits of bystander intervention? f) choice being ultimately the victims? Individualism, boundaries and privacy. g) any guidance on how to give advice? Be tentative with advice giving don't always say what you think? Emasculation of men?



## Appendix 18. Doc 2 Social Contract of Love and Happiness plan.

- 1) Behaviours are permitted to slip: if A breaks misbehaves B can misbehave –
- \* infidelity – if you've got nothing to hide; intimacy and trust
  - \* Rough patch;
  - \* Not adhering to gender role [feminine H&G Male; Anything for love (?);
  - \* Same-sex assert your power; Equal fight – response to violence fight back.

- 2) Partner is allowed to terminate the contract and leave the relationship.
- \* Men's violence towards women as the archetype of abuse
  - \* This is abuse (power and coercion, invasion of privacy, physical violence, psy violence)
  - \* Just leave
  - \* Same but different – It could be worse from a more social justice perspective and how situations should be dealt with differently based on the 'type' of relationship; also how it should be and how it is (how it is being: .
  - \* Worth of the relationship,
  - \* Abuse is abuse. You should never hit anyone
- Considerations within this:
- o Men's overlooked rights
  - o Barriers to leaving: it's complicated, Judgement and homophobia, anything for love, victim blame (of speaker and onlooker).

3) **The 'misbehaviour' / 'substandard behaviour' / abusive behaviour is seen to stretch 'the line'** but not seen to break the contract due to the types of behaviours- broadly 'Same but different', 'It could be worse', and links to constructions of a credible victim (CredV):

- \* Type of behaviour (Physical violence, psychological, lack of trust and surveillance, escalation [but links to gendered risk]); Men shouldn't hit women other vigs are less 'clear cut' have to think about for longer.
- \* Frequency (only once/ not all of them together) (Credible Victim)
- \* Intentions (unknowing male; rational female) (Credible Victim)
- \* or the 'type' of individual the behaviour is enacted against – links to Intentions and

Gendered Risk (Credible Victim)

a) Heterosexual male victim: Man up; violence as communication/normal; women as harmless and emotional; women as damaged low self-esteem FG2 V2, 68 – overlap with surveillance.

b) Lesbian relationships: equal fight; women as harmless & importance of talking; same-sex friend jealousy and women as jealous and insecure (V3, Jessica & Sonia, FGP, 241-251.)

c) Gay relationships: violence as male communication; same-sex friend jealousy.

In the case of same-sex, focus on the 'type' of individual is justified through reasoning that: a) same-sex equal fight; b) men are stronger than women thus women's violence against men, and women, is harmless.

## Appendix 19. Three Social Contract chapter plans

### 1. Love and Happiness Contract

CONTRACT: I will love you and You will love me and make me happy.

Relevance: Shows complexity of seeming normalisation of IPV (i.e. rough patch and external judgement and risks), appreciation of love as positive and negative, physical violence.

- Importance of happiness to relationships
- Use of rough patch analogy
- Happiness indicating worth of relationship
- Exceptions of gender (man up NOT violence as communication) and sexuality (equal fight)
- Problematic behaviours as normal and temporary
- Limits of Rough Patch analogy (fine line to abusive beh, excuse or denial of abuse; no one wants to be in a bad relationship).
- Rough patch analogy as a way to assess behaviours
- It's complicated
- Difficult situation: anything for love, relationships as private and subjective
- Limits of happiness as an indicator of worth & a good contract: Victim as subjective, happiness and love as a complicating factor
- Resolution: the need to consider multiple factors, limits of young people's advice

### 2. Intimacy and Faithfulness Contract

CONTRACT If we are in a relationship I will trust you not to cheat on me and I have the authority to make sure you don't cheat on me. / Our relationship will be intimate and monogamous / Cheating/ infidelity is a violation of the contract

Relevance: Shows contention of intimacy to entitlement to privacy and use of social media and technology, jealousy and peer groups

Dilemma: Social contract to be monogamous and duty to partner vs. individualism and personal freedom. Also, implicitly, the truth of the account (i.e. are have they been unfaithful?).

