

**“Wondering If I Was The Problem”: The Unique Nature, Perpetuation,
and Impact of Dating Violence on Young Australian Women**

By

Hannah Petocz

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College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce

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Statement of Authorship

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Hannah Petocz

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Abstract

Young adult dating violence continues to be a major public health and safety crisis for young women. In Australia, though the current body of literature is limited, research suggests rates of both physical and non-physical dating violence are extremely high. What is more, young women continue to struggle in defining and distinguishing violence and abuse within their dating relationships, and remain unsure about support available to them. This study draws from a feminist conceptual perspective, contributing empirical research exploring the unique nature of young adult dating violence, the social structures perpetuating dating violence, and the social impact of dating violence on young Australian women. Through an online survey, advertised and distributed through the social media platform facebook, responses from 79 young women (18-26), both with and without dating violence experience revealed the unique nature of the young adult dating relationship distinctly shapes the way violence and abuse are experienced, due to the age and relationship variety of this group. The study also found young adult dating violence is routinely perpetuated through social, cultural, and gendered structures that silence and reinforce dating violence as the responsibility of the individual victim. Finally, the study found the social impact of dating violence on young women is both wide-reaching and long-lasting, rippling into areas largely ignored by dating violence research so far. Such as, employment, education, friendships, identity construction, and future relationships. This study contributes a methodological approach with a participant-driven focus and benefits from the 'insider' perspective of the researcher. The thesis aims to contribute to illuminating the ways in which we can improve our education and support service efforts, bring dating violence out from the shadows, and empower young women within their dating relationships. This thesis also provides suggestions for areas of further research exploring young adult dating violence within Australia.

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Chapter One. Introduction

Introduction

“When I was in Year 12 at an all-girls school in Sydney, we attended a nearby all-boys school for a day to hear a talk about consent and sexual assault. It was the first time I’d heard about consent, and the first time that I heard all the many things that fall under the definition of sexual assault. This was way, way too late.

The only other education we’d had up until that point, was a one-day workshop in Year 10, about self-defence and rape. While this is important to educate students on, rape was portrayed as something that happens when a stranger jumps out of the bushes...We did not learn about what to do if your perpetrator is someone you know...” (Madi Fitzpatrick, ABC Triple J Hack, 2021)

Australia is entering a time of sexual violence reckoning. With young Australian women activists and advocates such as Grace Tame, Brittany Higgins, and Chantel Contos at the forefront, long overdue strides are being made in drawing sexual violence against young women out from the shadows. Madi Fitzpatrick (now age 24) reported to *ABC Triple J Hack* on her experience with the stark disjoint between young women’s experiences of sexual assault and rape, and the education available to young people. Her message was clear, this education is arriving too late, and missing half the point. Madi asserts the disconnect between *“when a stranger jumps out of the bushes”* (Fitzpatrick, *ABC Triple J Hack*, 2021), and the much more likely nature of this kind of sexual violence being perpetrated by someone you know and trust. Someone whose connection to you blurs the lines between active consent and just a ‘normal’ part of the dating experience. While sexual violence is extremely common within abusive dating relationships (Frith & Kitzinger 2001; Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Hooker, Theobald, Anderson, Billett & Baron 2019), it is not isolated.

Dating violence refers to the violence and abuse experienced within the dating relationship - with physical violence, manipulation, coercive control and isolation some of the most common experiences (Chung 2005; 2007; Elias-Lambert, Black & Chigbu 2014; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). This violence is slow to start, gradual to develop, and entrenched in dangerous heteronormative expectations of gender roles and power imbalances (Chung 2007; Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala, Molleda, Rodriguez-Franco, Galaz, Ramiro-Sanchez & Diaz 2014; Elias-Lambert et al. 2014; Shorey, Seavey, Brasfield, Febres, Fite & Stuart 2015). While physically violent and controlling behaviours such as, forcing a partner to have sex without their consent, are overtly recognised by young women as unacceptable dating behaviours, other more sinister forms of manipulation, control, and domination are much more likely to be recognised as 'normal' dating behaviour (Chung 2005; Elias-Lambert et al. 2014; Luft, Jenkins & Cameron 2012; Davies 2019), and this is a major concern.

The World Health Organisation (2013) identifies intimate partner violence as an ever-present, dangerous and pervasive reality for young women, with one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime, and 38% of all murdered women dying at the hand of a current or former partner. Australian statistics report similar findings, with one in four Australian women experiencing physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2017), 10 women per day being hospitalised for intimate partner related injuries (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2019), and an average of one woman per week being murdered by a current or former partner (Bryant & Bricknell 2012-2014). While the incidence of adult intimate partner and family violence is well documented, there is much less evidence on younger cohorts of women and in particular on the experiences of violence during less formalised relationships (Hooker et al. 2019) those often defined as 'going out' (Chung 2005) or commonly known as 'dating'.

Though Non-Governmental Organisations, such as *ReachOut Australia*, *1800RESPECT*, and dating violence specific app based services, such as *AskIzzy*, have engaged in nationwide education and support programs based on the enormity of intimate partner violence within Australia, it can be argued national statistics do not yet capture the true extent of the situation, particularly in the case of young people and dating violence. What is more, national statistics on violence against women not only fail to specify between rates of adult domestic violence and young adult dating violence, but also overwhelmingly fail to recognise non-physical forms of abuse altogether (AIHW 2019). Furthermore, while young women are experiencing dating violence at alarming rates, they have been shown to possess limited understanding about the specific nature and inherent dangers of dating violence (Chung 2005; Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala et al. 2014; Shorey et al. 2015; Barbaro-Kukade 2019), the ways they can protect themselves, and where to seek support after an incident (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; Jackson 2002; Baker 2003; Ashley & Foshee 2005; Chung 2007; Edwards, Dardis & Gidycz 2011; Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Lachman, Zweig, Dank & Yahner 2019;)

Research Objectives

This thesis seeks to address these issues by contributing empirical research exploring young Australian women's experience of dating violence, and by unpacking the social and cultural forces shaping these experiences in both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Firstly, the thesis aims to contribute new knowledge with regards to the specifically nature of the young adult dating relationship, and the ways in which violence and abuse manifests in these spaces. Secondly, the thesis aims to contribute to the current field of knowledge by producing an analysis of the ways in which dating violence is perpetuated through both social, cultural and gendered means. Finally, this thesis aims to contribute new knowledge with regards to the social impact of dating violence on young women. Demonstrating the impact of dating violence beyond that which is understood within the framework of psychology, but instead focuses on the ways in which the impact on young women can also be understood as highly social. The study is rooted in a feminist conceptual framework,

while also drawing from other sociological concepts such as individualisation, cultural-silence, identity construction, and shame in order to interrogate young women's experience of dating violence and the social forces shaping these experiences. Finally, this study contributes both qualitative and quantitative empirical research, from the responses of 79 young Australian women (18-26) through a purpose-built online survey, and seeks to answer these three research questions:

1. *What is the nature of young adult dating violence?*
2. *How is young adult dating violence perpetuated?*
3. *What is the social impact of young adult dating violence on young women?*

Key Terms

Active contention exists within dating violence literature surrounding the definition of key terms (see Chapter Two). As such, within this thesis the use of key terms require clarification. The terms 'young adult dating violence', 'violence', and 'abuse' are used interchangeably within this study, and defined as collectively encompassing both physical and non-physical violence and abuse occurring within the intimate partner relationships of young adults (18-26). Although the inclusion of both physical and non-physical forms of violence are heavily debated within the literature's understanding of dating violence (Jackson 1999; Teten, Ball, Valle, Noonan & Rosenbluth 2009; Geffner 2016; Brown & Hegarty 2018; Boyle 2019), this study aligns with those studies (Geffner 2016; Boyle 2019; Nordin 2019) arguing physical dating violence cannot be fully understood without also considering the imbalance of power, control, and manipulation taking place, referred to as acknowledging the 'context' of violent behaviours. In the same way, those young adult dating relationships in which physical violence is not present but high rates of manipulation, degradation, and coercion are taking place are referred to within this study with the

same gravity, by referring to these behaviours as ‘violent’, as well as ‘abusive’ experiences.

Positionality Statement

Feminist theoretical concepts emerged within the social silences in order to give voice to the experiences of women – a backlash against the long history of exploration into the male experience of the social world (Kim & McCann 2017). With the rise of feminist conceptual frameworks, and due to its grounding in activism, women were finally given the space to tell their stories and examine their experiences of the world within the academic field (Kim & McCann 2017). This study recognises the vital importance of allowing young women the space to share their understandings and experiences with dating violence as a gendered unit. It is important to situate myself as a researcher in this project, as a young Australian woman with a lived experience of dating violence — having been in a manipulative and coercive dating relationship. As such, the findings within the literature confirm my own experiences. It was not until several years after the relationship had ended that I was able to acknowledge and understand the extent of what I had undergone, particularly because the abuse I experienced was never physical. Instead, slowly, and without my notice I became isolated and vulnerable within the relationship. What is more, friends, family and acquaintances similarly struggled to identify this relationship as abusive; while I was manipulated, demeaned, coerced, and emotionally abused, there was no physical trace of this violence on my body.

The incidents described by the young women within this study are all too familiar to me, particularly with many participants drawing attention to the lack of recognition or support, and an emphasis on the lasting impact of dating violence on their lives. Now an educated post-graduate researcher in this topic, I have the advantage of recognising nuances potentially overlooked by researchers without this lived experience by being able to explore dating violence from both an insider and outsider positionality. The purposeful inclusion of this acknowledgement of my own

experiences with dating violence, along with the actualisation of the study overall, is intended to contribute towards the political act of defiance against the shame and silence shrouding young women's experience of dating violence within Australia. (Further consideration into the reflexivity involved in this study with regards to my researcher positionality are explored in Chapter Three.)

Conclusion

By working to understand the unique nature, perpetuation, and impact of young adult dating violence, this study will help contribute to the improvement of the support services, reporting mechanism, and education programs young women so urgently need. This study also contributes a methodological approach to young adult dating violence research through the online survey method. The methodology is based on providing space and anonymity for participants by the research taking place within the comfort of their own home in dealing with a potentially distressing topic. By being online the survey also takes the form of a highly utilised space by young adult women therefore providing for further comfort and ease of participants. Finally, by encouraging a participant driven focus to the study through repeated spaces for the young women participating to provide any further thoughts they had on the subject throughout the survey.

This thesis begins by exploring the literature regarding dating violence within the social sciences, with a particular focus on those studies conducted from an Australian perspective. Next, the methodological approach of this study will be examined, with attention being particularly drawn to the range of conceptual perspectives utilised, the ethical considerations, and the increased level of reflexivity required of this research - reflective of the insider/outside positionality of the researcher. This thesis will then provide an analysis and discussion of the findings of this study. First, the thesis will determine and discuss the nature of young adult dating violence, in order to better understand why dating violence needs to be addressed as a separate and nuanced issue, but within the broader context of intimate partner and family

violence. Second, the thesis will explore how dating violence is perpetuated in such an unseen manner. Third, this thesis will investigate the social impact of dating violence on young Australian women, focusing on the realms of friendships, future relationship, employment, education, and identity construction. The thesis will conclude by providing a summary of the key findings of this study, the contributions this study makes, and by providing suggestions for further research regarding dating violence unearthed during this study.

Chapter Two. Literature Review

Introduction

With young adult dating violence having been established so far within this thesis as a highly ambiguous, dangerous, and pressing reality facing many young Australian women, this thesis will next provide a review of the literature on the subject. This review has a primary focus on dating violence literature within the discipline of sociology, but also includes literature from several other disciplines, including that of psychology, criminology, public health, and social work. Literature was not considered for inclusion in this thesis if the focus was more to do with bullying, sexual harassment, male or non-binary victims, or revenge porn - as these issues, though connected within the phenomenon of dating violence, were beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, the literature review focuses on the nature of the young adult dating relationship and the experience of violence and abuse within these spaces, the social and cultural perpetuation of dating violence, and the social impact of dating violence on young women. The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate the varying ways in which dating violence is both researched and understood, and the significant gaps in the literature due to the limited amount of dating violence specific research taking place, particularly within the Australian context.

To being with, this literature review will examine the nature of the young adult dating relationship within both dating violence focused and non-dating violence focused literature, in order to establish the nature of the young adult dating relationship and how it relates to dating violence and abuse. The review will then explore the nature of dating violence, including rates and types of abuse, a potential typology of dating violence, and the digitalisation of dating violence prominent within the lives of young people. The review will then discuss conflict within dating violence literature regarding the incongruity of key terminology, particularly with reference to disciplinary differences, researcher/participant differences, and the

arguments concerning the inclusion of non-physical violence and abuse being considered within the framework of dating violence. Following this discussion, the review will explore the variety of theoretical and conceptual perspectives utilised within dating violence research, with a particular focus on the use of feminist theory. This literature review will then narrow in to focus on young women's experience of dating violence, exploring next the continued difficulty young women experience in recognising and distinguishing violent and abusive dating behaviours while they are taking place. Next investigating the role of heteronormativity in dating violence, focusing on the performativity of gender roles, and gendered expectations within dating relationship. The review will then explore the impact of dating violence on young women - the majority of these findings coming from psychology and the behavioural sciences, rather than a social and cultural focus. Following on from there, the review will investigate the role of individualisation, shame, and victim-blame in young women's experience of the responses of outsiders to incidents of dating violence. Finally, the review will explore the help-seeking behaviour of young women experiencing dating violence, and the ways in which current systems of education, reporting, and support services remain heavily underutilised by young women within Australia.

The Young Adult Dating Relationship

The definition of a 'dating' relationship is a key source of contention within dating violence literature (Chung 2005; Shorey, Cornelius & Bell 2008; Leadbeater, Connolly & Temple 2018) and also vital as the implication of this definition shapes the way we understand and label violence and abuse within these relationships. Stable and fulfilling intimate partner relationships in young adulthood have been found to directly influence positive mental and physical health, and result in the development of healthy future intimate partner relationships (Khaddouma & Gordon 2018). However, stark differences between age groups, types of dating relationships, commitment levels and levels of 'life enmeshment' within the literature results in researchers struggling to build upon previous scholarship exploring the dating relationships of young adults, and the way in which violence and abuse emerges

within these spaces (Baker 2003; Shorey et al. 2008; Leadbeater et al. 2018). Although the current body of literature is unable to uniformly define the dating relationship, active shaping and reshaping of the concept continues to take place. Chung's (2005) qualitative Australian study of 40 male and female high school students, determined three distinct dating relationships with varying degrees of commitment level and purpose. Firstly, 'going out with someone' includes public recognition as a couple, longer relationship length, expected monogamy, and emotional commitment. Secondly, the slightly more casual relationship termed 'seeing someone', involves a newness or shorter length to the relationship, less expectancy of monogamy, and more intermittent contact. Lastly, the highly casual and sexually focused relationship termed 'getting with someone', involves recently meeting, with no expectations of monogamy or ongoing contact (Chung 2005, p. 447). Alongside Chung (2005), Baker's (2003) qualitative study of 23 female Australian high school students, additionally notes the importance of dating relationships for practicing the roles young people expect from their future adult relationships. However, within these 'practice' romantic relationships, young people are dealing with the added influence of peer pressure, limited knowledge, or access to support, and 'romanticised' gender expectations (Baker 2003, p. 28).

Young Adult Dating Relationships and Adult Romantic Relationships

As much as dating relationships are a 'practice' for adult romantic relationships, there are also key differences between the age groups of dating couples. Leadbeater's et al. chapter within *Adolescent Dating Violence* (2018) suggests "the forms, functions, and positive and negative consequences of romantic relationships shift with age" (2018, p. 4). Dating relationships for youth are experienced differently by young adults due to factors such as age related views on sexual behaviours, the length and quality of relationships, the level of involved risk and reward, and the level of intensity and meaning given to the couple breaking up (Leadbeater et al. 2018). The dating relationships of young adults also have the potential to evolve, as couples move further towards commitment by living together or further casualising their dating relationships by establishing the perimeter of the relationship as strictly

sexual or 'hooking up' (Leadbeater et al. 2018). Differences similarly emerge when comparing marital relationships against dating relationships, with greater enmeshing of finances, family, and social connections, along with a combined place of residence being attributed to marital relationships. This overlapping of all aspects of married couple's lives can create a greater sense of being bound to one another, making intimate partner violence more acute and seemingly impossible to escape (Shorey et al. 2008). Shorey's et al. (2008) American review of dating violence conceptual frameworks suggests dating relationships involve reduced levels of enmeshment of lives compared to adult marital relationships. However, through naivety and an underdeveloped sense of acceptable dating behaviours, young women are more likely to perceive violent and controlling dating behaviours as protective and loving; accepting the validity of male domination and female subordination (Shorey et al. 2008). This ultimately makes the dating relationship an optimal location for control, abuse, and violence to take place uninhibited.

The Nature of Young Adult Dating Relationships

In addition to literature exploring the dating relationship with a focus of dating violence and abuse, research examining the dating relationship without the focus of dating violence is also pertinent to consider in this space, and provides a fuller picture of how the dating relationship is understood to take shape. An early study by Holland & Eisenhart (1990) exploring the romantic relationships of young people attending college in America found that dating and attraction are a significant part of the young adult college experience. They argue gendered expectations within these relationships mean that many young women 'overlooked' discontent within their relationship in order to avoid the embarrassment of a failed romantic relationship, dreading the loss of the social status their being in a relationship gained them (Holland & Eisenhart 1990). More recently, Boisvert & Poulin (2016) suggest romantic relationships in young adulthood are distinctly characterised by the variety and diversity necessary for the shifting stage in a young person's life-trajectory, as opposed to the more exploratory and shorter-lived romantic relationships experienced in adolescents. Tagliabue, Olivari, Giuliani & Confalonieri (2018) and

Khaddouma & Gordon (2018) further suggest during early adulthood the number of young people engaging in romantic relationships as well as the length of the relationships distinctly increases - as young adulthood is a life-stage particularly receptive to building the 'relational skills' involved in romantic relationships. Indeed, young adult relationships are referred to by Norona & Olmstead (2017) as 'dynamic', with an emphasis on the experience of young people feeling 'in-between' major life-stages, where exploration of identity and relationships are extremely normalised. Finally, Washburn-Busk, Vennum, McAllister & Busk (2020) argue young adult intimate partner relationships are shaped increasingly by economic, cultural, and technological developments in which romantic relationships are established through diverse pathways, completely foreign to previous generations of young people.

Defining Dating Violence

Just as difficult as it is to define the young adult dating relationship, researchers and young people themselves grapple with defining the meanings and parameters of 'dating violence'. DeKeseredy's (2000) American literature review examining dating violence definitions, argues the key source of contention within the literature is in regards to the inclusion of psychological abuse alongside physical and sexual violence within the definition. Researchers supporting the separation between these forms of abuse suggest the inclusion of psychological abuse within the definition 'trivialises' the more life threatening, and severe violence perpetrated through physical means (DeKeseredy 2000). Alternatively, researchers against this segregated definition suggest dating violence is much more 'multidimensional' than simply physical (DeKeseredy 2000). A further issue facing dating violence research is the recent rise in 'gender-neutral' language. DeKeseredy (2021) argues, gender-neutral terms, such as, 'intimate partner violence' and 'domestic violence' assume violence and abuse in these spaces is equal, instead of acknowledging the gendered power imbalances always present. These debates surrounding defining terms within dating violence literature significantly impact the kinds of data collected and the practical support generated by social and governmental services for young people experiencing dating violence (Jackson 1999, DeKeseredy 2000).

Physical and Non-Physical Dating Violence

Mahlstedt & Keeny's (1993) American study of 130 female university students - using both qualitative and quantitative methods, determined rates of physical dating violence are extremely high within the young adult community. The study found 67% of young people reported being pushed, 52% grabbed, and 48% slapped by a dating partner (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993). Additionally, 40-41% of violent experiences were perpetrated while their partner was under the influence of alcohol (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Williams & Smith 1994; Shorey et al. 2008; Hooker et al. 2019).

Although research focusing on physical violence has the benefit of providing firm 'rates' and 'types' of abusive behaviours taking place within the dating sphere, this narrow focus can oversimplify the complexity of abuse experienced (Jackson 1999). Instead, those studies which focus their attention on both physical and psychological abuse within dating relationships capture a much more holistic kind of abuse taking place, demonstrating the nuance and interrelatedness of physical and psychological abuse which makes intimate partner violence so dangerous and entrapping (Jackson 1999). Elias-Lambert's et al. (2014) quantitative study of 380 American boys and girls (12-14) determined extremely high rates of non-physical manipulative and controlling behaviours, such as, giving a partner the silent treatment (51%), accusing a partner of infidelity (32%), repeatedly checking up on a partner's whereabouts (45%), and blaming a partner for the couple fighting (25%), as also prominent within violence dating relationships. With manipulative and coercive behaviours taking place alongside physical forms of abuse, intimate partner violence can be understood as much more complicated and dangerous for young women. A slap is no longer just an isolated physical outburst, it becomes an interrelated sign of domination and control over a romantic partner. The way in which young women can experience multiple kinds of victimisations at the same time is understood within the literature as polyvictimization (Wolfe 2018; Semenza 2021) or the 'continuum of sexual violence' (Kelly 1987). These concepts demonstrate the nature of multiple types of violence and abuse to seep into and build off each other.

The Range of Dating Relationships

Scholars have established differing experiences of dating violence based on the age and relationship length of the couple (Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Davies 2019; Hooker et al. 2019). Where high-school-aged dating couples generally have increased access to the support and advice of family, teachers, and peers when experiencing incidences of dating violence, young adult dating relationships are more likely to be conducted away from the watchful eyes of family and teachers (Davies 2019; Hooker et al. 2019). Davies' (2019) quantitative (220) and qualitative (25) study of Welsh female high school students (15-18) identified the attribute of a perpetually present social network for young women, being much more likely for someone to notice abusive dating behaviour and to have the opportunity to intervene. Similarly, Barbaro-Kukade's (2019) qualitative study of 17 female campus-based college students within the United States, determined that the length a couple has been together directly affects the severity of the abuse perpetrated. The study suggests that in the earlier stages of a dating relationship manipulation and physical abuse are typically much less intense, compared with the severity of abuse perpetrated further into the relationship, in which the victims have time to become isolated, vulnerable, and trapped in a cycle of abuse. Similarly, definitional problems occur when considering rape taking place on a first date, in comparison to rape taking place regularly throughout a much more established relationship (Nicolaidis & Paranjape's 2009). Nicolaidis & Paranjape's (2009) investigation of definitions and terminology within dating violence literature, suggests the needs of the victim will be very different and treatment of the two situations requires very different handling, however both fall within the definition of dating violence.

Young Adult Dating Violence and Adult Domestic Violence

Scholars examining the parameters of dating violence have also sought comparisons to adult domestic violence, particularly sought after as the volume of domestic violence literature is robust in comparison to that of dating violence. Zweig, Yahner, Dank & Lachman's (2014) study of 5,647 students (16-18) examining the potential

Johnson's 1995 intimate partner violence typology has for better understanding dating violence typologies within the American context, argues the typologies can successfully be replicated from domestic to dating violence. However, the study found dating violence predominantly emerged as 'situational couple violence' - experienced through physical means without overarching coercive control, while adult domestic violence was predominantly experienced as 'intimate terrorism' - in which a partner threatens, intimidates, and controls the other through emotional and psychological abuse. These differing results demonstrate the importance for young adult and adult romantic relationships to be addressed as individual issues, within the same social problem.

Same-Sex Dating Violence

Due to the limited number of studies pertaining to dating violence as a whole, it is not surprising that there is little research on dating violence perpetrated within same-sex dating relationships. Researchers primarily address the issue by either establishing their study as only focusing on heterosexual couples, suggesting this male/female dynamic results in the highest rates of abuse (Baker 2003); or, as within Daff, McEwan & Luebbers (2018) quantitative Australian study of 423 male and female students (14-18), researchers simply acknowledge the gap of same-sex relationships within their research being due to the limited response rate of their study. However, the literature focusing on same-sex dating violence is gradually expanding and unearthing some key differences between same-sex and opposite-sex dating violence. Gillum & DiFulvio's (2012) American study of 109 sexual minority couples (18-24) determined that while same-sex dating relationships experience similar forms of dating violence as heterosexual couples, additional issues are also faced. This includes the added strain within same-sex dating relationships of internalised and externalised homophobia and the difficulty in the navigation of conflicting gender role stereotypes within the heteronormative romantic relationship framework.

Bermea, Eeden-Moorefield & Khaw's (2019) study of American support service providers management of same-sex dating violence builds on these findings, arguing an abuser within a same-sex relationship can also use the threat of 'outing' their partner's sexual orientation, disconnecting their partner from the queer community, or enforcing their partner's gender expression (e.g. making them present in a more masculine or feminine way) in order to control a partner - forms of abuse and control solely connected with same-sex relationships. The study also found domination and control takes place through abusers reinforcing the idea that the victim would be increasingly disbelieved by friends and police because of their gender identity. Finally, both a qualitative study by Donovan & Barnes (2020) of 17 men and 19 women and Langenderfer-Magruder, Whitfield, Walls, Kattari & Ramos's (2016) quantitative study of 1,139 individuals (18 and over), suggest much higher rates of victimisation are experienced by transgender individuals, compared with their cisgender peers, regardless of sexual orientation. However, the studies note that much of LGBTQ+ victimisation research primarily investigates hate-crime, and acquaintance-related violence rather than abuse within intimate relationships.

Technology-Facilitated Dating Violence

While dating violence traditionally takes place in-person, the uprising of mobile phone use, instant messaging and social media has created a new landscape for abuse within dating relationships to flourish. This emerging arena for dating violence has not replaced the more traditional face-to-face dating violence, instead this new set of abusive strategies are perpetrated in conjunction with traditional dating violence. Stonard, Bowen, Lawrence & Price (2014) suggests limited research and varied methodologies in digital dating violence research have resulted in inconsistent prevalence rates, making comparisons and generalisations difficult to make. However, some consistencies within the literature are starting to take shape. Three studies examining American high school students (Zweig, Dank, Yahner & Lachman 2013; Reed, Tolman & Ward 2016; 2017) reported to have found similar rates of technology-facilitated dating violence were experienced relatively evenly between the genders, with young women perpetrating this form of abuse as much as young

men. These studies additionally suggest, however, that young women were much more likely than young men to experience higher levels of distress related to abuse, and higher rates of sexual harassment and abuse through digital methods (Zweig et al. 2013; Reed et al. 2016; 2017).

Digital dating violence can consist of anything from purposefully encouraging partner jealousy through social media based posting, tagging, and instant messaging, to constantly calling a partner on their mobile or utilising mobile tracking apps to check up on a partner's whereabouts (Stonard et al. 2014; Baker & Carreno 2016; Stonard, Bowen, Walker & Price 2017). As such, controlling and psychologically abusive behaviours are some of the most common and serious forms of digital dating violence (Stonard et al. 2014; Baker & Carreno 2016; Stonard et al. 2017). A UK study by Stonard et al. (2017) examining the use of technology within dating relationships through semi-structured focus groups with 52 males and females (12-18), found that while technology can be used positively within dating relationships to generate, develop, and maintain relationship bonds and commitment, the negative impacts of unhealthy communication and monitoring are just as prominent. One female (14-15) participant from the study referred to the strain of being in constant contact with a dating partner, suggesting, "...it can be sweet stuff then if it continues then it's obsessive, annoying" (Stonard et al. 2017, p. 2094). Social media platforms are unique in their ability to provide both public and private spaces in which a dating partner can monitor, control, antagonise, and abuse their romantic partner (Baker & Carreno 2016). Similarly, instant messaging allows for constant contact between dating partners. The experience of traditional 'in-person' dating violence overlapping with digital dating violence can become a constant and almost omni-present experience of abuse for the victim. Stonard et al. (2017) exemplified this experience of omni-presence, with one participant suggesting "they'll always find a way to get to you" (Stonard et al. 2017, p. 2102).

Incongruity Within Dating Violence Terminology and Discourse

Having already acknowledged the struggle of defining what is included and excluded from the definition of dating violence, it is important to next address the tensions within the literature regarding the terminology of dating violence between scholars, research participants, and legal and political institutions. Schneider's (2000) study of feminist lawmaking argues in the very beginning stages of intimate partner violence being recognised publicly as a criminal offence, the ability to articulate the severity of the physical violence women were experiencing translated the most successfully within the contexts of the legal system. Even though the psychological abuse resulting from coercive control was universally recognised by victims as more negatively impacting, society was much more able to recognise extreme physical violence as punishable, and worth protecting women from; the 'number of hits' experienced by women was key to the success of intimate partner violence cases within the legal system (Schneider 2000). As such, 'wife battery' was the dominant recognised term for intimate partner violence (Schneider 2000). However, as it became increasingly prevalent that psychological abuse and coercive control made up an integral part of the 'wife battery' experience, and the term 'abuse' became a much more utilised term. It was felt that the term 'abuse' subtly encapsulated all the nuances of both physical and psychological trauma experienced within intimate partner violence within the legal system (Schneider 2000). The evolution of intimate partner violence terminology did not stop there. Feminist activists were conflicted, both fighting for this form of violent crime to be uniquely identifiable to the violence happening between married or romantic couples by the inclusion of qualifiers such as 'intimate' or 'domestic' in the terminology, while at the same time struggling to make this problem seen as a broader social issue concerning gender power imbalance (Boyle 2019). Feminists pushed back against the reigning patriarchal ideology that the problems of women were not as important as the problems of men (Boyle 2019). However, feminists remain conflicted between conveying the severity and criminality of intimate partner violence, and the 'everyday' nature of these experiences of women (Boyle 2019).

Terminology Incongruity Between Fields

Another key struggle within dating violence terminology is the way different fields of work conceptualise the meaning of intimate partner violence differently and in doing so utilise differing terminology. Nicolaidis & Paranjape's (2009) study of the definitional problems facing intimate partner violence literature, argues while the legal system and criminologists focus on the ways in which intimate partner violence breaks laws, this form of violence is understood through terms of simple or aggravated assault, with little capacity within the terminology available to them to criminalise the psychological or coercive control aspect deeply embedded within the experience of intimate partner violence. Alternatively, public health researchers conceptualise intimate partner violence in terms of strategy and surveillance, with monitoring, quantifying, and working to reduce risk as the key components of their interaction with the phenomenon (Nicolaidis & Paranjape 2009). This conceptualisation then shifts again within the field of mental health, which consider intimate partner violence in terms of the psychological impact on victims, and relevance to an established list of qualifying trauma responses (Nicolaidis & Paranjape 2009). Alternate conceptualisation of intimate partner violence also occurs within large-scale survey and census collection, which often fail to distinguish intimate partner violence from general violence or broader violence against women (Smith 1994). In this case, women tend to report low levels of violence as their experiences fail to accurately align with the criminal violence options listed within the surveys, resulting in national statistical rates of intimate partner violence -let alone dating violence- as being highly inaccurate, and reporting rates being much lower than findings suggest within smaller-scale, more qualitative focused research (Smith 1994). Finally, some governments and political organisations seek accuracy within their use of terminology, such as the United Kingdom Home Office, who use the combination of 'domestic violence and abuse (DVA)' to define intimate partner violence (Donovan & Barnes 2020).

Terminology Incongruity within Sociology

While disciplinary differences in terminology use are common, terminology tension also exists within the field of sociology itself. Jackson's (1999) review of the issues facing dating violence literature, suggests the difficulty faced by the social sciences in their use of terminology results from terms like 'abuse' and 'violence' being based on personal judgement, rather than an objectivity. The study notes however, this tension is not unique to intimate partner violence research but is present within all violence focused social research (Jackson 1999). Collectively, sociological literature interchangeably utilises the terms 'abuse' and 'violence' with little universally recognised clarification over the distinction and overlap between the two terms. Teten et al. (2009) argue variation in terminology is highly problematic because without additional clarification 'dating violence' can refer to both solely coercive controlled relationships at the same time as relationships with coercive control and severe physical and sexual violence. However, physical dating violence cannot be fully understood without also considering the imbalance of power, control, and manipulation taking place, referred to as acknowledging the 'context' of violent behaviours (Geffner 2016; Boyle 2019; Nordin 2019), therefore dating violence is most usefully understood as incorporating both physical and psychological forms of violence and abuse.

Periphery Terminology

An entire cohort of periphery terminology are also frequently used within sociological research into intimate partner violence, such as, 'aggression', 'assault', 'rape', and 'harassment', each implying very different forms of connection between victim and perpetrator as well as the level of severity and physicalness of the violence/abuse. Boyle (2019) argues 'abuse' better encapsulates the experience of intimate partner violence as the term evokes more than an isolated physical violence, instead articulating a nature of ongoing interrelated physical and psychological maltreatment by one partner against the other. However, tension arises when considering the term 'abuse' has the propensity to down-grade the severity of the implied violence (Boyle 2019). Geffner (2016) suggests the term

‘abuse’ aids intimate partner violence research by assuming a personal connection and power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator, an intimate connection absent from other forms of interpersonal violence. However, Geffner distinguishes physical violence as separate from abuse, which is understood as involving intimidation, control, and trauma, arguing there can be physical violence within a relationship without abuse, and vice versa.

Methods for Managing Terminology Incongruity

Clear distinctions over terminology within social research are key to the progression of dating violence research integrity and broader usefulness. Within their study of digital dating violence, Brown & Hegarty (2018) suggest for ‘sound measurement’ to take place, subtle differences between dating violence terminology need to be acknowledged and explored further in order for ‘sound instruments’ of research to be developed. As a result of this lack of universal definitions relating to terminology within dating violence, the wide use of terms and the use of these terms interchangeably surfaces as the most successful strategy, until further clarification of definitions within dating violence discourse are widely agreed upon and understood. This strategy enables researchers and participants the space to understand each other within the framework of language available to them, until future open discourse surrounding dating violence within the community make universal meanings available to both parties.

Context, Motive, and Impact

A further prominent argument within the literature regarding the terminology tension of intimate partner violence, suggests terminology greatly depends on the context, motive, and impact of the violence or abuse. Nordin’s (2019) study of 498 male and female college students from a large public school in southern USA, explored the differing use of terminology referring to dating violence through the use of vignettes. They found contextual factors contributing to dating violence, such as,

gender, relationship length, and provocation had a distinct impact on what terminology was considered appropriate and what was overall 'counted' as dating violence by participants. For example, female-perpetrated physical violence was identified as being less recognisable as a form of dating violence than male-perpetrated physical violence; and more definitively dating violence if the action was unprovoked. The inclusion of 'context' in the conceptualisation of dating violence terminology, highlights the way in which dating violence and abuse are both cumulative and ongoing, and the way that narrowing in on particular kinds of violence or abuse can misinterpret the level of severity involved. Boyle (2017) suggests an act of violence or abuse may seem innocuous on its own, but emerging amongst a series of other intimidating, threatening, and isolating behaviours can be experienced by the victim in a very different way.

Geffner (2016) argues context, motivation and impact are also crucial for understanding intimate partner violence in the broader context of the gender inequality at the heart of this form of violence. Helplessness, staying in the relationship, fear, and anxiety, are all common responses experienced by victims of intimate partner violence, and are all at the same time confusing responses to understand without the context of gendered power imbalances and the motivation of control being recognised (Geffner 2016). Additionally, context, motivation, and impact differ widely depending on the cultural background, ethnicity, class, and (dis)ability of both the victim and perpetrator. Abramsky, Watts, Garcia-Moreno, Devries, Kiss, Ellsberg, Jansen & Heise (2011) argue it is important to remember unacceptable transgressions or risky behaviour in some situations can be cultural expectations and norms in another, extending the need for context, motivation, and impact to include an intersectional approach to our understanding.

Researcher and Participant Terminology Tension

The differing use and understanding of terminology by the researcher and the participant is also a point of contention within the literature, particularly as the

majority of research within this area relies on self-reported, in-depth research methods, in which meanings can be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Barter (2009) explores the specific needs of young adult participants in relation to dating violence research terminology, arguing a 'one-size-fits-all' method of terminology in this arena does not work. Instead, Barter suggests an examination of the specific views and experiences of young people must be considered in the formulation of research material, referring to the complexity of researching intimate partner violence through the context of "diverse teenage relationships and intimate encounters" (Barter 2009, p. 214). Brown & Hegarty (2018) additionally suggest ambiguity in wording within dating violence research material is a primary cause of inconsistency and inaccuracy within the field. For example, a question presented to a participant regarding their partner threatening to end the relationship through social media is ambiguous as to whether the research is asking if the participant is concerned with being publicly threatened or humiliated, being publicly broken-up with, or both (Brown & Hegarty 2018). The study suggests a further hinderance to clarity within dating violence research is the use of terminology the participant may not grasp the meaning of (Brown & Hegarty 2018). For example, the terms 'compromising', 'humiliating', and 'derogatory' are frequently used within dating violence research material, leaving younger or less educated young people experiencing difficulty in comprehending their meanings (Brown & Hegarty 2018).

Theoretical Perspectives for Dating Violence Research

Disciplinary Differences

Although dating violence literature extends between multiple disciplines, such as, public health, social work, law, and psychology, sociological research into intimate partner violence benefits from the capacity to focus on the social structures allowing and perpetuating this kind of violence, in conjunction with exploring the individual experience and impact on both the victims and the perpetrators. Even within sociological research, dating violence can be explored through several differing theoretical perspectives. These theories range from: sociology of violence theories –

a perpetrator focused theory examining the violent expression of masculinity (Ray 2017); family violence theory – examining intimate partner violence as a form of familial violence, much the same as elder, sibling or child abuse (Lawson 2012); and, feminist theory – which focuses on intimate partner violence as a key issue within the wider social problem of violence against women (Walby 1990). While the combination of masculinity and violence theories, family violence theories, and feminist theories together offer a well-rounded exploration of dating violence through a sociological lens, feminist theory is crucial for investigating the personal experiences and impact of dating violence on young women themselves (Kim & McCann 2017). This theoretical perspective has a strong focus on the unique experience of being a woman and the inequalities and oppressions influencing that experience (Kim & McCann 2017). Feminist theory is key for intimate partner violence research as it insists on a dual exploration of both the ‘personal’ experience of abuse, and the ‘general’ experience of gender-based power imbalances and broader perpetration of violence against women - particularly relevant as the ‘general’ social experience is based on the ‘white male’ experience as the norm (Walby 1989; Schneider 2000; Lay & Daley 2007; Lawson 2012; Kim & McCann 2017; Jackson 2018).

Feminist Theoretical Perspectives

Feminist theory argues that we live in a patriarchal construction of society, in which the division of power is based on gender and favours the male body above the female body (Walby 1989). Walby (1989) suggests patriarchal culture is much better understood as ‘institutionally rooted’ misogyny, rather than an ideology or attitude towards women. In term of dating violence, patriarchal culture not only tolerates, but perpetuates violence against women as a way of ensuring the continuation of the status of men as the more dominant and powerful. This means that not only do men perpetrate violence against women at alarmingly high rates, law enforcement and legal systems are ill-equipped to serve victims of intimate partner violence (Schneider 2000). One way this plays out within dating violence literature is the

examination of attitudes towards violence against women, which find young men hold much more supportive attitudes towards the normalisation of dating violence (Jackson 1999) and report lower levels of attitudinal support for gender equality (Politoff, Crabbe, Honey, Mannix, Mickle, Morgan, Parkes, Powell, Stubbs, Ward, & Webster 2019). Another way this plays out is that male violence against women is generally understood as being perpetrated by 'bad men', a situation which requires 'good men' to protect women and punish the 'bad men' (Phipps 2020). However, research demonstrates the universality of intimate partner violence, suggesting this kind of abuse is instead perpetrated by normal, average, everyday men (Phipps 2020).

Feminist theories focus on raising the voice of women and focusing in on their lived experiences of the world, as set apart from the 'norm' of the male experience of the world (Kim & McCann 2017). Lamb (1999) suggest the concepts of 'silence' and 'voice' are the most poignant metaphors within the feminist arsenal, used to cut through the male experience, and shed light on the female experience. However, intersectionality is crucial in understanding the differing layers of oppression that make up individual women's experience, rather than mistakenly thinking the experience of all women is universal. The concept of intersectionality was developed by Crenshaw (1991), arguing oppression is not one-size-fits-all, rather individuals are made up of a multitude of oppressions, interlacing, creating a unique experience of oppression for each individual, based on ethnicity, sexual preference, gender identity, class, age, (dis)ability and other qualifying factors. Within dating violence research, intersectionality demonstrates the experience of dating violence, and afterwards in seeking support, is markedly different depending on the intersectionality of oppression facing the victim (Walby 1989, Mays 2006, Everhart & Hunnicutt 2013). Rather than the violence simply being based on gendered power imbalances, oppression of low economic status or ethnicity can add additional sources of oppression. Dunn (2004) suggests a lack of intersectionality within the concept of the 'ideal victims' is one of the primary ways a lack of intersectionality

within the understanding of dating violence can negatively impact young women, as they may not feel they 'fit' the narrowly constructed version of who can be a victim.

The Difficulty Experienced in Recognising Dating Violence

Focusing in on young women's experience of dating violence, a prominent issue that emerges within the literature surrounds the difficulty young women experience in recognising dating violence (Chung 2005; Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala et al. 2014; Shorey et al. 2015; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). While both physical and non-physical violence has been established as prominent within dating relationships (Hooker et al. 2019), young people have been shown to experience difficulty in articulating exactly what behaviours are considered abusive within a dating relationship. An example of this can be seen in Smith, Winokur & Palenski (2005) quantitative American study of 171 Hispanic high school students. The students were asked to define 'dating violence', to which 45 were unable to provide an answer (Smith et al. 2005). If a student reports personally experiencing or witnessing dating violence, however, they were much more able to provide some sort of a definition (Smith et al. 2005; Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders & Weisz 2008). What is more, only 18% of participants within the study recognised verbal or psychological abuse as being a part of dating violence (Smith et al. 2005, p. 10). Meanwhile, rates of severe coercive control-based dating violence are alarmingly high, and within these relationships, isolation, degradation, intimidation and sexual assault or sexual abuse are extremely common (Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Reflecting on their experiences with coercive control, young women within Barbaro-Kukade's (2019) study noted the ways in which they normalised their partner's seemingly harmless or fleeting abusive behaviours without much understanding of how far the abuse would progress (Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Participants reported that by the time they started to feel manipulated and abused the relationship was already highly dangerous and controlling (Barbaro-Kukade 2019).

Early Warning Signs

Similar studies examining the ‘unperceived’ nature of early warning signs of abuse (Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala et al. 2014), uncovered large proportions of high school and university students had experienced abusive behaviours seemingly without their knowledge. While 88% (Ayala et al. 2014) of students believed they had not experienced any early warning signs of abuse, substantial rates reported experiencing fear (15.9%), jealous and possessive behaviour (60%), and entrapment (27%) within their dating relationships; all of which are within the typology of early warning signs of dating abuse (Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala et al. 2014). Participants further demonstrated a lack of knowledge in how to respond to these early warning signs of abuse in a way that discouraged further repetition or escalation of the behaviours – apart from social distancing themselves from their perpetrator (Ayala et al. 2014).

Misrecognition of Abuse

A further factor influencing young women’s lack of recognition is the way in which abuse is frequently misrecognised as positive ‘romantic’ behaviour. Studies examining dating violence perpetrated through coercive control report a disconnect in victims recognising abusive behaviour perpetrated against them. Chung’s (2005) study of 25 female and 15 male Australian high school students determined practices of heteronormative ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ gender norms within dating relationships, resulted in frequent misrecognition of controlling, jealous or dominating behaviours as ‘protective’ and ‘loving’. Young women being told by their partner not to wear tight or revealing clothing, not to go out at night without them, or not to talk to other males, were repeatedly acknowledged as a demonstration of the way in which their partner wanted to ‘protect’ them (Chung 2005). The ways these behaviours establish a dynamic of patriarchal domination and control within the relationship remain dangerously overlooked by many young women.

Young women were also found to take responsibility for the abuse themselves as a way of managing the behaviour of their partner. For example, one young woman

within Chung's (2007) study suggested she no longer wore tight fitting tops because it made her partner angry that she was showing off her body to other men. In this situation, the young woman took responsibility for her partner's negative reaction and made an effort to change her own behaviour in order to keep the peace (Chung 2007). Chung also identified the shift young women experience from their identity as a 'single' individual to a member of a 'couple', causing significant normalising and minimising behaviours as young women feel the negative behaviour of their partner, through their 'couple identity', directly reflects on their own sense of self. A further way in which victims of dating violence take responsibility for the abuse they experience can be seen in the way the volatility of the relationship may cause the victim themselves to instigate or escalate arguments within the relationship, and sometime to have initiated physical violence themselves, blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator (Bermea, Eeden-Moorefield & Khaw 2019). However, it is important to note that 'problematic behaviour' of victims is extremely common as they experience long durations in anxiety and fear, revealing the complexity of the 'victim' positionality (Bermea et al. 2019).