- Jealousy and Surveillance as positive (shows affection [A11F – counter point B13M P. 1], everyone gets jealous)
- Jealousy and Surveillance as intimacy (positive) A11M pg. 10

- Infidelity (intimacy and surveillance to check/ensure fidelity [middle ground] – you can check if they know about it and/or if they're there – you've given permission – if not it's not ok A11M pg. 16 – a fine line but when not purposive/ not *checking for fidelity* it's OK.; BUT they can't say no B11F pg. – if you've got nothing to hide)
  - Sexuality as additional risk to fidelity.
- Surveillance as crossing the line B13M p. 6
- Importance of trust – you must trust your partner. (a) no surveillance – individualism; (b) look at their texts and social media to verify you can trust them. B11F pg. 7
- Trust as letting someone look on your phone (? – see beginning of B11F)
- Truth of the account: how likely is it that the person cheated? Gendered and sexuality based reasons/explanations.
- Suspected/actual incidences of infidelity surveillance OK vs not OK)
  - Sense of duty to reassure partner (if you've got nothing to hide)
  - Gender differences due to cheating Study 1, A13M(?) and B11F [women's emotions and hormones].
  - Interesting contradiction under idea that partner is checking because they are cheating (usually for V1 but not specific to that V) B11F pg. 7.
  - Vs. Entitlement to privacy – entitled to own friends, life and space, need to be separate – individualism. You can't *force* your partner to do things. Jealousy and Surveillance as bad (Gendered reasons for behaviours and gendered double standard).
  - OK to look if you ask: B11F *search doc for 'ask'*.
  - Dilemma: But can you say no to checking? B11F not seen here, but seen elsewhere

### 3. Teamwork and Obligation Contract

CONTRACT: I will support you and stand by you, as long as you do the same for me, within reason.

Relevance: Importance of talking key thing, public vs. private, contemporary concept of duty, two sides to every story, contention of truth.

#### Intentions

- Violence as communication amongst men, gender norms around communication,
- Importance of talk – talk will resolve it all (Insults meant in jest 550 FGP V1)
- Work as a team and talk to and support each other, within reason.

Maybe put a disclaimer here about the behaviours/circumstances YP constructed as unacceptable? – Or is this addressed elsewhere? - This is when the contractual agreement becomes an issue and intentions and communication become key factors drawn upon in arguments.

Moreover – the idea that verbal communication is needed and a way to avoid physical violence which is never okay, e.g. B11F pg. 9

Lack of communication diminishes relationship worth A13F line 355.

### Private

- Relationships as private: B13F p, 1 line 27-29, keep friends and partner separate.
- Why isn't it broken: Intentions- Violence as a misunderstanding (numerous reasons [incl gendered communication??] duty to tell p and loyalty to support partner who needs help [support and loyalty]; B13M p. 1)
- Behaviours that aren't OK: intentional violence (e.g. a shove is not a hit), not acting like a team/talking to each other. Importance of communication (call out bad behaviour absolves intentions argument, work as a team: it takes two [within reason])

### Public

- Problem shared is a problem halved (talking = resolution; stops coercion; can't resolve it on your own)
- Barriers (Loyalty, Self-blame, Judgement etc [obligation + team]), relationships as private; sexuality as a judgment factor B13M pg. 15.
- Behaviours that aren't ok: bitching about partner to other people (sometimes), making partner out to be bad when their not to other people. Two-sides to every story (playing the victim, problematic behaviours as truth not violence, gender stereotypes affirm this [relationships take two – two levels 1) normal, automatic self-preservation, 2) manipulative, underhand])
- Gendered communication- female violence as rational, unknowing man also linked above Respect, women good at talking; unknowing man\*.???
- Fear of being on your own, all alone, have no one (F group? Say at the same time).
- Tensions of public and private, i.e.
  - Having to fit in both friends and one's partner
  - Having to fit parents and one's partner



## Appendix 20. Analytic questions

a.) What objects are being constructed in this text?

Objects are the things/constructions that seem to matter, but they are constructions of things that could be seen as real. E.g. power, gender, hurt, violence.

b.) What are the nature of these objects, how are they being used in this talk? How are they being constructed (this can be implicit or explicit in talk)?

c.) How could this have been done differently, what's not happening? Who does this account benefit?

Which people are placed in a position of power? Who are privileged and who are undermined?

How does it benefit those in power?

What institutions or discourse does this prop-up? (marriage institution, gender discourse)

d.) What assumptions need to be in place for this to be believed or made unproblematic?

E.g. there is someone to blame, blame helps, some behaviours are blame-worthy