Dulling of Abusive Behaviour

Finally, scholars have established the difficulty young women experience in recognising dating violence through a perpetrator's use of occasional and sporadic 'supportive' behaviour, which 'dulls' the effect of other negative and abusive behaviour (Shorey et al. 2015; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Violent dating relationships in which the perpetrator demonstrated affection and support for their partner in between outbursts of violence and abuse, resulted in extended abusive relationship lengths as the abuse was never consistent enough for victims to recognise the level of distress they were experiencing (Shorey et al. 2015). Commonly seen within highly coercive and dominating adult intimate partner violence, women experiencing this 'hot and cold' kind of abusive relationships are prone to develop severe anxiety and fear within the relationships, as they never know how their partner will react to any given situation, they find themselves always on the alert for danger (Johnson 2008).

The Role of Heteronormativity in Dating Violence

Heteronormativity within dating relationships refers to the set of behaviours expected of each member of a couple based on their biological sex. Based on these binary opposites, men are expected to present masculine, and women are expected to present feminine; which within a patriarchal social structure results in male domination and female subordination. Feminist theories argue it is difficult to see everyday dating violence in our communities because women are used to altering their behaviours, routines, and reactions in order to accommodate men's power over them (Walby 1989). In this way, dating violence becomes part of the 'everyday misogyny' feminism contends with (Walby 1989). Unless violence against women is extreme, physical, and expressed in an inappropriate situation, little social and cultural notice is taken (Walby 1989).

Managing a Male Dating Partner's Emotions

Heteronormativity has been a primary concept of interest within dating violence literature, particularly with regards to the ideologies of 'emotionally intelligent women' and 'emotionally deficient men' (Chung 2005; Luft et al. 2012; Elias-Lambert et al. 2014). Luft's et al. (2012) qualitative study of 28 female Canadian students (14-18), found young women repeatedly struggle to navigate gendered expectations of when to 'stand up for themselves', and when to 'make sacrifices' within their dating relationships. A recurring theme is women being both responsible for their partner's emotions, and 'powerful' within the relationship due to their ability to navigate and manage their partner's emotions. Young women also minimise and naturalise abusive behaviour such as harassment, controlling behaviour, and unwanted attention from other men, by responding with 'passivity' (Elias-Lambert et al. 2014; Davies 2019). Passive reactions involving ignoring or dismissing negative behaviour and expressing empathy when faced with their partner's excuses for their abusive behaviour acts as a way of managing their partner's emotions and their own safety (Davies 2019).

Young women regularly work to minimize their boyfriend's 'bad moods' by pleasing their boyfriend through their own reactions to his behaviour (Davies 2019). Similarly, young women demonstrate a belief that their possession of a higher level of emotional intelligence over that of their male counterparts provides them with an equalising power within the relationship. While their partner may be physically controlling, young women believe they can hold their own, by being as equally emotionally controlling (Chung 2005; Davies 2019). This paradigm helps to explain why dating violence is understood to be such a 'bidirectional' form of intimate partner violence (Foshee 1996; Hanna 2006; Lichter & McCloskey 2004; Clark 2013; Palmetto, Davidson, Breitbart & Rickert 2013; Zweig et al. 2014; Taquette & Monterio 2019). Young women see their ability to manage and control their partner's emotions as a distinctly feminine skill; one which their male counterparts do not possess (Chung 2005).

Excusing, Minimising, and Normalising Abusive Behaviour

Young women excuse, minimise, and normalise abuse in several different ways. Firstly, by deflecting responsibility away from their partner, young women are able to 'dull' the severity of the abusive behaviour. Young women repeatedly refer to the abusive behaviour of their boyfriend as 'just a phase', of which the boyfriend will 'grow out of' (Chung 2007; Luft et al. 2012). Chung's (2007) qualitative study of 25 young Australian women (14-18), found that when experiencing intimidation and controlling behaviours young women were prone to deflect responsibility away from their partner by framing the incident as 'unavoidable' or simply a short tempered 'character flaw'. Similarly, young women were found to brush off verbal and physical abuse by their partner as a 'natural response' to their abusive family background (Chung 2007). Poignantly, the same study also found that most young women would forgive episodes of violence if their partner showed remorse, without regard for how many times the violence happened or the increasing rates of severity of the violence (Chung 2007).

Normalisation of Sexual Coercion

Alarmingly high rates of dating violence are perpetrated through sexual means, yet very few women actually recognise sexual coercion or forced sex with a partner as sexual assault in a dating situation (Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Hooker et al. 2019). Literature examining the perpetration of sexual assault through coercion in dating relationships suggest that the expectations and performances of gender roles play a distinct role in how and why this eventuates. In particular the myth of 'sexually submissive women' and 'sexually dominant men' may help explain its incidence (Hird & Jackson 2001). Hird & Jackson's (2001) qualitative study of male and female high school students (15-18) in New Zealand, suggests dating relationships continue to be shaped by the patriarchal societal structures involving feminine dichotomies of "angel" and "slut" and male dichotomies of "stud" and "wuss" (Hird & Jackson 2001). Young women's sexuality was seldom considered in its own right, rather, their sexuality was considered only in response to the 'activeness' of male sexuality (Hird & Jackson 2001). Young women were found to construct their sexual narrative by negotiating the role of the "slut" - who has "sex for fun", and the "angel" - who meaningfully "makes love" (Hird & Jackson 2001). Meanwhile young men were found to constantly try to maintain the position of "stud", by actively initiating and seeking-out sexual interactions in order to avoid falling into the sexually passive position of "wuss" (Hird & Jackson 2001).

Though young women spend a considerable amount of time negotiating refusals to the sexual offers of their dating partners, coercion within this area of the relationship is troublingly understood as a completely normal part of dating. Frith and Kitzinger's (2001) qualitative study of 58 British young women (modal age 20:8), argues that young women regularly take responsibility for men's feelings and emotions by engaging in sex with a male partner even when they would rather not, as a way of alleviating the chance of 'hurting' their partner's feelings by rejecting their sexual advances. This response assumes young women's responsibility for men's emotional

experience - positioning men as 'vulnerable', 'emotional weaklings' with 'delicate sexual egos', which must be appeased. Young women's response here is particularly damaging as it directly opposes traditional feminist approaches to sexual coercion, which regard males as the sexually manipulative, and females as sexually vulnerable (Frith and Kitzinger 2001). Finally, a third of the 200 young people (12-18) within Weiss's (2013) American study, were found to consider sexual harassment and sexual assault perpetrated by young men as 'trivial' and 'minor' issues, normal to the experience of being in high school, highlighting the deep-running normalisation of abusive behaviours between young people.

The Impact of Dating Violence on Young Women

Dating violence can have severe consequences on victim/survivors mental health and wellbeing. The majority of literature in this area come from psychology and the behavioural sciences, and consider issues such as the impact of dating violence on substance abuse (Ahmadabadi, Najman, Williams, Clavarino, d'Abbs & Smirnov 2019), eating disorders (Silverman, Raj, Mucci & Hathaway 2001), and anxiety and depression (Silverman et al. 2001; Brown, Cosgrave, Killackey, Pucell, Buckby & Yung 2009; Lövestad, Löve, Vaez & Krantz 2017). A notable gap in the literature is a sociological examination into the effect of dating violence on young women's lives. Barbaro-Kukade (2019) mentions several potential areas for sociological investigation into the negative effects of dating violence and victimisation. This study examining coercive control within the dating relationships of young, college campus-based American women, suggests the lasting negative impacts of abuse on mental and physical health are not the only areas of their lives affected. Participants within the study reported problems with anxiety, gastrointestinal issues, hair loss, and depression. Additionally, more social negative repercussions were also noted, such as self-blame, regret, and an altered self-image. Finally, Hooker et al. (2019) found that homelessness was also a major source of negative life-impact due to dating violence in regional areas of Australia.

Barbaro-Kukade's (2019) study is unique in the way it identifies several ways in which the college-campus environment assists in the perpetration and victimisation of dating violence. The study suggests the close living quarters, isolated environment of campus, and mapped-out class schedules all contribute to perpetrators gaining constant and easy access to their victims' whereabouts. Additionally, the study notes the negative impact of dating violence on academic achievement. Barbaro-Kukade's findings identify that the expectation of young women to spend all their free time with their partner, along with the additional stress of dealing with an abusive partner, meant that their academic achievement suffered. This finding is echoed by Luft et al. (2012) who similarly found young women were prone to sacrifice time on schoolwork and socialising with friends and family for time spent with their boyfriend, which contributed to considerable social distress upon the ending of an abusive relationship.

Impact on Future Dating Relationships

Scholars have also drawn their attention to the impact of dating violence on young women's attitudes towards future romantic relationships. Barbaro-Kukade (2019) suggests young women who experience dating violence undergo a changed understanding of dating relationships and the realisation of the commonness of coercive control. Prospero & Vohra-Gupta (2007) study of 200 male and female American students (18-25), found that females who had experienced dating violence victimisation were much more inclined to view dating relationships as negative, suggesting young women found it difficult to desire new romantic partners after their experience with abuse. The study found the more dating violence had been experienced, the more young women "expected" violent reactions from dating partners; situations involving rumours of infidelity, for instance, were likely to incite apprehension and the expectation of a violence or manipulative reaction (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta 2007). Similarly, Baker (2003) identified that young women living with heightened levels of manipulation and domination in their dating relationship indicated, "their strategy was to live in a state of constant surveillance" (Baker 2003, p. 31). Exposure to an abusive dating relationship has also been linked to repeat

abusive relationship experiences, and a cycle of abusive experiences that can make escape and recovery extremely difficult for the victim (Martin, McLean, Brooks & Wood 2019).

Impact on Construction of Identity

Lastly, dating violence victimisation has also been identified as having a profound and long-lasting effect on young women's identity construction. Sociological concepts of identity construction argue personal identity relies on social interaction in which the self is identified in relation to power (Weir 2013). Identities are understood as a source of individual and collective freedom, as they create and sustain meaning, connectivity to others, and are never reducible to one single feature; rather they are extremely multiple and diverse (Weir 2013; Meehan 2017). The impact of violence and abuse within an intimate relationship then has a strong effect on the identity construction of young people. Best's (2011) American study of youth identity construction suggests identity construction should be understood as a constantly evolving 'project', rather than an achievable and fixed sense of self. Best argues through interactional work based on 'claiming' and 'rejecting' identities reflected back at them, young people construct personal identity and a sense of self. Best also suggests the degree of identity ownership within a single social interaction is continually shifting. For example, a youth who is both a student and sister will predominantly identify as that which corresponds to the social situation they find themselves in. Best suggests youth identity is much more a 'task' than a 'given', and therefore this development of identity is a heavy focus of young people. In terms of dating violence, Boyle's (2017) study of sexual assault victims suggests the self-narratives of young people find themselves challenged by the trauma, commonly resulting in recognised symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which affects identity construction through high levels of deflection and discrepancies in the victims understanding of what happened to them and their relationship to power. Schneider (2000) additionally notes that personal identity construction can increasingly improve the wellbeing of young women after victimisation, and requires

‘personal privacy’ to be reinstated, primarily through the channels of safety, autonomy, seclusion, and healthy intimacy.

The Victim-Survivor Identity

A final area of interest within dating violence research regarding identity construction surrounding victimisation, concerns the binary labels of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’. ‘Victims’ of intimate partner violence are understood by Dunn (2015) as presenting an image of entrapment, while ‘survivors’ are conversely presented as possessing agency. This binary understanding suggests victims of dating violence must fall into one category or the other. Dunn (2004) argues the use of the term ‘victim’ disregards the value in the agency involved in women’s resistance, coping mechanisms, and ultimate survival. However, Boyle & Rodgers (2020) study of 169 male and female college students (18-24) - all with at least one experience of sexual assault, found that depending on the context the label of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ were accepted by some as strongly either way, others identified relating to both victim and survivor identities, with many also disidentifying with either. The study further argues the lack of identification with the ‘victim’ identity has a stronger connection to the development of self-esteem and emotional stability than the connection to a ‘survivor’ identity, suggesting the continued use of the ‘victim’ identity and terminology within support services and law enforcement discourse has the potential to be highly damaging for young women and instrumental in the long-lasting effect of dating violence on their personal identity construction (Boyle & Rodgers 2020).

The Role of Individualisation, Shame, and Victim-Blame in Dating Violence

Globalisation has created a constantly shifting and highly-connected lived experience of culture and society, where space and time do not have the same meanings they used to. Binaries of local and global, public and private, and structures and movements interweave to create the abstract systems which mediate their lives (Best 2011). Neoliberal ideologies grounded in ‘choice’ and ‘individual responsibility’

are dominant themes within dating violence literature and help to explain the broader structural forces perpetuating the high incidents of dating violence taking place. Drawing from the broader sociological understanding of individualisation developed by Beck (1992), Giddens (1991), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001), individualisation refers to the cultural shift from community to the individual. Responsibility, achievement, and choice are regarded with the upmost importance in society and in the case of structural oppressions, such as gender inequality, these are understood as individual problems (McRobbie 2009). McRobbie (2009) argues this shift in focus to personal responsibility has affected women differently than men, suggesting the concept of 'female individualism' can be used to explain women's rejection of feminism being replaced by an aggressive individualisation.

Individualisation

Individualisation works to revoke the work of feminism, shifting the responsibility of oppression and inequality from the societal structure to the individual, suggesting self-care practices and personal choice are the most valuable commodities young women can possess, and ignoring the broader social structures shaping the landscape these 'choices' are made within (Scharff 2011; Donovan & Barnes 2020). Storer & Strohl's (2017) study investigating the representation of teen dating violence within young adult literature found that the influence of societal-level structures contributing to the perpetuation of dating violence were neglected within narrative, instead dating violence was portrayed within the narratives as the individual impact of 'mental health' and 'family disfunction' on victims and perpetrators. Similarly, low self-esteem and relationship inexperience were represented within the narratives of the cause of dating violence (Storer & Strohl 2017). Further, Flood & Pease (2009) argue within their study exploring factors influencing the attitudes of victims, perpetrators, and broader society with regards to violence against women, that 'gender' and 'culture' are key to the development of attitudes regarding violence against women, within both the organisational, societal, and communal levels.

Shame

Townsend & Bailey's (2021) chapter within *Intimate Partner Violence* exploring the nature of domestic violence within the LGBTQ+ community, found that common misconceptions surrounding intimate partner violence remain prevalent. Some of the most common surrounded the idea that some people are deserving of the abuse they experience, abuse being most common among poorer communities, that if the situation gets really bad that the victim can just leave the relationship, and finally, that abuse is not as serious or severe if it is not physical (Townsend & Bailey 2021). Being vulnerable or overpowered is humiliating in our culture, and despite the work of victim-advocates, being a victim of abuse is disarmingly shameful (Lamb 1999). Shame can be described as 'spoiled identity' and the fear of stigmatisation, and has moved in recent years from the periphery of research to of central focus (Fallon 2012). A study by Fallon (2012) investigating the way shame operated for 30 young women (13-19) accessing emergency contraception, found narratives within popular culture of 'shameless youth' were unfounded, instead young people were filled with intense shame in anticipation of judgement. The study argues shame is a highly gendered and oppressing experience, suggesting young women even experience shame in the basic functions of the female body, such as menstruation.

Post-Feminist Ideologies

Feminist theories regarding dating violence suggest young women enter dating relationships with an expectation of the gendered equality, ever present within postfeminist discourses. Unfortunately, expectations of equality are quickly dissolved as young women contend with the deeply gendered power imbalances within their dating relationships (Sharpe 2001; Chung 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta 2007; Baker 2008; Clark 2013; Agostinho 2016; Gill 2016; Davies 2019; Iyer 2020). Baker's (2008) qualitative study of 55 young Australian women (15-18), suggests current ideologies held by young women surrounding the 'achievement' of feminism, result in a false sense of security and disillusionment, which ironically serve a masculine agenda as

young women protect their reputation by hiding and normalising the gendered inequalities they face. The crux of this problem arises in the shame young women experience in being 'unable' to establish equality and respect within their intimate relationships (Sharpe 2001; Chung 2005; Baker 2008; Clark 2013; Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013; Agostinho 2016; Gill 2016; Davies 2019; Iyer 2020). With shame being understood as deep feelings of "self-condemnation, powerlessness, feelings of disgrace, failure and inadequacy" (Weiss 2010, p. 286), young women understandably focus their attention on ways in which they can alleviate these feelings. By instigating a series of responses to abuse which work to excuse, minimise, and normalise the gendered inequality and abusive behaviour within their relationships, young women attempt to combat their feelings of shame by hiding their 'personal failure' to the outside world (Sharpe 2001; Chung 2005; Baker 2008; Clark 2013; Pomerantz, Raby & Stefanik 2013; Agostinho 2016; Gill 2016; Davies 2019; Iyer 2020).

Victim-Blame

Increasingly, scholars reflect on the role of victim-blame in shaping young women's normalisation of abuse. Fear of blame and judgement from others plays a significant role in shaping whether or not young women report incidences of abuse to anyone (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2007). In particular, young women fear the embarrassment of being blamed for either 'choosing the wrong boyfriend', and for 'putting up with the abuse', so much so, that they practice normalising behaviours as a way of hiding the abuse from their social network (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2007). Jackson's (2002) mixed method New Zealand study of 173 male and 200 female students (16-20), suggests young women who do end up disclosing incidences of dating violence to friends, are actually much less likely to leave abusive relationships due to the way in which the abuse becomes normalised in their own mind through 'dulling down' the severity when speaking with friends. This pattern of behaviour indicates that young women who do not disclose to a friend then have the advantage of being more able to see

the serious nature of the abusive behaviour against them and have more of an inclination to remove themselves from the relationship (Jackson 2002).

Help-Seeking Behaviour of Young Women Experiencing Dating Violence

An emerging concern addressed within dating violence literature involves the ways in which young women seek help and support during and after experiences of abuse (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; Jackson 2002; Baker 2003; Ashley & Foshee 2005; Chung 2007; Edwards et al. 2011; Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Lachman et al. 2019). Though the body of literature surrounding this topic is limited, the research has uncovered some crucial ways in which the needs of young women are not being met regarding education, social network support and support from official social, legal and law enforcement services. Current rates of young people reporting incidences of dating violence are meagre (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; Jackson 2002; Baker 2003; Ashley & Foshee 2005; Chung 2007; Edwards et al. 2011; Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Lachman et al. 2019). Lachman's et al. (2019) American study of 3,745 male and female high school students, identified that while 59% of participants reported having personally experienced dating violence, only 9% reported seeking any kind of help. Similarly, Ashley & Foshee's (2005) quantitative study of 225 American high school students (13-16), found 60% of victims did not seek any help after an incident of dating violence. Of those who did seek help, "89% of victims sought help from a friend, 12% sought help from a telephone hot-line, 8% sought the help of a non-school counsellor, and 13% sought help from a law enforcement officer" (Ashley & Foshee 2005, p. 29). Myhill's (2017) study of the importance of 'context' in domestic violence research, explores the struggle some victims of abuse experience due to having also been violent, even though the violence was pre-emptively resistant to expected violence, or fighting-back in the moment against violence from a partner. This physical violence perpetrated by the victim of abuse played a major role in victims feeling unable to come forward and seek help regarding the intimate partner abuse they were experiencing (Myhill 2017).

Disclosing to Friends

Overwhelmingly, scholars note the propensity for young women to report experiences of dating abuse solely to a friend, rather than seeking assistance from an adult in an official capacity; that is, if they report the abuse to anyone at all (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; Jackson 2002; Baker 2003; Chung 2007; Edwards et al. 2011; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Young women are identified as either seeking support from a friend or relative, or simply dealing with the situation on their own, by either attempting to end the relationship or stand up to their partner (Elias-Lambert et al. 2014). Disclosing experiences of dating violence to a friend has been found to elicit some highly positive responses, with young women advocating the positive effects of having someone like a trusted friend to talk to. Having someone their own age with whom they can 'vent' and gain non-judgmental encouragement and advice can make young women feel empowered to make their own 'healthy' choices within their dating relationship (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Jackson 2002; Edwards et al. 2011). However, young women also suggested responses from friends involving victim-blame or simply being told to leave the relationship, can cause the victim to refrain from seeking further advice from their social network (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993). Troublingly, Fry, Messinger, Rickert, O'Connor, Palmetto, Lessel & Davidson's (2013) quantitative study of 1,312 American male and female high school students, reported 80% of young people would respond to a friend's disclosure of abuse by telling them to end the relationship. Promisingly though, Dunn's (2004) American study of victim-repertoires within social movements, suggest the success of self-help women's groups for women experiencing shame and self-blame, as a way of reconfiguring their experiences from deviant to acceptable and understandable - crucial to establishing sound wellbeing.

Barriers to Help-Seeking

Experiences with victim-blaming regarding disclosure of incidents of dating violence were found within the literature to be deeply influential on the negative effect dating violence has on young women's lives (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001;

Chung 2002; 2007; Edwards et al. 2011). Young women without personal experience with dating violence regularly responded to friend's disclosure of victimisation by focusing on the behaviours and 'choices' made by the victim, rather than the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Chung 2007). Dating violence was largely understood by these young women as happening to 'other', 'vulnerable' young women with 'low self-esteem', from an 'abusive upbringing' (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Chung 2007). Responses commonly misinterpreted the gravity of the situation by minimising and normalising the abuse, or by making jokes (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Chung 2007). Baker (2003) found that experience with victim-blame while the victim was still in a relationship with the abuser, resulted in young women being much less likely to discuss, admit or seek advice from their social network in future. Young women experiencing abuse also reportedly felt that once the violence or argument 'blows over', the negative image of their dating partner in the opinions of their social network will be difficult to reverse, and experienced apprehension over their social network potentially demanding they end the relationship (Baker 2003). Lamb's (1999) study of the images and label constructing the 'real victim', argues victims of dating violence struggle to report abuse and seek support due to the rhetoric of 'victims' as only relating to someone who has experienced severe abuse over an extended duration. In comparison to these expectations of a 'real victim', many young people experiencing dating violence do not feel their experiences 'count' and are afraid of being seen as whining or seeking attention (Lamb 1999).

While apprehension over potential victim-blame is prevalent within reasons why young women fail to report incidents of dating violence to anyone at all, the culture of silence surrounding intimate partner violence is notable within dating violence literature. McCleary-Sills, Namy, Nyoni, Rweyemamu, Salvatory & Steven (2016) argue perpetrators of intimate partner violence are allowed to abuse their victims with impunity, as victims find themselves unable to disclose their experiences of abuse. This in turn compromises data reliability within intimate partner violence research and prevents relevant policies and funding taking place in support of

victims. The sociological concepts of the 'private' and 'public' spheres of society are extremely useful here, particularly as these concepts are highly gendered and based in the maintaining of men's power over women. This concept of the 'public' space being the domain of men, politics, and the marketplace, while in turn the 'private' space is recognised as the domain of women, marriage, and domestic life, is highly connected to the perpetuation of intimate partner violence as silence and secrecy is demanded of anything that goes on in the private sphere, referred to as the 'veil of the relationship' (Schneider 2000). Schneider (2000) suggests here that the concept of the private sphere works within the patriarchal culture of society to devalue the experiences of women, disallowing legal and political action on their behalf, and implies impunity to men regarding their behaviour within this space, with no chance of retribution in the public sphere regarding their actions in the private. In Australia, these concepts are all too familiar. Intimate partner violence is recognised within policy and legislation as inherently wrong, however this view is not universally shared or upheld, and neoliberal ideologies surrounding individual responsibility and the government 'hands-off' view regarding the private sphere of the family, the home, and the intimate relationship remains dominant (Murray & Powell 2011).

Though limited research examines the causes and consequences of young people failing to seek support from adults and professionals, Jackson's (2002) study suggests the reluctance is due to the fear of adults breaking confidentiality and causing serious ramifications for the dating partners. Additionally, Mahlstedt & Keeny (1993) suggest young women who report dating violence victimization to a male friend, father or brother commonly endure a reproduction of the pattern of male dominance over women as the response by their male confidant commonly focuses on providing protection and taking over control of the situation - rather than supporting and empowering the victim. Problems also occur when considering the preparedness and capability of service providers and law enforcement in responding to the complexity of coercive control. Brennan, Burton, Gormally & O'Leary (2019) found the lack of clear definition of coercive control within intimate partner violence victim support service providers systems means that 'personal discretion' was

routinely used in determining the needs of victims, which in turn increased the 'discounting' of many non-physical forms of abuse by workers under pressure. Similarly, young women who have fought back against their abusers frequently experience feeling as though they are perpetrators as well as victims, and in doing so are reluctant to seek support (Myhill 2017, Bermea, Eeden-Moorefield & Khaw 2019). Finally, in their study of queer experience with dating violence support services, Everhart & Hunnicutt (2013) argue support services using a 'one-size-fits-all' framework for dating violence runs the risk of deterring those who do not fall within this oversimplified understanding of the experience of dating violence victimisation.

Conclusion

This literature review explored the multidimensional social issue of young adult dating violence, examining literature from both sociology and several different disciplines of research, including psychology, criminology, and public health. The review started with an examination of the definitions of both the dating relationship and dating violence, and the tension present within the literature with regards to dating violence terminology. The review found current debates present distinct contestation within the literature regarding the inclusivity of non-physical dating violence within the term 'dating violence' - by both young people and researchers alike. Similarly, the review discussed the tension within the literature regarding the key terms 'violence' and 'abuse', finding a lack of universal agreement regarding which behaviours within the dating relationship can be labelled as which. The review also explored the use of theoretical perspectives used for the study of dating violence, such as family violence theory, sociology of violence theory, and feminist theory, demonstrating the multiple ways in which the issue of dating violence can be addressed. In particular, the review of the theoretical perspectives used for the study of dating violence highlighted advantages a feminist perspective can give to a study of young women's experiences, most prominently to give voice to young women themselves, but also to provide a conceptual structure for the simultaneous examination of the macro/social and the micro/individual experience of dating violence.

The remaining sections of this literature review focused more on young women's experience of dating violence. Firstly, the review explored the prominent issue of young women's difficulty in recognising dating violence, and discussed the role of gendered expectations and heteronormativity within the dating relationship. Dating violence was found to be hugely influenced by heteronormative gender roles and the ensuing imbalance of power. The review then investigated the literature addressing the impact of dating violence on young women, particularly noting the lack of research in this area outside of that coming from the discipline of psychology and the behavioural sciences. This gap in the literature raises questions about the impact of dating violence victimisation beyond the individual development of psychological disorders. While Barbaro-Kukade's (2019) study was able to touch on some of the ways dating violence had negatively impacted young women's social lives and achievement in higher education, a broader understanding of what the more social impact of dating violence has on young women is a notable gap requiring further research. The review then explored how the mechanisms of individualisation, victim-blame, and shame, shape the experience of dating violence, and the way in which young women seek support after experiencing an incident of dating violence. The review particularly focused on these influencing factors from the perspective of examining the ways they shape how young women themselves, their social network, and the wider community respond to disclosure of dating violence.

While the literature demonstrated that current knowledge surrounding the lack of young women seeking support and reporting dating violence is limited to recognising that this lack of help-seeking behaviour is taking place, a gap emerged in considering why it is taking place on a structural level. This is a particularly pressing area of further research as understanding the reasoning behind why young women fail to report or seek support after dating violence could have a direct influence on our improvement of these services and gaining higher rates of reporting and support service use by victims. This review of the existing body of literature regarding the

public health and safety crisis of young adult dating violence has demonstrated most significantly the urgent need for further research in this area, particularly with regards to the young adult age group, the social impact of dating violence on young women, a need for resolution regarding the terminology tension throughout the literature, and a broader exploration of the social and cultural forces shaping and driving the perpetration of dating violence in young adult dating relationships. The following chapter of this thesis builds upon the findings within this literature review, exploring the methodological approach and reflections related to this study.

Chapter Three. Methodology

Introduction

Having explored the multifaceted literature surrounding the social issue of dating violence within the previous chapter, this next chapter will outline and explain the methodological approach of this study. Dating violence is a highly pervasive and dangerous reality for many young women, with significant further research needed, particularly from within Australia. In what follows, I outline the study design, conceptual framework, participant sample, limitations, and ethical considerations for the methodological approach of this thesis. The study was designed and implemented to investigate the social phenomenon of young adult dating violence, and to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms involved in the unique nature, perpetuation, and impact of dating violence on young Australian women. The study aims to contribute to the limited body of Australian dating violence research by focusing on three research questions developed from gaps within the literature. Firstly, this thesis explores the nature of young adult dating violence; secondly, this thesis investigates how young adult dating violence is perpetuated; and finally, this thesis explores the social impact of dating violence on young women's lives, and what these findings can tell us about how to improve current support services, education, and reporting methods.

Study Design

For this study, I designed and conducted an online survey using the program Qualtrics, which was advertised and distributed through a dedicated page made on the social media platform Facebook. The survey ran for 10 days (6th August to 15th August, 2020), and received 79 completed surveys in that time. The survey was advertised to young women who identified as currently living in Australia, and who were between the ages of 18 and 26. The online survey was a combination of 'tick-all-appropriate' multiple-choice, true or false, closed, and short answer questions. The option for participants to identify their gender was left open ended, and only

participants who identified as 'female' were included in the study. Each question also provided space for participants to contribute more in-depth long-answer responses if they chose; an option many of the young women participating embraced. The survey responses included both qualitative and quantitative results, and were analysed through a conceptual framework including feminist concepts of heteronormativity, and gendered power imbalances - along with other sociological concepts such as, individualisation, cultural-silence, victim-blame, identity construction, and shame. These additional concepts allowed for the nuances of young Australian women's experiences with dating violence to be examined from more than just a gendered perspective. In particular, this study focused on the social and cultural ways young adult dating violence is unique, the way in which it is silently perpetuated, and the social impact on the lives of young women.

Drawing from the methodology of previous Australian dating violence research (Chung 2005; 2007; Daff et al. 2018; Barbaro-Kukade 2019) in which gaining an understanding of the experiences, attitudes, and knowledge of young people regarding dating violence was paramount, the survey questions were divided into three sections. The first section of the survey explored the level of knowledge young women possessed with regards to the nature of both dating and dating violence. The second section of the survey investigated young women's personal experiences or observations of peer experiences of dating violence and the ongoing effect on their lives of these experiences. The final section of the survey considered young women's attitudes and experiences with reporting and seeking support after an incident of dating violence. This final section of the survey also included a portion of questions asking the young women their suggestions regarding support services they felt could be improved or made available to young women. This section also allowed space for the young women to 'have their say', as they were encouraged to share any additional details about their knowledge and experiences with dating violence of which they felt the researcher should know.

The methodological approach of an online survey was made in order to attend to an issue that arose within previous dating violence research, in which young participants were found to alter their responses and behaviour in order to 'satisfy' or 'seek approval' of the researcher (Daff et al. 2018). This study sought to address the issue by creating a methodology in which the young women were able to respond to the questions without the researcher being present – in their own space, and in their own time. The online survey method also gave the participants within this study the ability to cease their contribution at any time and skip questions they did not wish to respond to. The survey also provided the space for additional responses from participants whenever they saw fit, allowing for this study to shift with the drive of its participants. This meant that the responses of the young women in which they felt a greater interest in contributing further details provided the researcher with much richer data and deeper analysis could be made. In this way, the study was designed to be partially participant driven – a particular attribute as this area is so under researched it was important for the researcher to address the areas the young women themselves felt were important to talk about.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws from a conceptual framework primarily based in feminist theoretical concepts in order to explore young women's experience of violence and abuse within the dating relationship. Feminist conceptual perspectives are key for this study as they both place the experiences of women in the forefront of their conceptualisation and seek to explore the experience of women from an individual/micro level, as well as a broader social and cultural/macro level (Lay & Daley 2007; Kim & McCann 2017). While Abbott, Tyler & Wallace (1996) argues feminist concepts do not all agree with each other in how to account for and interrogate the subordination of women to men, they do all agree that this subordination is very real and present, and requires putting the experiences of women at the forefront of research. Abbott, Tyler & Wallace (1996) also assert that these differences in feminist perspectives are not representatives of one's primacy over another, but instead contribute to the validity of feminist theoretical

perspectives due to the theory's continual re-evaluation and critique of each other. This study draws feminist theory in order to explore the experience of dating violence for young women and driving forces behind this phenomenon. This study draws from a feminist conceptual framework grounded in Foucault's (1982) theoretical concept of 'power' – which explores how power operates in the construction of society; Butler's (1990) theoretical concept of 'gender performativity' – which argues gender designation is achieved and maintained by active repetition and enactment of designated gendered behaviours; and Warner's (1991) concept of 'heteronormativity' – which argues the heterosexual relationships and attraction is the normalised form of sexuality within society and is guided by strict gender roles.

Within this study of dating violence, a feminist conceptual framework is used to investigate the gendered power imbalance and heteronormativity active and influential within the young adult dating relationship. Heteronormative dating behaviours dominate the romantic relationships of young adults and reinforce the power and control of men over women (Walby 1989; Lawson 2012). In relation to this study of young adult dating violence, the concept of heteronormativity refers to a set of socially constructed behaviours expected of each member of a couple based on their biological sex, and can be seen not only within the individual behaviours of those within a dating relationship, but also in broader social structures of society, such as how a dating couple are treated by outsiders or by government systems (Jackson 2018). Based on these binary opposites, men are expected to present masculine, and women are expected to present feminine – likewise, men are expected to be dominant, and women are expected to be subordinate (Walby 1989; Jackson 2018). Feminist theories argue it is difficult to see dating violence every day in our communities because women are used to altering their behaviours in order to accommodate men's power over them (Walby 1989; Jackson 2018). More specifically, this study investigates how heteronormativity, the performativity of gendered dating expectations, and gendered power imbalances reinforce the 'hidden', 'normalised' and 'victim-blaming' nature of young adult dating violence. While the primary conceptual framework of this study is feminist, it is important to

acknowledge the gaps in feminist concepts, particularly with regards to participants in this study who experienced dating violence within same-sex relationships. Queer theories challenge perceived societal norms by positioning heteronormativity and gender at the forefront (Marcus 2005; Sherlock 2016). Queer theories regularly push back against feminist theories, arguing feminist theories oversimplify gender and heteronormativity by focusing solely on the categories of men and women, overlooking the way these categorisations require questioning to begin with (Browne & Nash 2010). However, due to cultural and social underpinnings of intimate partner violence currently being deeply entrenched in the gendered power imbalances between the socially constructed categories of men and women, this study sought to explore the experiences of 'women' as a category. Therefore, this study relies on a feminist conceptual framework in analysing both queer and heterosexual participant responses by focusing on their experiences as young women, and is limited in exploration of the role of queerness in participant's responses.

Synonymously, the concept of cultural silence is explored within this study in relation to the patriarchal silencing of young adult dating violence, through the utilisation of the concept of the 'private sphere' of the home. As discussed within the literature review in Chapter Two, McCleary-Sills et al. (2016) argue perpetrators of intimate partner violence are allowed to abuse their victims with impunity, as victims find themselves unable to disclose their experiences of abuse. This concept of the 'public' space being the domain of men, politics, and the marketplace, while in turn the 'private' space is recognised as the domain of women, marriage, and domestic life, is highly connected to the perpetuation of intimate partner violence as the silence and secrecy is demanded within this space (Schneider 2000). Schneider (2000) suggests the concept of the 'private sphere' works within the patriarchal structure of society to devalue the experiences of women, disallowing legal and political action on their behalf, and implies impunity to men regarding their behaviour within this space; with no chance of retribution in the public sphere regarding their actions in the private.

The final key concept drawn from within this study is Beck (1992), Giddens (1991), and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001), concept of individualisation. As discussed within the literature review in Chapter Two, with society becoming more globalised, neoliberal ideologies grounded in ‘choice’ and ‘individual responsibility’ began emerging with the cultural shift from community to the individual. Responsibility, achievement, and choice are regarded with the upmost importance in society and in the case of structural oppressions, such as gender inequality, these are understood as individual problems (McRobbie 2009). McRobbie (2009) argues this shift in focus to personal responsibility has affected women differently than men, suggesting the concept of ‘female individualism’ can be used to explain women’s rejection of feminism being replaced by an aggressive individualisation. Additionally, individualisation works to revoke the work of feminism, shifting the responsibility of oppression and inequality from the societal structure to the individual – suggesting self-care practices and personal choice are the most valuable commodities young women can possess, and ignoring the broader social structures shaping the landscape these ‘choices’ are made within (Scharff 2011; Donovan & Barnes 2020).

The concept of individualisation is prominent within dating violence literature and helps to explain the broader structural forces perpetuating the high incidents of dating violence taking place, along with the responses to dating violence by both the victim and their wider community in the form of self-blame, victim-blame, and shame. Individualisation works within the feminist conceptual framework of this study to examine the ways in which female submissiveness and imbalanced gendered power relations are experienced by young women in abusive dating relationships as a personal flaw; rather than a result of living within a patriarchal structured society (Scharff 2011; Storer & Strohl 2017; Donovan & Barnes 2020). The concept of individualisation is used within this study to argue violence and abuse within the realm of the dating relationship is understood by society and young women themselves as the responsibility of the victim, and to explore why young women are so reluctant in seeking support or reporting dating violence. The concept of shame is also put to work within this study, alongside individualisation, in arguing

that despite the work of victim-advocates, being a victim of abuse is experienced as disarmingly shameful (Lamb 1999). Shame can be described as 'spoiled identity' and the fear of stigmatisation (Fallon 2012). Feminist theories regarding dating violence suggest young women enter dating relationships with an expectation of the gendered equality, ever present within postfeminist discourses. Unfortunately, expectations of equality are quickly dissolved as young women contend with the deeply gendered power imbalances within their dating relationships, and result in deep feelings of shame for young women (Sharpe 2001; Chung 2005; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta 2007; Baker 2008; Clark 2013; Gill 2016; Agostinho 2016; Davies 2019; Iyer 2020).

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, identities are understood within sociology as a source of individual and collective freedom, as they create and sustain meaning, connectivity to others and are never reducible to one single feature, rather they are extremely multiple and diverse (Weir 2013; Meehan 2017). The impact of violence and abuse within an intimate relationship then, can have a strong effect on the identity construction of young people (Best 2011; Boyle 2017; Meehan 2017). In terms of dating violence, Boyle's (2017) study of sexual assault victims suggests the self-narratives of young people find themselves challenged by the trauma, commonly resulting in recognised symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder which affects identity construction through high levels of deflection and discrepancies in the victims understanding of what happened to them and their relationship to power. The concept of identity construction then works within this study to explain the profound and long-lasting impact of dating violence victimisation on young women's construction of identity. In particular, how the experience of young adult dating violence can shift a young women's understanding of her place in society and how she views her own abilities and weaknesses.

Participant Sample

The sample of participants taking part in this study consisted of 11 young women aged 18-20 (13.92%), 27 young women aged 21-23 (34.18%), and 41 young women aged 24-26 (51.90%), as shown in Table 1. All participants identified as currently living within Australia. Sexual orientations within the sample, however, were varied, with the largest proportion of participants identifying as heterosexual (56.96%, n=45), followed by bisexual (25.31%, n=20), pansexual (7.59%, n=6), queer (1.26%, n=1), lesbian (1.26%, n=1), and a final group providing no response (7.59%, n=6). Within this study, the young women with sexual orientations other than those designated heterosexual had the potential to include dating violence in which the abusive dating partner could be male, female, or non-binary.

Table 1. Participant sample characteristics

Option	Response count	
	(n=79)	%
Gender		
Female	79	100.00%
Location		
Australia	79	100.00%
Age		
18-20	11	13.92%
21-23	27	34.18%
24-26	41	51.90%
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	45	56.96%
Bisexual	20	25.31%
Pansexual	6	7.59%
Queer	1	1.26%
Lesbian	1	1.26%
No response	6	7.59%
Personal experience with dating violence		
Yes	33	41.77%
Maybe/Unsure	17	21.52%
No	29	36.71%

As the study sought responses from both young women with and without personal experience with dating violence, the sample contained 33 (41.77%) young women

who had personal experience with dating violence, 17 (21.52%) young women who identified as maybe/unsure of their experience with dating violence, and 29 (36.71%) young women who identified as having no personal experienced of dating violence. This split of the sample based on experience meant that responses were able to be examined from the perspective of young women on both the 'inside' and the 'outside' of dating violence; particularly valuable in considering knowledge, understanding, and attitudes regarding aspects of dating violence. Sections of the survey relating to personal experiences with dating violence were only made available to 50 (63.29%) participants, including those who responded 'yes' (n=33) or 'maybe/unsure' (n=17) to having experienced dating violence. The combination of these categories within this study was made in reflection of findings within the literature (Ayala et al. 2014; Murphy & Smith 2010) which indicate young women who felt they had potentially experienced dating violence overwhelmingly demonstrated experiences identified as those associated with dating violence when further investigated.

The specific gender and age group of participants selected for examination within this study required much consideration, and the decision was made based on several factors. Firstly, this study chose to focus solely on young women's experiences, based on the previous findings of Reed et al. (2016; 2017) and Zweig et al. (2013), in which the overwhelming majority of dating violence is experienced by women, and that these experiences are more often of a much more serious and severe nature than that of dating violence perpetrated by young women against young men. Secondly, this study aimed to investigate the experiences of young women within the age group drawing the least attention within current research, with the majority of literature (Chung 2005; Davies 2019; Hooker et al. 2019) focusing their attention on the teen or youth, 'high school' aged cohort, rather than those engaging in dating relationships beyond school-age. In particular, this decision stems from the studies of Barbaro-Kukade (2019), Davies (2019) and Hooker et al. (2019), in which both dating relationships and dating violence shift dramatically with age, which suggests experiences of dating violence by young adult women require attention on their

own. Thirdly, the limitation of this study needing to take place within the limits of firstly an Honours, and then a Master's degree, meant that an age group of participants over 18 was much more soundly acquired from the ethics committee. Lastly, by examining the experiences and understandings of dating violence from this young adult age group of women meant this study benefitted from a more articulate and 'experienced' participant sample, in which participants were potentially able to reflect on previous dating violence from a position of hindsight and distance.

Ethical Considerations

Regarding the ethical considerations present within this study, the nature of the online survey method of this study resulted in a 'low-risk' categorisation and swift approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the research. This low-risk categorisation was due to participant's ability to actively 'opt-in' for engagement in the survey, the participants being over the age of 18, and the absence of any direct contact between the researcher and participants – particularly in order to encourage participation. In order to attend to the potentially triggering content within this survey, participants could decide to discontinue the survey at any time, to select 'unsure' for any question, or skip triggering survey questions altogether in order to limit the potential for participant distress, and the contact information for both local and national age-appropriate support services were made available to them on both the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, and at the end of the survey. The national support services provided included both general intimate partner and family violence support services, such as 1800RESPECT, as well as dating violence specific support services such as *Daisy* and *Ask Izzy*. Additionally, the student researcher's supervisor was included as an 'admin' on the facebook page used to distribute and advertise the survey, ensuring that any distressed or harassing direct messages would be addressed by the supervisor rather than the student researcher. Finally, data storage and management for this study met the requirements of the ethics committee, being stored on a password secure Google Drive account and on a password secure private laptop, and the study did not collect any identifiable data from participants.

Reflexivity

The objectivity and positionality of the researcher is always present and needs to be carefully considered within research (England 1994), and as this study benefited from the 'insider' positionality of the researcher (detailed in Chapter One), considerable reflexivity was taken into consideration and was made known to the ethics committee. Hayfield & Huxley (2015) suggest there are always ways in which a researcher with 'insider' positionality is also an 'outsider' to their participant sample, a concept further entrenched by Chavez (2008) and Greene (2014) who suggest the 'insider' and 'outsider' status of a researcher is more of a continuum than a ridged dichotomy. While the 'insider' perspective of the researcher within this study, at having personal experience with dating violence, allowed access to greater nuance with regards to recognising and understanding the meanings and experiences of young women victimised by dating violence, careful and continual consideration was undertaken with regards to the researcher assuming the experience of dating violence by other young women was the same as the researcher's own. Additionally, there are many ways in which the researcher was also engaged in this study as an 'outsider'. This 'outsider' positionality of the researcher is due to several factors, particularly through both their position as a university educated student-researcher, with a background in dating violence scholarly research, and other potential differences in class, ethnicity and economic status. A particular instance of the value of the 'insider' status of the researcher for this study can be seen in the way the nuance in the social impacts of dating violence were much more readily recognisable, and drawing out the way in which the young women demonstrated a social impact due to dating violence was much more possible. For example, the recognition of the development of a distrust in men – potentially extending to the distrust in men in general, rather than just those relating to future dating partners, and the impact this can have on a young women's education, employment, and friendships was notable.

Limitations

The central limitations of this study stem from the online survey method of data collection and the small participant sample size. The online survey method of data collection in general allows for misinterpretation of questions by participants, high rates of missing data, and removes the option for the researcher to probe the participant where greater detailed responses are desired (Walter 2013). As such, participants demonstrated a potential overlapping in their understanding of dating and domestic violence, which although 'dating' violence was clearly established as the topic of interest, several responses from participants used terminology directly related to domestic violence instead. Additionally, the 'self-selecting' nature of the online survey within this study had the additional potential to limit participation to only those young women who are both passionate and knowledgeable about the subject of violence against women, along with being computer-literate and having access to the social media platform facebook. While participant responses from this group are extremely valuable, the data set has the potential to misrepresent the general experiences of young women by mostly consisting of vocal and passionate participants. The researcher sought to address this potential issue by ensuring this study was examined as a 'one-shot' case study sampling (Walter 2013), with broader conclusions about young women's experience and understanding of dating violence not drawn.

A further limitation of this study stems from the lack of specificity in relation to the gender of the dating partner/s in which the young women experienced dating violence. In response to the literature (Baker 2003; Daff et al. 2018) which suggests dating violence research rarely investigates same-sex dating violence alongside that of opposite sex dating violence, and other literature (Gillum & DiFulvio 2012; Langenderfer-Magruder et al. 2016; Bermea et al. 2019; Donovan & Barnes 2020) in which same-sex dating violence is suggested to be as common as opposite sex dating violence, this study aimed to fill this gap by including both same-sex and opposite-sex dating relationships. However, while the study sought to gain this information through participants identifying their 'current' sexual orientation, the study did not

ask the young women the sexual orientation of the specific relationship/s in which the dating violence occurred, and as such the sexual orientation could have shifted since that relationship. As Bosse & Chiodo (2016) and Porta, Gower, Brown, Wood & Eisenberg (2019) suggest, young people are understood to sometimes shift identity within their definition of their own gender and sexual orientation. Further, some of the non-heterosexual sexual orientations specified by the young women within the study had the potential to include men or women as dating partners. For example, many of the young women identified as bisexual or pansexual, sexual orientations of which the young woman's partner could be male, female, or nonbinary. Similarly, due to the limited size of the project, the implications of racial and cultural backgrounds, class differences, and (dis)ability differences were unable to be considered with regards to young women's experiences of dating violence, along with examinations of dating violence perpetrated against male dating partners. While these issues were responded to within the study by removing analyses focused on these factors. However, these issues demonstrate a gap requiring future research based on more comprehensive data.

Finally, the issue of tension within dating violence terminology was a major concern within this study, with ambiguity in relation to terminology present in both the use of the literature, the development of the survey questions, the response of the young women participating, and the analysis of the researcher in all these areas. As the literature (Jackson 1999; Barter 2009; Brown & Hegarty 2018) suggests, differences in dating violence terminology can lead to serious issues with the validity and reliability of data and analysis based on how the participant and researcher both interpret each other's meanings. This study aimed to address these issues in several key ways. Firstly, in line with Daff's et al. (2018) study of experiences of aggression and abuse within the intimate partner relationships of young Australians, this study used a method of refraining from defining dating violence for the participants. As gaining an understanding of these participant-driven definitions was one of the central investigations of this study – with the aim of understanding what forms of abuse young women see as healthy and unhealthy dating behaviour – instead of

providing definitions of key terms, both the dating relationship and dating violence were not predefined for participants. This allowed for participants to provide their own definitions as to the parameters of these concepts. Secondly, terminology was purposefully used interchangeably within this survey in response to Barter (2009) and Brown & Hegarty (2018) findings, along with the researcher's own experience in talking with young people about dating violence, in which young people were found to struggle with understanding the bounds of dating violence terminology, and were less able to articulate their experiences when terminology was rigidly defined for them. Due to these findings, this study focused on using the terms 'violence' and 'abuse' interchangeably within the survey, and was intended to demonstrate to the young women participating in the study that both terms were relevant in regards to dating violence, and regardless of their preference both were legitimate and recognised.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which young women are experiencing dating violence and what we can do to reduce the incidence of dating violence within our communities. The thesis firstly asks if the nature of young adult dating violence is unique, and if so, what can that tell us about how we can better respond to and treat young adult dating violence and its victims. Secondly, this thesis ask what the social and cultural forces are perpetuating young adult dating violence. Thirdly, the thesis asks what the social impact of dating violence on young women's lives is. Building upon the limited body of Australian dating violence research, this study is grounded in a feminist conceptual framework, while also drawing from several other sociological concepts and theories in order to illuminate the social experience of dating violence in Australia. This study contributes to both the field of the social research, by producing new knowledge through the utilisation of sociological theories and methodologies, and empirical research, but also to the wider community and young people who may benefit from the improvement of support systems and education and reporting methods based on the findings in this study.

After establishing the methodological approach of this study, the following three chapters provide an analysis and discussion of the findings this study produced. The first analysis and discussion chapter focuses on exploring the unique nature of the young adult dating relationship and how that relationship shapes the way violence and abuse are experienced; the second analysis and discussion chapter explores the social and cultural perpetuation of dating violence; and the final analysis and discussion chapter investigates the social impact of dating violence on young women, particularly focusing on the ways in which the impact of dating violence on young women lives has previously been overlooked.

Chapter Four. The Nature of Young Adult Dating Relationships and Dating Violence

Introduction

Dating violence literature has been at the forefront of research attempting to define the dating relationship (Chung 2005; Shorey et al. 2008; Leadbeater et al. 2018).

However, as yet a uniform definition remains elusive. With that in mind, this study begins by considering what it is about the young adult dating relationship that makes it a unique intimate partner relationship experience. In what follows, I draw on the definitions of dating relationships that appear within the limited body of literature on dating violence, and from literature outside of dating violence research in order to analyse the cultural models of dating relationships that were evident in the survey participants responses. One of the unique contributions this project makes is to consider the differences between teen and young adult dating relationships and dating violence, and likewise to consider the differences between young adult dating violence and adult intimate partner or domestic violence, highlighting the need for specialised support for each group of victims based on these differences.

First, this chapter begins by exploring the nature of the young adult dating relationship, followed by an investigation of how violence and abuse are shaped by this relationship, in which familiar tensions arise regarding the inclusion of both physical and non-physical violence and abuse. The chapter examines several prominent areas that emerged within the young women's responses in which dating violence is particularly unique to the young adult age group – that of digital dating violence, the normality of sexual coercion within young adult dating relationships, the difficulty experienced by young women in distinguishing dating behaviour from abusive dating behaviour, and finally the difficulty experienced by young women in leaving an abusive dating relationship.

The Nature of the Young Adult Dating Relationship

This study firstly seeks to shape a clearer definition of the dating relationship as understood by young women themselves. The young women participating in this study identified several expected parameters as being present within the definition of a dating relationship, such as, regularity of contact (67.09%, n=53) and exclusivity (58%, n=46) between relationship partners, as shown in Table 2. This version of a dating relationship reflects Chung's (2005) definition of 'going out with someone'.

Table 2. Participants understanding of the young adult dating relationship

Option		Response count (n=79)	%
1	Seeing someone on a regular basis but not living together	53	67.09%
2	Being in a sexual relationship	36	45.57%
3	Being 'exclusive' and not seeing other people	46	58.23%
4	Only the first initial stage of a relationship where you go on 'dates'	37	46.84%

This form of dating relationship is understood to involve public recognition as a couple, a longer relationship length, expected monogamy, and emotional commitment (Chung 2005, p. 447). When given the space to expand on their responses the young women also referred to specificity of intentions and agreed upon labels as common within the defining of a dating relationship;

“When both people agree that ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’ or similar are appropriate titles for each other.” (Katie, 21-23, bisexual)

The young women particularly focused on the common need for ‘mutual agreement’ upon the terms, parameters, and intentions for a dating relationship to be taking place;

“A relationship in which both people have specified intentions to date each other.” (Nina, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

For the young women, clearly defined and gendered roles and labels, as well as expectations and intentions were vital to the formalising of ‘dating’ relationships. These parameters reflect the labels, agreements, and expectations involved within adult intimate partner relationships. For example, dating relationships exchange ‘husband’ and ‘wife’, for ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’. While these findings reflect the similarity between the dating relationship and adult intimate partner relationships, key differences also emerged. In particular, 67.09% (n=53) of the young women identified non-cohabitation as a distinct way in which the dating relationship is unique to that of adult intimate partner relationships, as shown in Table 2.

The literature suggests dating relationships like these can be understood as a ‘practice’ for future more substantial intimate partner relationship further into adulthood (Baker 2003), and that in comparison adult intimate partner relationships can be much more dangerous for those experiencing violence and abuse due to the enmeshing of finances, family, and social connections, along with a combined place of residence which creates a greater sense of being bound to one another; making violence and abuse more acute and seemingly impossible to escape (Shorey et al. 2008). However, Baker (2003) argues that while this idea of young people ‘practicing’ intimate partner relationships suggests a level of frivolity, young people

are dealing with a great deal of added influence due to peer pressure, limited knowledge or access to support, along with 'romanticised' expectations, which all contribute to the complex nature of dating relationships, and contribute to the experience of dating violence as both dangerous and unique.

There are several other key ways in which the young adult dating relationship strongly differs from that of the married or de facto relationships of adults based on the varied nature of the dating relationship. Firstly, the wide range in relationship stages and lengths associated with the dating relationship were identified by the young women within this study, with 46.84% (n=37) determining the first initial stages of a relationship, particularly one in which the couple engage in going out together on 'dates', as being unique to the dating relationship, as shown in Table 2. When providing further details the young women also referred to the potential for a dating relationship to encompass only a limited timeframe;

"An established mutual like for each other and going out of each other's way to fuel the desire even if for a short period of time." (Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

For this young woman, the short length of the dating relationship was legitimised, in terms of the relationship being considered officially a dating relationship, by also including the agreement of intentions and interest in engagement in the relationship by both members of the couple. Chung (2005) identifies this kind of dating relationship as slightly more casual in nature, and termed as 'seeing someone'. This dating relationships is recognised as involving a newness or shorter length to the relationship, less expectancy of monogamy, and more intermittent contact (Chung 2005). Further, dating relationships are experienced widely through technology, with dating apps, social media and smart phones changing the shape of the dating experience for young people (Zweig et al. 2013; Stonard et al. 2014; Reed et al. 2016; 2017). Additionally, the inclusion of relationships entirely sexual in nature were also

identified by the young women as common forms of dating relationships, with 45.57% (n=36) of the young women determining primarily sexually focused relationships as included within the framework of the dating relationship, as shown in Table 2. When given space to elaborate, the young women referred to their understanding of the commonality of dating relationship being sexually focused in nature;

“Usually having sexual relations with that person. But you can [be] ‘dating’ numerous people at once.” (Lucy, 24-26, heterosexual)

While sexual relationships were widely understood by the young women as being a key part of the dating relationship, the difference between the dating and married or de facto relationship is that the dating relationship can be entirely sexual in nature; without official ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’ labels or monogamous expectations. This kind of dating relationship is identified within the literature as the highly casual and sexually focused relationship termed ‘getting with someone’, involving recently meeting, and with no expectations of monogamy or ongoing contact (Chung 2005). In her comment above, Lucy also articulated the elasticity and multiplicity of the dating relationship in her response – in which assumed exclusivity is not always a defining factor, by referring to the ability to ‘date’ several people at the one time. Lastly, the young women also referred to the commonality of the dating relationship parameters being much more reliant on the wants and needs of the individual or couple, than the more ridged and established framework of the married or de facto relationship. Sarah encapsulated this view succinctly, suggesting the dating relationship can be best described as;

“All and any of the above.” (Sarah, 24-26, has not experience dating violence, bisexual)

Overall, dating relationships were considered by the young women as distinctly different in character to those considered adult intimate partner relationships or teen dating relationships in several important ways, based on the variability of relationship stages, purposes, and agreed upon parameters of the individual couple. As Leadbeater et al. (2018) argues, dating relationships for young adults are experienced differently than adults or teens due to factors such as age related views on sexual behaviours, the length and quality of relationships, the level of involved risk and reward, and the level of intensity and meaning given to the couple breaking up. The dating relationships of young adults also have the potential to evolve, as couples move further towards commitment by living together or further casualising their dating relationships by weakening ties to monogamy and regularity of contact from their relationship. It is in these emerging and exploratory intimate partner relationships of young people that violence and abuse similarly take a unique shape.

Young Women's Experience of Dating Violence

Building upon this investigation into the unique nature of the young adult dating relationship, this study also explores the way this unique relationship shapes the way violence and abuse are experienced. While it is understood that intimate partner violence takes place in similar ways in throughout all abusive intimate partner relationships, due to the transitory age of young adult dating couples and the varied nature of the dating relationship, young adult dating violence takes a shape of its own. This study suggest young adult dating violence is unique due to the age related life-stage and relationship naivety of the couple, along with the variety of shapes purposes the relationships can take. This uniqueness can be seen in the way young women misrecognise abuse due to a lack of relationship experience, and the way maintaining separate living arrangements can 'dull' the effect of the abuse due to the regularity of breaks between spending time with a dating partner. Shorey et al. (2008) argues through an underdeveloped sense of acceptable dating behaviours due to the young age of those engaged in dating relationships, young women are more likely to accept the validity of male domination and female subordination. This ultimately makes the dating relationship an optimal location for control, abuse, and

violence to flourish. Additionally, the binary nature of heteronormative expectations surrounding the performance of gender roles within the young adult age group can result in abuse being understood by young women as 'protective' and 'loving' behaviour, rather than as manipulation and coercion.

Dating violence can be much like other forms of intimate partner violence in regards to the general behaviours associated with violence and abuse within romantic relationships (Zweig et al. 2014). The young women within this study demonstrated confidence in identifying physical violence, such as, hitting and punching (97.47%, n=77), and yelling (88.61%, n=70) as behaviours representative of dating violence, as shown in Table 3. Likewise, physically 'controlling' behaviours, such as banning a partner from seeing either same sex (88.61%, n=70) or opposite sex (92.41%, n=73) friends, and stopping a partner from going to work (92.41%, n=73) or from going out (93.67%, n=74), were also strongly regarded by the young women within this study as clear behaviours associated with dating violence. Further, the length a couple had been together can directly affect the severity of the abuse perpetrated, as in the earlier stages of a dating relationship manipulation and physical abuse are typically much less intense, compared with the severity of abuse perpetrated further into the relationship, in which the victims have time to become isolated, vulnerable, and trapped in a cycle of abuse (Barbaro-Kukade 2019).

Table 3. Participants understanding of dating violence behaviours

Option		Response count (n=79)	%
1	Yelling	70	88.61%
2	Hitting or punching	77	97.47%
3	Banning partner from seeing opposite sex friends	73	92.41%
4	Banning partner from seeing same sex friends	70	88.61%
5	Stopping partner from working	73	92.41%
6	Stopping partner from going out	74	93.67%
7	Tracking partner through apps	72	91.14%
8	Calling to check up on partner whereabouts	52	65.82%
9	Reading partner emails, instant messages, or texts without permission	68	86.08%
10	Continuing to ask for sex even though partner has already refused	10	12.66%
11	Forcing partner to engage in sex when they don't want to	77	97.47%
12	Putting down a partner in front of other people	12	15.19%
13	Putting down a partner when alone	13	16.46%
14	Banning a partner from wearing revealing or tight fitting clothes	14	17.72%
15	Threatening physical violence	15	18.99%
16	Making a partner feel jealous on purpose	64	81.01%

While physical violence and physically controlling behaviours were more universally agreed upon by the young women as unacceptable dating behaviour, non-physical violence was notably less recognisable as problematic behaviour. For example, demeaning verbal abuse was only considered to be associated with dating violence by 15.19% (n=12) of the young women when relating to public spaces, and 16.46% (n=13) when relating to private spaces, as shown in Table 3. Similarly, banning a partner from wearing particularly revealing clothes was considered behaviour associated with dating violence by a meagre 17.72% (n=14). Where the young women provided further details about their experience with dating violence, some were able to list numerous and nuanced non-physical ways in which they had experienced dating violence. These were behaviours which on their own can be seemingly innocuous, but when grouped altogether demonstrate the diversity and nuance of abuse experienced, and the ease with which these behaviours could be misconstrued as acceptable due to the young age of the people involved;

“Jealously, restrictions to seeing your own family, stalking, making someone sick so they can't leave the house.” (Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Taken individually, some of these behaviours, such as ‘jealousy’ and ‘restrictions to seeing your own family’ are liable to being misinterpreted by young women or those outside the relationship within the framework of gender roles as potentially ‘protective’ or ‘caring’ behaviours. For example, being encouraged to spend less time with family members who are seen as a ‘bad influence’ or eliciting jealousy from a partner in order to determine whether or not they have true feeling for you, could both be seen as normal or even healthy dating behaviour by young women. When these experiences of coercive control through emotional manipulation and psychological abuse are spread between other more supportive and loving, or ‘healthy’ dating behaviours, abusive behaviours would be easy to miss (Shorey et al. 2015; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). The sporadic nature of abuse within some dating

relationships has the effect of dulling the victim's sense of the severity and regularity of the abuse and manipulation, in part due to the lack of cohabitation and the regular gaps in contact as a result (Shorey et al. 2015; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). This 'dulling' effect was something the young women were aware of in hindsight, and expressed concern over – particularly in regards to the perpetrators tendency to even out abusive behaviour with apologetic or caring behaviour;

"The abuser displays an overabundance of affection to 'make up for' the abuse (cycles of extremes)." (Daisy, 24-26, has not experienced dating violence, bisexual)

The young women referred several times to the pattern, common within intimate partner violence, in which moments of affection and even remorse over previous violence or abuse are woven throughout an abusive relationship.

Technology-Facilitated Young Adult Dating Violence

For young women today, the dating experience takes place in both offline and online spaces, with constant access to a dating partner through mobile/smart phones, curated profiles, tracking and stalking a partner through apps and geotagging, and public interactions through social media (Zweig et al. 2013; Stonard et al. 2014; Reed et al. 2016; 2017). The young women within this study overwhelmingly demonstrated an understanding of dating violence also taking place through social media and technology (97.47%, n=77), as shown in Table 3 (p. 74). However, responses were more complex in relation to more specific instances of abusive behaviour perpetrated through technology. When considering the nuances of technology-facilitated dating violence, the overtly controlling behaviour of tracking a partner through apps on a mobile phone was determined by 91.14% (n=72) of the young women as behaviour associated with dating violence.

Alternatively, the more subtle controlling and manipulating dating behaviour, such as reading a partner's emails or instant messages without their permission (86.08%, n=68) and regularly checking up on a partner's whereabouts (65.82%, n=52) were more difficult for the young women to identify as constituting dating violence, as shown in Table 3 (p. 74). Stonard et al. (2017) argues dating violence is increasingly perpetrated through digital methods, including through smart phones, social media, and dating apps (see also Baker & Carreno 2016). The key point here is that this form of abuse is not replacing in-person dating violence but instead collaborates to form an 'omni present' experience of dating violence, in which manipulation and control over a partner is increasingly easy to obtain (Stonard et al. 2017).

Digital dating violence can consist of anything from purposefully encouraging partner jealousy through social media-based posting, tagging, and instant messaging; to constantly calling a partner on their mobile or utilising tracking mobile apps to check up on a partner's whereabouts (Stonard et al. 2014; Baker & Carreno 2016; Stonard et al. 2017). As such, controlling and psychologically abusive behaviours are some of the most serious and most common forms of digital dating violence. Stonard et al. (2017) argue that while technology can be used positively within dating relationships to generate, develop, and maintain relationship bonds and commitment, the negative impacts of unhealthy communication and monitoring are just as prominent. Instant messaging allows for constant contact between dating partners, and social media platforms are unique in their ability to provide both public and private spaces in which a dating partner can monitor, control, antagonise, and abuse their romantic partner (Baker & Carreno 2016). This results in the experience of traditional 'in-person' dating violence overlapping with digital dating violence can become a constant and almost omni-present experience of abuse for the victim.

Sexual Coercion within Young Adult Dating Relationships

Sexual violence or sexual coercion was considered by the young women within the frame of physical and non-physical violence and abuse. When referring to physical

acts, such as 'forcing' a partner to have sex, 97.47% (n=77) determined this behaviour unacceptable; while manipulating and coercing behaviour with regards to sexual interactions, such as 'continuing to ask a partner to have sex when they have already refused' was only considered by 12.66% (n=10) as constituting abusive dating behaviour, as shown in Table 3 (p. 74). These findings reflect the lack of recognition by young women of the serious nature of sexual coercion and abuse within dating relationships. Alarming high rates of dating violence are perpetrated through sexual means, yet very few women actually recognise sexual coercion or forced sex with a partner as sexual assault in a dating situation (Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Hooker et al. 2019).

Hird & Jackson (2001) argue the expectations and performances of gender roles play a distinct role in the myth of 'sexually submissive women' and 'sexually dominant men', and help to explain its incidence. Young women regularly take responsibility for men's feelings and emotions by engaging in sex with a partner even when they would rather not as a way of alleviating the chance of 'hurting' their partner's feelings by rejecting their sexual advances (Hird & Jackson 2001). Although young women spend a considerable amount of time negotiating refusals to sexual offers by their dating partners, and are extremely prone to consider sexual harassment and sexual assault perpetrated by young men a 'trivial' and 'minor' issue, normal to the experience of being a young person (Weiss 2013). This finding highlights the deep-running normalisation of abusive behaviours between young people in which violence and coercion within this area of the relationship is understood as a completely normal part of dating (Frith & Kitzinger 2001; Weiss 2013).

Another way manipulation and coercion are used within dating relationships with regards to sex can be seen through the withholding of or restrictions for sex within the dating relationship in order to get a partner to do or behave how you want;

“Any kind of conditional behaviour based on personal factors, e.g. if you lose weight I will have sex with you.” (Tilly, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Here the young woman, Tilly, articulates the nuanced way in which sex can be used within a relationship to coerce and manipulate a partner by the threat of withholding intimacy and affection through sex. This statement additionally nods to the way in which shaming a partner, e.g. about her weight, can be used as a tool of manipulation and reinforce power imbalances between the dating partners.

The Difficulty Differentiating Dating Behaviour from Abusive Dating Behaviour

A prominent issue that emerges within dating violence literature is the difficulty young women experience in recognising dating violence (Chung 2005; Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala et al. 2014; Shorey et al. 2015; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). While, both physical and non-physical violence have been established as present within dating relationships (Hooker et al. 2019), young people have been shown to experience difficulty in articulating exactly what behaviours are considered abusive within a dating relationship. Chung (2005) argues dating violence is often misrecognised as positive ‘romantic’ behaviour by young women. Practices of heteronormative ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ gender norms within dating relationships result in frequent misrecognition of manipulative, controlling, jealous and dominating behaviours as ‘protective’ and ‘loving’ behaviours, and the ways these behaviours establish a dynamic of patriarchal domination and control within the relationship are dangerously overlooked by young women (Chung 2005). Although the young women demonstrated possessing a sense of what abuse looks like (even though that perception is limited to physical abuse), the problem lies more with the lack of awareness of the young women that relationship behaviours can be abusive (rather than romantic). Many young women remained unsure whether their experiences constituted actual dating violence;

“he was just like manipulative and controlling so idk [sic] if that counts as dating violence.” (Sally, 21-23, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Young women struggle to identify and distinguish abusive behaviour due to the gradual way the abuse develops. While hindsight allows the young women the space and time to reflect on their experiences within the relationship, at the time, labelling their experience as ‘dating violence’ was something beyond their reach, and likewise also beyond the comprehension of their friends and peers;

“Myself and many of my friends didn't understand that violence encompassed verbal abuse and controlling behaviours until it was too late and the red flags had passed. Girls need to be taught at a young age.” (Ann, 24-26, heterosexual)

The young women frequently referred to their regret at their own naivety and young age at the time of their abusive relationship/s, particularly with regards to missing important warning signs and the nuance to the ways in which violence and abuse are experienced within dating relationships due to their relationship inexperience. In examining the ‘unperceived’ nature of early warning signs of abuse, both Murphy & Smith (2010) and Ayala et al. (2014), uncovered large proportions of high school and university students had experienced these abusive behaviours without their knowledge. While young women believed they had not experienced any form of the ‘early warning signs of abuse’, substantial rates reported experiencing fear, jealousy, possessiveness, and entrapment – which are all identified as common early warning sign of dating violence (Murphy & Smith 2010; Ayala et al. 2014). These findings demonstrate the power of broader structural factors and cultural norms that make it difficult to interpret specific behaviours as abusive when they are located within the context of romantic attachments. These findings reflect the normalisation of

gendered scripts of romance within which violence is somehow permissible or invisible, or incorrectly labelled as something else, such as chivalry, care, or love to young women (Chung 2005; Luft et al. 2012; Elias-Lambert et al. 2014).

Self-blame and shame were also evident in the young women's responses, and routinely referred to in the context of the young women having to 're-educate' themselves in order to gain self-protection;

"After my 2 [sic] consecutive violent relationships I no longer trusted myself. I did not want to become close to anyone so sought transactional, meaningless flings to get short term satisfaction and excitement. It worked for a while but I realised I had to trust myself again and re-learn how to be alone. I am now in a healthy and loving relationship which is violence free in all aspects. I am working on unlearning behaviour and thought processes I had learned from my violent relationships." (Esther, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

For this young woman, not only was her focus on re-educating herself on how to firstly be alone again, but then on how to experience a dating relationship free from violence and abuse. Similarly, other young women expressed their self-blame by suggesting they feel as though they are not mentally capable of handling a relationship;

"Just made me question whether I'm even fit or mentally strong enough to be in a relationship so I worry about struggling in future relationships." (Zoe, 24-26, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence)

The young women frequently demonstrated experiences of self-blame and shame, through internalising the experience of a failed romantic relationship. These experiences can be understood through the frame of individualisation – in which young women see themselves as responsible, and fail to see their experiences as

directly shaped by broader gendered structures of inequality and cultural models of romance.

The Difficulty in Leaving an Abusive Dating Relationship

When asked about their opinions and understandings of why someone might have a difficult time leaving a violent or abusive dating relationship, some of the young women produced extremely nuanced possible reasons for this difficulty, particularly with relation to these issues of entrapment and disempowerment.

“The victim has no support system or rehab from the abuser and being abused is the only option unless they suicide.” (Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

In this response, the young woman demonstrates the severity of entrapment and disempowerment experienced by young women within abusive dating relationships – in which there seems to be no way out of the relationship. Holland & Eisenhart’s (1990) study on dating relationships within the American college environment found that young women demonstrated a gendered pressure once the romantic relationship had been established, to maintain intimacy, attractiveness, attention, and support for their partner in order to prove their successfulness in being a girlfriend and a woman. The study additionally argues that once ‘problems’ and ‘discontent’ develop in the romantic relationship the young women were prone to hide the eventuation from friends, peers, and family in order avoid embarrassment (Holland & Eisenhart 1990). The study found the failure of a relationship had a direct impact on how a young women understood her social positioning and sense of personal attractiveness (Holland & Eisenhart 1990). These findings help to explain why simply leaving a failing or abusive relationship is sometimes not seen as an option to young women, who instead aim to ‘work’ on the relationship, through the use of emotion work and emotional intelligence to improve their situation. Social position and sense of self-worth were found to be highly entwined in these decisions. Luft et al. (2012) similarly refer this moment within their study as young women’s

ambiguity over deciding when to 'make sacrifices' for the relationship, and when to 'stand up for themselves' in the relationship.

In addition to the experience of wanting to stay and 'fix' an abusive or failing relationship, the young women also struggled to articulate their experiences due to their not quite recognising which behaviour fell inside and outside of the concept of dating violence. The young women referred to their understanding on the way in which age-related relationship naivety plays a key role in how dating violence is overlooked or misrecognised by young women;

"I have minimal understanding and am still coming to deal with whether I actually experienced violence from someone I never thought would be emotionally abusive. It starts young, way younger than you think." (Harriet, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

The young women also referred to the confusion and unawareness they experienced within their abusive dating relationship. Identifying a clear blind-spot to abuse that was not physical in nature;

"When I entered into my abusive relationship I didn't have a nuanced understanding of abuse. I knew if he hit me it would be abuse, but didn't register his other behaviours (manipulating, gaslighting, withholding affection, silent treatment, pressure to have sex, swearing, yelling) as abusive. The relationship was exhausting. I've been single for a year and am only just starting to consider the possibility of dating, however not with the intention of committing to a monogamous relationship." (Meg, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

In this response, Meg's lack of ability to identify non-physical violence at the time of the abusive relationship was similarly identified by numerous young women within

the study, and the unique nature of dating violence along with general silence surrounding dating violence become clear as potentially dominant causes as to this pattern. Mega also strikingly referred to the 'exhaustion' she experienced over the relationship, which is extremely telling of the emotional work young women put into relationships in which violence and abuse is taking place, in order to manage the emotions and outbursts of their abuser, and maintain equilibrium and safety within the relationship (Davies 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the unique nature of violence and abuse within the young adult dating relationship. While it is understood that intimate partner violence takes place in similar ways in both dating and domestic or de facto relationship, due to the young age of dating couples and the varied nature of the dating relationship, dating violence takes a shape of its own. This chapter established that young adult dating violence is unique in the way young women's misrecognition of abuse is extremely common within dating relationships due to lack of relationship experience, and that not living together can 'dull' the effect of the abuse as there are more likely to be regular breaks between spending time with a dating partner, but also that these relationships are more substantial and isolated than that of teen dating relationships. This analysis also found that although young women demonstrate a keen understanding of the nature of physical dating violence, young women are plagued by the inability to collectively define and distinguish experiences of coercion, manipulation, and domination within the framework of dating violence.

This chapter also demonstrated the ways in which young women routinely minimise, normalise, and excuse violent and abusive behaviour in order to maintain the relationship themselves. Further, violence and abuse was also identified as being regularly minimised and normalised due to the way in which abusive behaviours are often 'dulled' through their sporadic nature. Dating violence was also found to be minimised and normalised within dating relationships due to the 'normalisation' of

violence against women in romantic relationships. These findings suggest that the problem facing education providers and support services has to do with reframing abusive dating behaviours that are currently understood as a 'normal' part of dating, in order to empower young women to be able to recognise abuse and control for what it is. Having built up a comprehensive understanding of the unique nature of dating violence within framework of the young adult romantic relationship, the following chapter investigates the ways in which dating violence is perpetuated within society. In particular, the chapter explores how dating violence is not just an issue of gendered violence, but is shaped by the acceptance and silence of intimate partner violence by society.

Chapter Five. The Perpetuation of Young Adult Dating Violence

Introduction

In spite of growing awareness of gender violence, the prevalence of violence against women continues to be perpetuated at alarmingly high rates, and this includes violence within dating relationships. In this chapter, I address the complex and problematic issue of measuring rates of dating violence, before then discussing the factors that contribute to the perpetuation of high rates of dating violence. I make the argument that dating violence is as much a social and cultural problem as it is a gendered one, and that only through understanding it, as such, are we able to address the issue from the root of the problem. The chapter begins by exploring the perpetuation of young adult dating violence through both national invisibility and incongruity in dating violence terminology within community discourse. These discussions set up the chapter to explore deeper into the social and cultural forces perpetuating dating violence at such high rates, and without much recognition. The chapter does this by investigating the power of cultural-silence, the normalisation of dating violence, and the commonality of victim-blame faced by young women experiencing dating violence. These analyses draw from the concepts of heteronormality, individualisation, cultural-silence, victim-blame, and shame in order to flesh out how dating violence is so silently perpetuated within society. Finally, the chapter explores the perpetuation of dating violence through the lack of nuance within dating violence support services for young women, and the ways in which young women suggest these services could be immediately serve them better.

The Perpetuation of Dating Violence Through National Invisibility

The issue with Australian national statistics surrounding dating violence is twofold. Firstly, dating violence is not separated from other forms of intimate partner and family violence. National statistics reported by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) determine one in six Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former since the age of 15, and one in four

Australian women have likewise experienced emotional abuse (ABS 2017). While dating violence would naturally fall within these statistics, without separation of dating violence from other forms of intimate partner and family violence true national statistics prove impossible, and dating violence remains invisible in its own right. Secondly, national statistical data requires young people to be able to recognise, label and report their experiences with abuse – a practice which is severely underdeveloped within the realm of young adults and dating violence. For example, national statistics reporting on the incidences of dating violence within Australia are overwhelmingly generated through either police reports or national census data (ABS 2017); however, research identifies young women as rarely reporting incidents of dating violence to police (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Jackson 2002; Ashley & Foshee 2005; Edwards et al. 2011; Lachman et al. 2019). This indicates that levels of dating violence among young people are potentially much higher than what is currently estimated. Smith (1994) argues women tend to report low levels of violence as their experiences fail to accurately align with the criminal violence options listed within the surveys. This results in national statistical rates of intimate partner violence – let alone dating violence – as being highly inaccurate, and acknowledges reporting rates as being much lower than findings within smaller-scale, more qualitative-focused research suggest (Smith 1994).

Within this study, just over 40% (41.77%, n=33) of the young women identified having experienced some form of dating violence, with a further 21.52% (n=17) of the young women unsure whether their experiences within dating relationships constitute consideration as dating violence (see Figure 1).

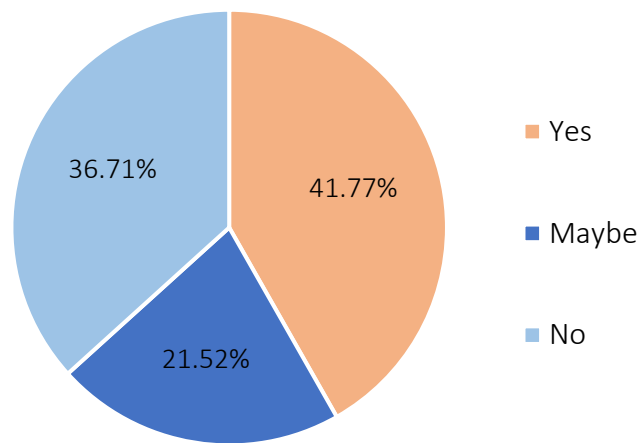


Figure 1. Participants personal experience with dating violence (n=79)

Nearly three quarters of the young women within this study identified not having sought any assistance from support services after an incident of dating violence, with 66.67% (n=30) of participants reporting no support was accessed, and only 33.33% (n=15) accessing some form of support service, as shown in Figure 2.

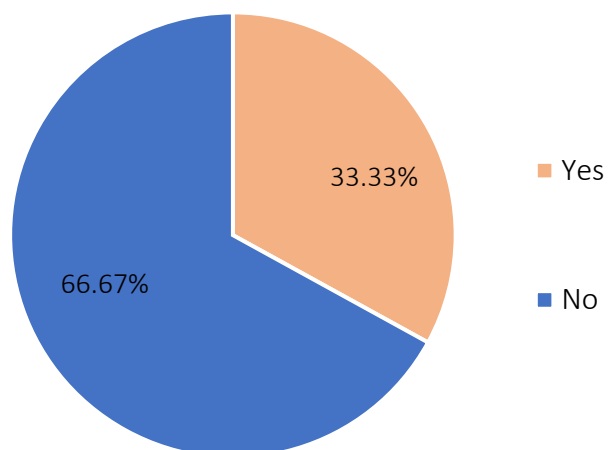


Figure 2. Participants accessing of support services after experiencing dating violence (n=45)

Of those young women who sought assistance after their experience with dating violence, 13 sought support from a counsellor, while only three identified as reaching out to Lifeline. A single young woman identified visiting her local hospital emergency department, and a further one participant identified accessing the Headspace website, as shown in Figure 3.

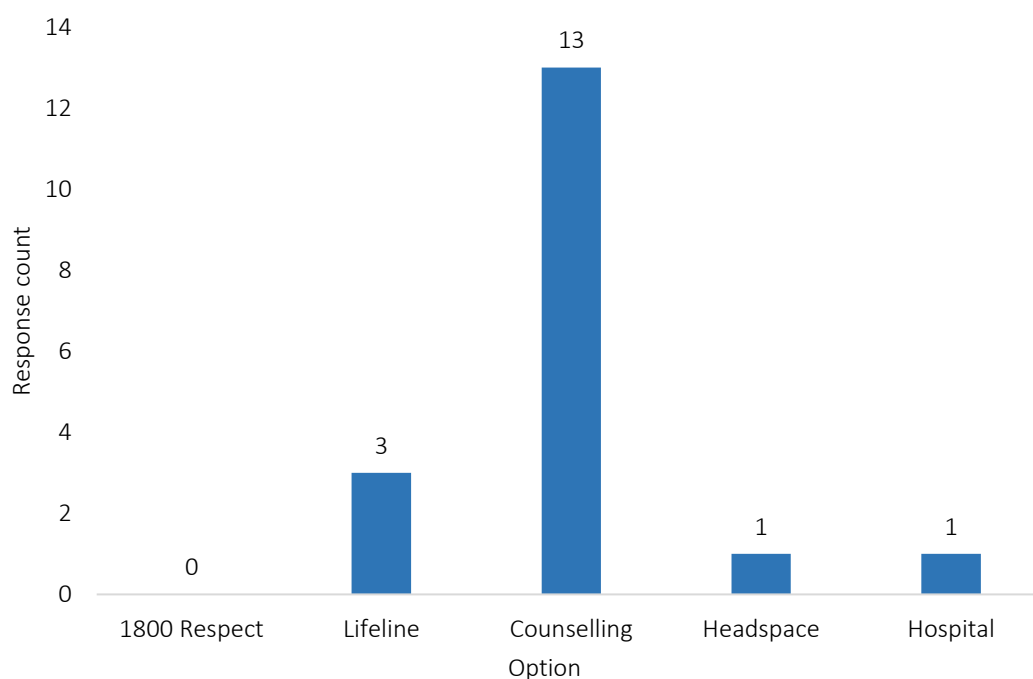


Figure 3. Support services accessed by participants who had experienced dating violence

Differences in help-seeking and reporting behaviours varied by age group, with the young women in the eldest age group (24-26) identifying as the most likely to access support after experiencing dating violence, with 37.50% (n=9) accessing some form of support after an incident of dating violence, as shown in Table 4. Contrastingly, the youngest group of young women (18-20), reported the lowest rates of accessing support after an experience of dating violence, with 100% (n=8) identifying as not having accessed support of any kind. These findings indicate the age related

differences in the way dating violence is experienced and dealt with afterwards by young women. Particularly noticeable is that distinct patterns emerge in support seeking behaviours even within the limited age-range of this study.

Table 4. Participants access of support services by age group

		18-20		21-23		24-26	
		Response		Response		Response	
		count		count		count	
Option		(n=8)	%	(n=18)	%	(n=24)	%
1	Accessed support	0	0.00%	6	33.33%	9	37.50%
2	Did not access support	8	100.00%	10	55.55%	12	50.00%

Overall, the negative association and apprehension experienced by the young women within this study relating to reporting experiences of dating violence to police, support services, or other official persons were notable in the young women's responses. The young women demonstrated a distinct lack of trust and belief in law enforcement and the legal system in responding to their needs as victims of dating violence. Only two young women identified reporting their experiences of dating violence to police, as shown in Figure 4. These findings reflect the overwhelming consensus within the literature, that rates of reporting dating violence to police or other official support services are incredibly meagre (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; Jackson 2002; Baker 2003; Ashley & Foshee 2005; Chung 2007; Edwards et al. 2011; Barbaro-Kukade 2019; Lachman et al. 2019). As such, rates of dating violence among young adults have the potential to be much higher than we currently acknowledge.

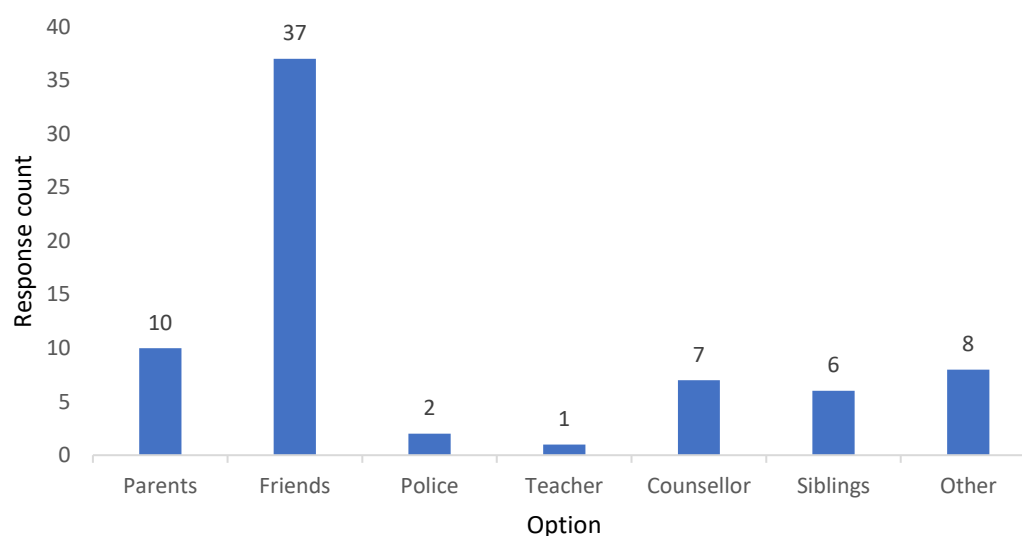


Figure 4. The reporting and disclosure behaviour of participants who experienced dating violence

The Perpetuation of Dating Violence Through Incongruity in Terminology

Terminology incongruity is also a key source of tension within dating violence research and general public knowledge, and directly influences the perpetuation of dating violence through a lack of centralised understanding of dating violence and definitions of terminology. This study has argued dating violence is a unique experience shaped by the varied nature of the dating relationship and the young adult age group of those engaging in these relationships, however the use of non-dating-violence-specific terminology within general intimate partner violence discourse, means for young women there is an increased possibility for the more nuanced and dating violence specific forms of abuse to become undefinable and unable to be labelled within the available terminology. This is a particular problem when considering young women reporting dating violence to police or seeking guidance from support services – through which young women may not be able to express the severity and dangerous nature of their experiences with dating violence in a way that police and support workers can understand the nuance.

In some cases within this study, the young women used the term 'domestic violence' in referring to their understandings of dating violence and reflecting on their own dating violence experiences;

"This country is so riddled with domestic violence that even people falsely accused get DVOs against them despite no evidence at all, and the real abusers who do get DVOs against [them] just see it as a piece of paper and nothing stops them from hurting you." (Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Here, in Hazel's response, there is a disconnect between the experiences of intimate partner violence unique to dating violence and that of adult domestic violence. By grouping the two experiences within the same term 'domestic violence' the nuances of young adult dating violence – such as, the variety in the nature of relationships, age related relationship naivety, and being in a transitioning stage of life, are minimised and lost. This makes it much harder for young women to identify their experiences within the framework of 'domestic violence', which are commonly understood to involve the greater life-enmeshment of cohabitation, and potentially also dependent children (Zweig et al. 2014). Young women within this study regularly struggled to identify and articulate their experiences with dating violence due to the lack of available terminology and cultural understanding of intimate partner violence between young people.

The disconnect between the dating violence terminology used by researchers and participants is also a dominant issue dating violence research; and in turn, perpetuating dating violence. As social researchers, in our attempts to investigate this social problem, this means there is greater potential for false or skewed data – as meanings and terminology shifts from researcher to researcher, and from researcher to participant. Barter (2009) argues a 'one-size-fits-all' method of

terminology in this arena of study does not work, instead suggesting an examination of the specific views and experiences of young people must be considered in the formulation of research material – referring to the complexity of researching intimate partner violence through the context of “diverse teenage relationships and intimate encounters” (Barter 2009, p. 214). Brown & Hegarty (2018) additionally suggest ambiguity in wording within dating violence research material is a primary cause of inconsistency and inaccuracy within the field.

The young women within this study predominantly referred to ‘dating violence’ and ‘abuse’ when reflecting on their experiences, and while most young women fell to using the terms interchangeably – sometimes switching between the terms within the same sentence – others felt there was a much more distinct difference between the terms;

“My understanding of dating violence is that violence is physical, whereas abuse could be anything that controls or manipulates or hurts another person, however, both can lead to psychological damage.” (Lux, 24-26, has not experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

While dating violence continues down this path of terminology ambiguity, it is the victims of dating violence who are facing the fallout. Without universal definitions of key terms within dating violence discourse, young people will continue to struggle in identifying, defining and articulating their experiences to support services and law enforcement. Additionally, without a more complete understanding of the way in which young people identify dating violence terminology, the misunderstandings between researchers and participants examining dating violence will continue. This study argues terminology tensions within dating violence literature and discourse are a prominent way in which dating violence is being perpetuated, as without sufficient tools to identify and articulate dating violence between participant, researcher and discipline, much of the experience of dating violence remains unspoken and in the

dark. Clear distinctions over terminology within social research are key to the progression of dating violence research integrity and broader usefulness.

The Perpetuation of Dating Violence Through Cultural-Silence

Alongside the lack of national statistical recognition and terminology tensions surrounding dating violence, cultural silence is a key driving force behind the continued perpetuation of dating violence. Cultural silence shifts violence and abuse within intimate partner relationships to the 'private sphere' of the home, rather than acknowledging the issue as a public crisis. Through an examination of several key ways in which cultural silence perpetuates dating violence, this study finds there is an urgent need to pay attention to the broader social structural and cultural issues that contribute to the perpetuation of dating violence. Young people today live in a highly connected and ever-changing world. Globalisation has created a constantly shifting lived experience of culture and society – in which space and time do not have the same meanings they used to. Binaries of local and global, public and private, and structure and movement interweave to create the abstract systems which mediate our lives (Best 2011). Neoliberal ideologies grounded in 'choice' and 'individual responsibility' are dominant themes within dating violence literature and help to explain the broader structural forces perpetuating the high incidents of dating violence taking place.

The perpetuation of dating violence through 'cultural silence' was passingly referred to by several of the young women within this study, particularly with regards to the lack of public discourse and age related issues, such as, lack of education and relationship experience;

*"It's rarely talked about and therefore difficult to recognise in the early stages."
(Faye, 24-26, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence, heterosexual)*

However, a distinct focus on the individual as the reason for dating violence being misrecognised or overlooked in responses was also common;

“At a young age I didn’t realise it was a problem. It wasn’t until I was in my twenties I realised what I went through and how it wasn’t okay.” (Janice, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

The young women repeatedly identified their own lack of knowledge and understanding of dating violence as the reason dating violence was perpetuated within their relationships – without expressing an understanding of the cultural silence and normalisation of abuse in intimate partner relationships. The lack of discourse surrounding dating violence was keenly identified as a driving force behind why dating violence is so common and yet so unarticulated. Further, the young age of victims experiencing dating violence is incredibly important and noted by the young women within this study themselves. McCleary-Sills et al. (2016) argue perpetrators of intimate partner violence are allowed to abuse their victims with impunity, as victims find themselves unable to disclose their experiences of abuse.

The majority of the young women within this study (69.82%, n=55) were confident in identifying dating violence as a widespread and serious issue facing young women (see Figure 5.). However, intimate partner violence is recognised within policy and legislation as inherently wrong, however this view is not universally shared or upheld, and neoliberal ideologies surrounding individual responsibility and the government ‘hands-off’ view regarding the private sphere of the family, the home, and the intimate relationship remains dominant (Murray & Powell 2011).

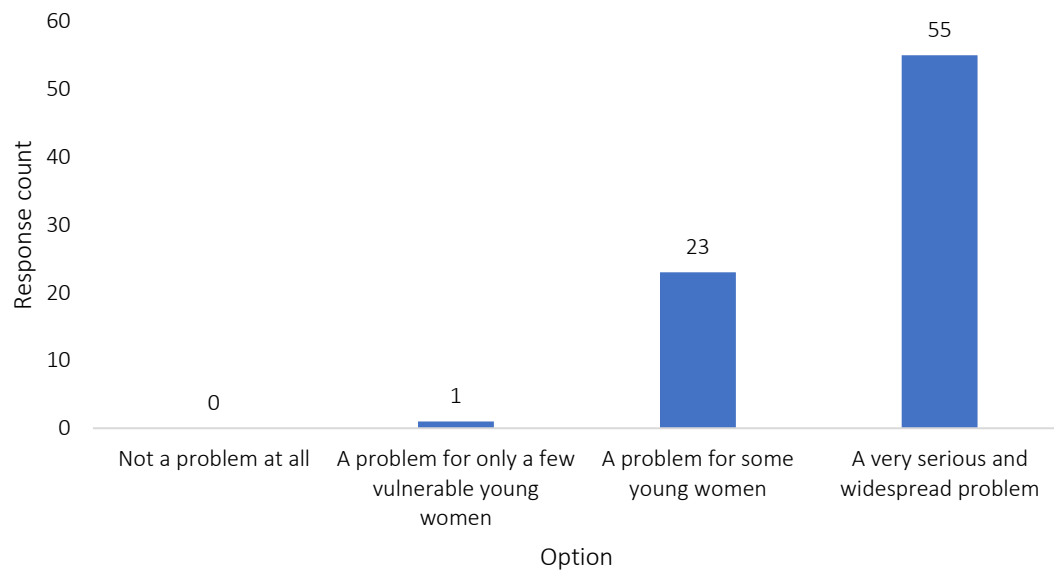


Figure 5. Participants understanding of the proportion of young women experiencing dating violence in Australia

Several further reflections from the young women participating in the study also alluded to their understanding and experience with the ‘everyday’ nature of gender-based violence and abuse, and the commonness of dating violence;

“Too many of the stories I hear from friends involved dating violence.” (Jodie, 21-23, has not experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

“it's an epidemic, especially from men in my experience. every woman has a story.” (Sophie, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Similarly, when asked about their attitudes and understandings of dating violence in general, the young women showed overall consensus relating to the statements offered within the survey. Townsend & Bailey (2021) suggest common misconceptions relating to intimate partner violence surround ideas that the victim

deserved it, that it only happens among poor communities, and if it gets bad the victim can just leave the relationship.

While some of the young women within this study did not consider the more nuanced abusive behaviours as constituting dating violence, many demonstrated an understanding of the falsehood of some of these misconceptions relating to dating violence. For example, the young women recognised the nuance of abuse not simply ending when the relationship ends (98.73%, n=78); that dating violence affects young (96.20%, n=76) and educated people (94.94% n=75); that dating violence can reoccur in a relationship after the initial incident (96.20%, n=76); and, that you cannot make a friend leave an abusive partner by walking away from them (98.73%, n=78), as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Participants understanding of the nuances of dating violence

		True		False	
Statement		(n=79)	%	(n=79)	%
1	Ending an abusive relationship ends abuse	1	1.27%	78	98.73%
2	Dating violence is rare among young people	3	3.80%	76	96.20%
3	Dating violence is rare among educated people.	3	3.80%	75	94.94%
4	Drugs and alcohol can contribute to abusive relationships	79	100.00%	0	0.00%
5	Hitting or punching a partner may just be due to frustration	5	6.33%	74	93.67%
6	Partner can be excused for verbal violence if it is within the context of a fight	7	8.86%	72	91.14%
7	You can force a friend leave a violent relationship by walking away from them	1	1.27%	78	98.73%
8	If someone confides in you that their partner is being violent, you should always disclose it to parents or other authorities	29	36.71%	50	63.29%
9	If violence occurs once in a dating relationship, it is likely to happen again in that relationship	76	96.20%	2	2.53%
10	If violence occurs once in a dating relationship, it is likely to happen again in subsequent relationships	53	67.09%	26	32.91%
11	Dating violence happens through social media and instant messaging as well as in person	77	97.47%	1	1.27%

These findings suggest that although dating violence remains quite hidden within society and national statistics, young women are generally knowledgeable about the false information and stereotypes regarding the experience of dating violence; particularly the assumption of intimate partner violence only happening to adults and those less educated, and the difficulty experienced in leaving or ending an abusive relationship, along with the difficulty experienced in helping a friend who is experiencing dating violence.

The Perpetuation of Dating Violence Through the Normalisation of Dating Violence

Dating violence is also perpetuated by the broader societal normalisation of violence against women, and intimate partner and dating violence. The young women within this study described experiences of 'expecting abuse' within their dating relationships, suggesting that they have been brought up to expect and to accept some level of abuse, gender inequality, and male domination in their relationships;

"I think there should be education around consent and respectful relationships starting in primary school. I wasn't aware of the violent tendencies of the person I dated in the past because I had been brought up to implicitly accept disrespect and violence towards women through popular culture and the actions/beliefs of my family. I think it's really important to emphasise to girls and young women that they can say no. This education is also needed (probably more) for boys and young men. It shouldn't be on young women to protect themselves from the harm caused by men (or any gender). We need a more open conversation about respectful relationships in Australia." (Tilly, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

In this response, Tilly additionally expressed an understanding of 'consent' being a highly under-sought state. These findings suggest the cultural norm of gendered power imbalances and gender-based violence as being so ingrained that although on

paper these issues are understood by young women as unacceptable dating behaviour, in their lived experience of dating relationships they are everyday commonalities and expectations. The young women also referred to a lack of 'consent' and respect of young women by their dating partners with a sense of resignation, and a loss of faith in the belief that they will be respected and treated as an equal by their dating partners;

"I was not actually dating the person who I am thinking of, however, they were constantly pushing for a relationship to the point where I was very uncomfortable. I feel like, ultimately, their actions haven't affected my desire to enter a new relationship, but definitely have made me over-consider whether people will respect what I attempt to communicate with them." (Shania, 18-20, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence, bisexual)

The young women within this study demonstrated the effect dating violence has had on their belief in respectful and fair treatment by others. Having their boundaries broken within the relationship can have a distinct influence on young women's self-respect, self-esteem and belief in their right to respect and equal treatment. The literature suggests young women struggle to navigate gendered expectations of when to 'stand up for themselves', and when to 'make sacrifices' within their dating relationships (Luft et al. 2012). Young women routinely minimise and naturalise abusive behaviour, such as harassment, controlling behaviour, and unwanted attention from other men, by responding with 'passivity' (Elias-Lambert et al. 2014; Davies 2019).

The performance of heteronormative gender roles within abusive dating relationships was a common theme among the response of the young women within this study also in relation to the expectation of 'emotional intelligence' and the way in which young women would minimise, normalise and excuse abusive dating behaviours in order to maintain the relationship and protect themselves from

outward social shame or stigma. The young women referred to several methods they used in order to minimise, normalise, and excuse of dating violence – openly reflecting on how their own behaviours potentially perpetuated the abuse they experienced;

“It is very hard to not make excuses for violent partners and to remove yourself from those environments. Having more resources on how to cope in those situations would help a lot. I also strongly believe in prevention over treatment and think more effort should be brought into school for young men and also young women!” (Emma, 18-20, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Within the literature, Chung (2007) argues young women can experience a shift from their identity as a ‘single’ individual to a member of a ‘couple’, and the way this shift causes significant normalising and minimising behaviours, as young women feel the negative behaviour of their partner, through their ‘couple identity’, directly reflects on their own sense of self. Similarly, Davies (2019) argues young women regularly work to minimize their boyfriend’s ‘bad moods’ by ‘pleasing’ their boyfriend through their own reactions to his behaviour. Young women were also found within both studies (Chung 2005; Davies 2019) to demonstrate a belief that their possession of a higher level of emotional intelligence over that of their male counterparts provides them with an equalizing power within their relationship – while their partner may be physically controlling, the young women demonstrated a belief that they could hold their own, by being just as equally emotionally controlling.

When asked why they felt dating violence happens, the suggestions made by the young women participating in this study similarly demonstrated reasoning in which the behaviour of perpetrators was ‘minimised’ or ‘excused’;

“The abuser has low self-esteem.” (Tilly, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

“The abuser has anger issues, or just issues in general.” (Wendy, 18-20, has not experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Here, the young women refer to perpetrators of dating violence in a way that suggests their behaviour is understandable due to pre-existing social difficulties facing the perpetrator. Personal problems facing the perpetrator, such as ‘anger issues’ or ‘low self-esteem’, were identified as reasonable excuses as to why dating violence eventuated within the relationship. Young women routinely excuse, minimise, and normalise abuse in different ways. Chung (2007) and Luft et al. (2012) argue young women are prone to deflect responsibility away from their partner, to ‘dull’ the severity of the abusive behaviour in the way they talk about their experiences with others, and minimise the abusive behaviour through categorising the behaviours of their partner as something they will ‘grow out of’, by framing the incident as ‘unavoidable’ or just as a short tempered ‘character flaw’. Similarly, young women were found to brush off verbal and physical abuse by their partner as a ‘natural response’ to their abusive family background (Chung 2007). Poignantly, young women also frequently forgive episodes of violence if their partner shows remorse, without regard for how many times the violence happened or the increasing rates of severity of the violence (Chung 2007). Seemingly harmless or fleeting abusive behaviours can also be experienced by young women within abusive dating relationships without much understanding of how far the abuse would progress, and by the time the young women start to feel manipulated and abused the relationship is already highly dangerous and controlling (Barbaro-Kukade 2019).

The Perpetuation of Dating Violence Through Victim-blame

Finally, dating violence is perpetuated by the experience of victim-blame young women are overwhelmingly faced with in response to reporting or disclosing their experiences of dating violence victimisation. While this victim-blame response may come from friends, parents, or more official sources such as police, or support

workers, the repercussions of all forms of victim-blame result in young women failing to report or disclose their experiences the next time. Similarly, by witnessing or responding to disclosure of abuse with victim-blame young women will be much less likely to disclose any violence or abuse they themselves experience in the future. By victim-blame being such a prominent response faced by young women experiencing dating violence, this study argues further silence surrounds the experience of dating violence and this form of abuse remains distinctly perpetuated.

The young women within this study overwhelmingly reported disclosing incidences of dating violence to friends (n=37), if reporting to anyone at all; followed by, parents (n=10), and siblings (n=6), as shown in Figure 4 (p. 91). Additionally, responses from the young women within this study which suggested the victim was at fault for the occurrence of dating violence taking place within their relationship were also prevalent. Of the young women within this study, 35.44% (n=28) suggested the reasons for dating violence could stem from the victim not having enough friends (35.44%, n=28) or self-esteem (37.97%, n=30), and suggested that the victim does not realise the abuse is happening (77.22%, n=61) as a potential cause, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Participants reasoning as to why dating violence happens within a relationship

Option		Response count (n=79)	%
1	The victim does not have high enough self-esteem	30	37.97%
2	The victim does not have supportive family and friends	28	35.44%
3	The influence of drugs and alcohol	62	78.48%
4	The couple does not have enough money	19	24.05%

5	The victim lets it happen	8	10.13%
6	The abuser does not respect women	75	94.94%
7	The abuser has trust and anger problems	76	96.20%
8	The victim does not realize it is happening	61	77.22%

Experiences with victim-blame regarding disclosure of incidents of dating violence were found within the literature to be extremely influential on the negative effect dating violence has on young women's lives and deeply rooted in heteronormative expectations and individualisation (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; 2007; Edwards et al. 2011). Baker (2003) particularly suggests that experience with victim-blame while the victim is still in a relationship with the abuser, results in young women being much less likely to discuss, admit, or seek advice from their social network in future; and can have extremely dire consequences for that young woman.

The experiences of the young women within this study reflect those found within the literature. One young women explained her experience with victim-blame and shame in her disclosing to friends the dating violence she was experiencing;

"I experienced the beginning of what I believe would have become a systematic take-down of my confidence in a dating relationship a few years ago. It had a long-standing impact on me and led to many other repeat experiences based on a sexual assault that occurred in the relationship. When I first told my friends about what I was experiencing they chastised me and told me I was a fool for staying with this person. Some did that. Others told me I should wear more makeup and do what the man I was dating wanted..." (Tilly, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

This victim-blame-laden response of Tilly's friends to her disclosure of dating violence, can be understood within the framework of heteronormative gender roles and individualisation. In this instance, Tilly is both blamed and shamed for the abuse she is experiencing, through the assumption of her friends that she has 'let the abuse happen' to her, and for her foolishness in staying in the relationship. Tilly also experienced a stark contrast in responses from other friends, who instead blamed and shamed the young woman for not properly fulfilling her gendered role within the relationship – by not being feminine (or submissive) enough. In the end, the young woman failed to gain adequate support during this time from those she sought help from, and instead, as the literature also suggests (Elias-Lambert et al. 2014) relied solely on her individual self to make sense of and improve her situation;

"...Luckily I had a sense of what was happening and quickly ended the relationship. Now, talking to young women of 18-22 years, I see the same patterns of behaviour and beliefs that I had. I think this is a really crucial age group to work with and support. It worries me the way that young women are encouraged to rationalise the abuse they experience. Almost every woman I know has experienced sexual assault at some point in their lives. This is a serious issue and requires all genders to work together and change the status quo." (Tilly, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Increasingly, scholars reflect on the role of victim-blame in shaping young women's normalisation of abuse. Fear of blame and judgement from others is suggested to play a significant role in shaping of whether or not young women report incidences of abuse to anyone (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2007). In particular, young women fear the embarrassment of being blamed for either 'choosing the wrong boyfriend', and for 'putting up with the abuse', so much so, that they practice normalising behaviours as a way of hiding the abuse from their social network (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2007). Further, young women who do end up disclosing incidences of dating violence to friends, are much less likely to actually leave abusive relationships, due to the way in which the

abuse becomes normalised in their own mind through ‘dulling down’ the severity when speaking with friends (Jackson 2002).

Young women without personal experience of dating violence regularly responded to a friend’s disclosure of victimisation by focusing on the behaviours and ‘choices’ made by the victim, rather than the abusive behaviour of the perpetrator (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Chung 2007). Responses commonly misinterpreted the gravity of the situation by minimising and normalising the abuse, or by making jokes (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Chung 2007). Dating violence is largely understood by these young women as happening to ‘other’, ‘vulnerable’ young women with ‘low self-esteem’, from an ‘abusive upbringing’ (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Chung 2007).

The Perpetuation of Dating Violence Through Support Systems Lacking Nuance

When young women do reach out to official forms of reporting and disclosing of dating violence, repeatedly we see current reporting systems and support services failing young women. In the few instances where young women actually report their experiences with dating violence through official channels, such as police or support services, the nuance and serious nature of dating violence is insufficient and the young women find themselves unable or unwilling to reach out for further help. The study argues the lack of nuanced and specialised support and reporting methods available to young people experience dating violence is a huge driving force behind the perpetuation of dating violence. Though the body of literature surrounding young women’s help-seeking behaviours after dating violence is limited, the research has uncovered some crucial ways in which the needs of young women are not being met regarding education, social network support and support from legal and law enforcement services.

Several young women within this study referred to instances where official forms of support and reporting of dating violence had been attempted, but the support and understanding provided completely missed the mark, and left them to deal with the dating violence on their own;

“Reported one incident to parents/police and it was a horrible experience. Have had subsequent experiences that I talk through with friends.” (Holly, 24-26, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence, bisexual)

In this instance, Holly demonstrates the nervous nature of the help-seeking behaviour of young women, which can result in a single occurrence. With the response of official persons not meeting the needs of the young woman in the first instance, there is very unlikely to be a second attempt made. Which means we need to be really careful and attentive to how young women are being responded to and how we can improve our responding reactions and procedures. The young women within this study also described the concern experienced over the lack of understanding of the nuances of dating violence victimisation by police and other official services;

“I have to worry about how reporting my own violent partner could make police doubt the sincerity of the person i [sic] am living with's [sic] violent relationship that has been reported.” (Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Lack of confidence in official services understanding of the nuances of dating violence created a barrier to Hazel feeling comfortable enough to report her experiences of dating violence to police. Myhill (2017) refers to this experience of victims of abuse being deterred from seeking support due to concern over how their reactionary behaviour will be construed, arguing even though the violence was pre-

emptive resistant to expected violence or fighting-back in the moment against violence from a partner having also been violent, concern over how their own behaviour would be seen played a major role in young women failing to reach out for support. The result of this apprehension is both the continued secrecy and silence surrounding dating violence as young women are not sharing their experiences officially, and that we as a society cannot help women who do not come forward for help. The literature suggests victims of dating violence take on the responsibility for the abuse they experience as the volatility of the relationship can cause them themselves to escalate arguments within the relationship and sometime to have initiated physical violence themselves (Bermea, Eeden-Moorefield & Khaw 2019). However, it is important to note that 'problematic behaviour' of victims is extremely common as they experience long durations in anxiety and fear, revealing the complexity of the 'victim' positionality (Bermea, Eeden-Moorefield & Khaw 2019).

Finally, one young woman within this study described succinctly the way in which she experienced 'falling through the crack' of official services;

"I was homeless after the last physically violent incident. I was not allowed to go to a women's shelter because they don't accept sex workers in Western Australia. I needed a place to sleep; and the hospital asked me to find myself a hotel (with no money) or call a friend (with no friends and no phone) before telling me that my bruises and sprain were too mild to reserve a bed for me."
(Katie, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Katie's experience with the lack of specialised support services for young women experiencing dating violence within Australia is harrowing. Young women need the support of services who understand the complexity of coercive control, and the preparedness and capability of service providers and law enforcement in responding. Brennan, Burton, Gormally & O'Leary (2019) study of intimate partner violence victim support service providers found that the lack of clear definition of coercive

control within the system meant that 'personal discretion' was routinely used in determining the needs of victims, which in turn increased the 'discounting' of many non-physical forms of abuse by workers under pressure. Similarly, Everhart & Hunnicutt (2013) in their study of queer experience with dating violence support services, argue support services using a 'one-size-fits-all' understanding of dating violence run the risk of deterring those who do not fall within the 'understood' experience of dating violence victimisation; oversimplifying, and losing out on helping you people.

The young women within this study were given the space to provide their own suggestions for the types of support services, education and reporting methods they felt young women desperately needed. Their responses were abundant, thoughtful, and nuanced. Notably, young women who identified as having experienced dating violence, along with those who remained unsure, were able to provide more nuanced and specific suggestions than those without dating violence experience, who offered more general suggestions. Further, increased legal and police services were much more common among the responses of young women without dating violence experience. The young women who had personal experience with dating violence – or were unsure if they had experienced dating violence – similarly focused their attention on areas overlooked by those without personal experience, such as suggestions focusing on the empowerment and anonymity of those seeking support.

Collectively, the young women within this study expressed the importance of creative, age appropriate, independent and community focused, and technology related suggestions. The young women referred to the importance of autonomy, independence and support in aid of recovery from dating violence;

"People they know and trust to be able to confide in and seek advice. Trust and belonging in a place outside of a relationship will help them see the result of

positive relationships. Helplines and emergency social support contacts." (Lucy, 24-26, heterosexual)

Along the same lines, the young women also focused their attention on the particular usefulness of peer support advice and support. This suggestion by the young women within this study reflects the findings of Schneider (2000), in which identity construction can increasingly improve the wellbeing of young women after victimisation, and requires 'personal privacy' to be reinstated, primarily through the channels of safety, autonomy, seclusion, and healthy intimacy. Additionally, the importance of self-help women's group for women experiencing shame and self-blame, as a way of reconfiguring their experiences from deviant to acceptable and understandable, was noted by Dunn (2004) as crucial to establishing sound wellbeing after experiencing dating violence. The young women within this study argued that women supporting and educating each other is of vital importance to the healing of young women after experiencing dating violence – and as a defence against the potential for further dating violence victimisation of that young woman.

The young women within this study particularly suggested peers can provide for each other the deep understanding needed and can shift the experience from one of 'protecting' other young women, to one of 'empowering' them;

"Even more support or women's circles. They need to understand they are not alone and they have other women or otherwise that have been through the same thing." (Esther, 21-23, experienced dating violence, bisexual)

"Peer support is especially important - this is definitely a gendered issue & [sic] I mostly felt that only my other young woman friends would understand all the nuances." (Agnes, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

There was also a strong interest in the young women at the importance of getting friends and family involved, as these connections were well understood by the young women as the first line of defence;

"Easier access to conversational support rather than authorities and/or law enforcement as this might make them nervous or might make them think the violence will get worse." (Brooke, 21-23, has not experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Improvement in education surrounding dating violence was also an extremely frequent suggestion, with a distinct requirement of the importance of young men being taught alongside young women, and the need for specificity in services, such as women's only services for same-sex lesbian/queer dating violence, in which the particular nuances of same-sex dating violence can be made sure to be brought into the forefront of the support provided;

"It should be available to young men and non-binary people too. Information and anonymous text/call lines that could contact police for you if it got serious. A support network." (Christina, 21-23, has not experienced dating violence, pansexual)

"There should be more support and advice for lesbians/bisexual women in relationships with women." (Flora, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Finally, the importance of speciality support and better understanding of the nuances and experience of young adult dating violence in general attitudes of support services, law enforcement, and legal systems;

"Anonymous chat lines, more resources to search for therapists who can empathise best (eg [sic] female, DV counselling etc)." (Jane, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

"A hotline, support from social workers, trained police officers who believe them." (Nichola, 21-23, has not experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

In particular, these services were described by the young women as needing assured privacy and confidentiality in order to encourage young women to disclose their experiences and seek the support they need;

"Counselling/therapy with a guarantee that there will be absolutely no reporting or legal intervention without permission. As confidentiality rules currently say that confidentiality can be broken if the patient is at risk of harm, it may deter many victims from seeking this kind of emotional and mental support due to fear of honesty leading to police intervention." (Shania, 18-20, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Though limited research examines the causes and consequences of young people failing to seek support from adults and professionals, the literature (Jackson 2002) does suggest this reluctance could be in part due to the fear of adults breaking confidentiality and causing serious ramifications for the dating partners.

Conclusion

Dating violence is deeply imbedded in gendered social and cultural norms pervading our society, and social research helps to illuminate these cultural and structural forces shaping the perpetuation of dating violence. This chapter explored the ways in which dating violence is deeply perpetuated by being both silenced, misunderstood, and mishandled at much higher rates than young people and their safety can afford. The chapter found that invisibility and cultural silences surrounding intimate partner

violence, particularly in Australia, along with strong attitudes supporting individualisation, victim-blame and shame are all key ways in which dating violence is being silently perpetuated. Without these deeper understandings and exploration through sociological research, dating violence threatens to remain the problem of the individual, and the structural social forces driving this form of intimate partner violence are to remain hidden. Having gained a better understanding of the ways in which dating violence is both shaped and perpetuated by social and cultural forces, as well as those of a more direct gendered nature, this study continues these investigations in the following chapter, exploring the ways in which young women are socially impacted by dating violence, and the current invisibility of these impacts.

Chapter Six. The Social Impact of Dating Violence on Young Women

Introduction

The final chapter of analysis and discussion within this thesis concerns the highly under-researched social impact of dating violence victimisation on young women. Understanding more clearly the ways in which young women are impacted in a social sense by dating violence is key to determining how they can be better supported and future violence and abuse within dating relationships can be prevented. The bulk of the literature examining the impact of dating violence on girls and young women has been produced within the discipline of psychology and the behavioural sciences, meaning these studies have a keen focus on the individual experience and the development of psychological disorders as a result of the trauma of intimate partner violence, particularly at a young age (Silverman et al. 2001; Brown et al. 2009; Lövestad et al. 2017; Ahmadabadi et al. 2019). A notable gap in the literature is an examination into the impact of dating violence on young women's social world. This study builds upon findings within Barbaro-Kukade's (2019) work examining coercive control within the dating relationships of young women, which found the lasting negative impacts of abuse on mental and physical health were not the only areas affected. Instead, dating violence was also found to have a notable negative impact on young women's ability to maintain academic achievement, friendships and future romantic relationships. However, the social impact of dating violence on other areas of young women's lives, and an examination of the social structures shaping these experiences requires further exploration.

This chapter builds upon the findings of Barbaro-Kukade (2019), firstly, addressing the impact of dating violence on young women's experience and understanding of broader social structures of gendered power imbalances and individualisation, and the impact of this on employment, education, and friendships. The chapter then draws from Weir's concept of identity construction, investigating the impact of

dating violence on young women's sense of self and understanding of the space they hold within society. Lastly, this chapter explores the impact of dating violence victimisation on young women's apprehension over the possibility of future romantic relationships, considering the broader social implications of this shift away from desiring to engage in new romantic relationships.

The Impact of Dating Violence on the Social Experience of Young Women's Lives

Within this study, the young woman demonstrated the impact of dating violence as being both physical, psychological, and social. However, the social impact of dating violence is an area particularly lacking in research. When asked directly, the young women compiled lists demonstrating the range of ways dating violence had impact them;

"Anxiety and depression, loss of friends, loss of self, eating disorder, poorer academic results." (Sophie, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

The impact of dating violence can be seen here as having a striking social impact on Sophie, a long way into the future. For example, poorer academic results due to experiencing dating violence can result in longer timeframes in which education is completed and entering into the workforce can be achieved or prevent young women from achieving the grades required for employment in positions with higher levels of remuneration. In this way, dating violence can be attributed in some way to the gender wage gap and gendered inequality within both education and the workforce. Similar results were found by Barbaro-Kukade (2019), in which abusive dating partners were found to disrupt young women's higher education as abusive dating partners demanded the young women spend all their 'free time' with them – which invariably included time which would have been spent studying – resulting in poorer academic results. Likewise, the additional stress of dealing with an abusive

partner, meant that the young women's academic achievement suffered (Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Another study, by Luft et al. (2012), found young women were prone to sacrifice time on schoolwork and socialising with friends and family, for time spent with their boyfriend, which contributed to considerable social distress upon the ending of an abusive relationship.

In addition to education, the direct impact of dating violence on a young woman's employment opportunities was described by one young woman within this study. The young woman found herself unable to continue her work within the sex industry to the same degree due to the reminder of the trauma she experienced within her abusive dating relationship;

"My libido and want for multiple partners (I'm poly) has dropped to 0 [sic]. This is severely unusual for me. I work as a full service sex worker; and I am unable to work for long periods due to flashbacks and nightmares related to the former relationship." (Katie, 21-23, bisexual)

Katie demonstrates the impact dating violence can have on a young women's experience of the working environment, particularly within the space of sex work. In this instance, dating violence has been a distinct factor influencing the amount of hours per week this young woman is able to spend in paid work, which could have an immediate impact on the financial stability of a young woman.

The development of distrust in people, and men in particular, was a dominant impact of dating violence on young women that emerged within the young women's responses. This development of distrust as the result of dating violence has the potential to be hugely impactful on young women's lives, particularly in the areas of employment, education, friendships and social networks. For the young women within this study, the development of issues relating to 'trust' were the most highly identified by participants, with 74% (n=37) trusting people less than they did before,

and 46% (n=23) suggesting it takes them longer to trust new partners, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The impact of dating violence on participants

Option		Response count (n=50)	%
1	I am afraid of being in another relationship	15	30.00%
2	I trust less than I did before	37	74.00%
3	It takes me longer to trust new partners	23	46.00%
4	I do not feel that I want to have another relationship	11	22.00%
5	I am afraid that violence will happen again	18	36.00%
6	I am afraid that I may not be able to leave my current violent relationship	2	4.00%
7	I am afraid I may not be able to leave another violent relationship	8	16.00%

The young women within this study referred to the negative effect of dating violence on their social interactions with others due to the development of a general distrust of others and the realisation that violence and abuse could happen within their relationship. The young women also demonstrated an awareness of the daily danger they are faced with in regards to interactions with men;

"I feel it's more safe for my physical & [sic] mental health to stay away from men. Sadly statistics prove me right here as it's one of the most dangerous

things for woman - to get injured or murdered.” (Belle, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Belle identifies the discomfort and difficulty she experiences in her everyday life due to the development of distrust in men. The weight she experiences in regards to the life-threatening nature of violence against women and intimate partner violence is evident. However, this discomfort and distrust is not just relating to new romantic partners. Males within the workplace, the university, the shopping centre, bars and pubs, and even men in official roles, such as male police officers and male doctors are also singled out as people who are not to be trusted. This distrust has the potential to be extremely disruptive and distressing for young women;

“After my violent dating experience I was convinced that all men were like that. It took me a long time & hard work to think otherwise.” (Agnes, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Here, Agnes also particularly refers here to the extensive length of time it took to work through these issues relating to the general distrust of men. Due to the extended amount of time needed by some young women to process and heal from their experiences with dating violence, again employment and education opportunities have the potential to be missed or postponed, putting young women at a career or academic disadvantage.

These sorts of issues point to the potential lifelong impact of dating violence on a young woman. Particularly notable within the young women’s responses were those relating to the suggestions as to why a young woman would stay in an abusive relationship, in which the strong influence of social networks and family were present;

“Their friends and family support their relationship with the abuser, the victim has been exposed to abusive relationships and they're normalised (e.g. parents).” (Daisy, 24-26, has not experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Finally, the development of constant concern for their own physical safety since experiencing dating violence, along with that of their social networks and particularly their ability to protect and maintain relationships with friends, was an experience extremely common among the young women within this study;

“I cannot walk the streets of my home town without protection. I have to warn my peers about another human. My friends and people who know me get physically attacked in public just for knowing me.” (Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Here, Hazel also demonstrated concern over her own ability to make and maintain friendships, due to both their ex-partner's reactionary behaviour to the break up, and the fear of how their own behaviour has been affected as a result of experiencing this violence and abuse;

“I am afraid my past violent relationship will negatively impact my future partners and friends. I am also afraid that I may become reactionary and violent myself.” (Katie, 21-23, bisexual)

The impact of dating violence on a young woman's ability to make and maintain friendships is incredibly telling of just how much we need to better understand the effect dating violence has on young women's lives. Friends are well-understood to be the first point of disclosure and support by young women experiencing dating violence (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Xenos & Smith 2001; Chung 2002; Jackson 2002; Baker 2003; Chung 2007; Edwards et al. 2011; Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Disclosing experiences of dating violence to a friend has been found to elicit some highly positive responses, with young women advocating the positive effects of having

someone like a trusted friend to talk to; having someone their own age with whom they can 'vent' and gain non-judgmental encouragement and advice can make young women feel empowered to make their own 'healthy' choices within their dating relationship (Mahlstedt & Keeny 1993; Jackson 2002; Edwards et al. 2011).

Maintaining the support of friendships is vital in the effort for recovery from and prevention of future dating violence and abuse for young women, and without the spaces of friendship young women experiencing abuse will be quite alone in their trauma.

The Impact of Dating Violence on Young Women's Identity

A further way in which the young women within this study demonstrated the social impact of dating violence in their lives, was through the development of low self-esteem and lack of belief in their own abilities. Dating violence victimisation has the ability to shift the way in which a young person identifies themselves and the realisation of having been victimised through the intimacy of coercion and abuse rooted in gender inequality within their dating relationship can be deeply impactful on a young woman's social development and where they see their rights and their place in society. Further, the loss of a sense of self and a shifted identity stemming from their experiences of violence and abuse can have a profound and long-lasting effect on young women's identity construction and life-trajectory.

The substantial social impact of dating violence was referred to by the young women within this study in regards to their own understanding of their abilities, their identity and their self-worth. Shame, self-blame, regret, and an altered self-image were found within the literature to be hugely impactful on young women recovery from dating violence (Barbaro-Kukade 2019), and were extremely common among the young women within this study, particularly the shame and self-blame at having fallen prey to dating violence and abuse in the first place. The young women referred to the toll taken on their confidence and self-esteem with regards to their experience with dating violence;

“Low self-esteem, wondering if I was the problem, unlovable, thoughts about what my ex and his friends will think if I move on.” (Harriet, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

Struggling with feelings of shame regarding whether the abuse they experienced was through their own fault, as they wondered if they were the problem, and worried what others think of them were common threads among the responses from the young women. This is incredibly telling of the ways in which dating violence is framed through gendered individualisation, with responsibility and blame accepted by the young women victims. Harriet wonders if she is the problem in the situation, regardless of the responsibility of the perpetrator in being abusive, and the broader social structures, such as gender and individualisation, which control the situation. This finding demonstrates the need to better support and educate young women with regards to the perpetrator being responsible for dating violence, and not the victim.

Additionally, the young women were prone to show apprehension over starting new dating relationships, as they acknowledged the way in which abusive relationships do not start out abusive, rather once trust and attachment is established does dating violence begin to surface;

“Whenever I consider being in a new relationship, I remind myself that it's safer to remain single. I'm sceptical when potential love interests are kind to me as I suspect they may be 'lovebombing' and things may spiral into emotional abuse as time goes on.” (Arlo, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, pansexual)

The young women considered their wariness in attempting to establishing new dating relationships after experiencing abuse, as they were now conscious of the ways in which manipulation and control establish themselves with a dating relationship, as soon as you are hooked. The young women's sense of self and low

self-esteem also came through in the shame they expressed at their having fallen victim to an abusive dating partner;

“It has taken a toll on my confidence and makes it harder to trust other men as they are usually sweet in the beginning.” (Bonnie, 24-26, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence)

The young women spoke of regret and shame in having a lack of faith in their own ability to recognise early warning signs of abuse within their future dating relationships, even though demonstrating an understanding of the way in which abuse is progressive and unnoticeable at the start of a dating relationship. The young women expressed the ‘toll’ of dating violence on their self-esteem and confidence. Similarly, the young women also demonstrated shame and distress at having fallen victim to dating violence and their previous naivety;

“Feelings of distress because I wasn’t aware of it until reflecting years later.” (Michelle, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

The young women acknowledged the substantial length of time it had taken them to recognise what they had gone through in that relationship, and the serious nature of their experiences. Similarly, the development of anxiety and depression were illuminated by the young women as shaping their view of themselves and in considering their newly altered behaviours since their experiences with dating violence;

“I believe it made me a more anxious person. I sometimes feel guilty about seeing people who I know my previous partner didn’t approve of (even though we aren’t together anymore). I’m also protective of my phone/laptop even though I have nothing to hide.” (Jess, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

The young women repeatedly referred to increased levels of anxiety, however in this case the way this young woman frames her development of anxiety is in a way that has altered her identity. She is not 'dealing with anxiety', she is now 'an anxious person'. This shift in identity can be understood within the framework of the 'victim' identity. The literature argues victims of abuse can very easily categorise themselves through the lens of self-blame, in which they understand themselves to be a 'victim', rather than as someone who has been victimised (Ovenden 2012; Andrus 2019). The difference is subtle, but demonstrates the internalisation and entrenchment of self-blame for their victimisation. The young women within this study also demonstrated the impact of dating violence perpetrated through technology changing their sense of self, referring to new anxiety and fear in relation to their technological devices. In her comment above, Jess expresses an increased level of caution with regards to her personal devices alongside active defiance against the potential for victim-blame, arguing she feels this way even though there is nothing for her to hide. Schneider (2000) argues that identity construction can increasingly improve the wellbeing of young women after victimisation, and requires 'personal privacy' to be reinstated, primarily through the channels of safety, autonomy, seclusion, and healthy intimacy.

A further way in which the young women demonstrated the shift in their identity and sense of self can be seen within Katie's statement, in which high levels of personal protection became an increasingly necessary newly developed behaviour, particularly identified through the way in which Katie found she needed to protect herself by protecting her identity and changing her name;

"I have a realistic fear of dying in front of a new future partner due to my ex threatening this. I now also have had to change my name and keep all friendships and potential relationships under wraps and secret in-case he finds out. This is a realistic fear because he has plaid [sic] out this scenario before and been to jail for it." (Katie, 21-23, bisexual)

Here, Katie also demonstrated in a highly distinct way dating violence can impact a young woman's identity. Katie found herself having to change her name, the very label we are given from birth to identify us within our social world. Boyle's (2017) study of sexual assault victims suggests the self-narratives of young people find themselves challenged by the trauma, commonly resulting in recognised symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which affects identity construction through high levels of deflection and discrepancies in the victims understanding of what happened to them and their relationship to power. Similarly, Katie can also be understood here to be negotiating her positionality within the framework of the 'victim' and 'victim-survivor' identities. Along with this change in her identity, Katie also suggests she struggles to contend with the very real possibility of further violent acts perpetrated against her even though the relationship has ended, with fear for the safety of herself, her friends and any new dating partners. The literature identifies the experience of living with constant fear, by women young women who have experienced heightened levels of manipulation and domination in their dating relationships as a strategy, in which they "live in a state of constant surveillance" (Baker 2003, p. 31) in order to protect themselves.

There were some situations in this study in which the young women found they were able to shift the experience of dating violence of one in which they were shameful of, into one in which the development of a stronger sense of self was able to be acknowledged. In this example, the young women were able to work towards healing by reclaiming their identity as a 'survivor' of victimisation, or as a 'victim-survivor' rather than seeing themselves through the lens of self-blame (Ovenden 2012; Andrus 2019). Ovenden (2012) and Andrus (2019) suggest instead, a sense of self that can be developed through personal identification with the 'victim-survivor' identity, in which young women develop the ability to see themselves as 'someone who has experienced abuse' rather than as a 'victim'. Within this study, the experience of 'healing' from their experiences of dating violence still altered the young women's sense of self, identity, and 'place' in society, but was understood to be a more positively constructive identity shift;

“I have a strong sense of what I will allow from a partner and am very aware of this early on when dating a new person - I’m very vigilant for signs of violence or disrespect and do not continue seeing someone if they display any of these behaviours.” (Tilly, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

The few young women who demonstrated a positive impact of having had these experiences with dating violence now in their arsenal, suggested that these experiences have shaped their ability to understand and know themselves better, and understand better what to look for in a partner much more confidently. These ‘positives’ suggested by young women with regards to knowing who they are and what they want in a partner much more clearly having experience dating violence, nod to the space and potential for improved education and support services to create similar results in the development of personal strength and understanding of worth, within the young women having to go through the experience of dating relationship beforehand.

The Impact of Dating Violence on Young Women’s Future Relationships

Lastly, the young women demonstrated a notable impact dating violence had on their decisions surrounding engaging in new dating relationships, with more than half of the young women (57.14%, n=28) who had experienced dating violence suggesting they had been affected, as shown in Figure 6. The literature suggests young women who experience dating violence undergo a changed understanding of dating relationships and the realisation of the commonness of coercive dating violence (Barbaro-Kukade 2019). Young women within the literature who had been victimised by dating violence were much more inclined to view dating relationships negatively, with young women finding it difficult to desire new romantic partners after their experience with abuse (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta 2007). The more dating violence had been experienced, the more young women “expected” violent reactions from dating partners; situations involving rumours of infidelity, for instance, were likely to

incite apprehension and the expectation of a violence or manipulative reaction (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta 2007).

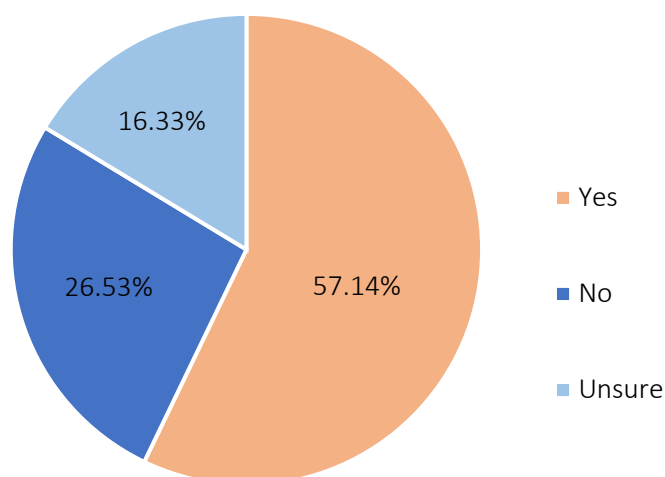


Figure 6. Participants opinion on whether dating violence has impacted their desire to engage in a new dating relationship (n=49)

The young women within this study identified the development of fear and apprehension in being in another relationship (30%, n=15), being trapped in a new relationship (16%, n=8), being trapped in their current relationship (4%, n=2), and being afraid they will be victimised by dating violence again in the future (36%, n=18), as shown in Table 7 (p. 119). When given the space to expand on their responses, the young women demonstrated distinctly high levels of distrust in and apprehension over the idea of engaging in a new dating relationship;

“I don't want to invite men into my personal space as they now have the power of knowing where i [sic] live, who i [sic] know, where I go and what I do. As i [sic] never want anyone to have the power of that information ever again.”
(Hazel, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

For young women, the experience of manipulation and domination is something that really stuck with them. Access to their personal information and whereabouts was an area the young women particularly felt the need to protect from future partners. The literature suggests exposure to an abusive dating relationship has been linked to repeat abusive relationship experiences, and a cycle of abusive experiences that can make escape and recovery extremely difficult for the victim (Martin et al. 2019). The young women were deeply impacted in their experiences of new dating relationships by this potential for future manipulation abuse, by needing to actively work to prepare and protect themselves from future vulnerability. In this way, the establishment of trust in a new relationship has the potential to be a much more drawn out process.

Similarly, this distrust and apprehension carried over into the sexual relationships of the young women within this study. The young women referred to the impact of non-consensual sex and sexual violence within dating relationships as a prominent driving force behind their apprehension over new dating and sexual relationship;

“By not having my boundaries respected during sex, it made me not want to be intimate with another person because I was afraid it would happen again - so I didn’t trust anybody to be close enough to me, therefore I didn’t want a relationship as I mistrusted all new people getting intimately close to me.”
(Brittany, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

These findings demonstrate the variety in dating relationships, in which some forms of dating relationships can simply be sexually focused, but are considered dating relationships non-the-less, and all dating relationships have the capacity to produce a violence and abusive experience for young women.

Responses from young women who experienced dating violence within same-sex relationships were notably similar in the ways dating violence impact their desire for new dating relationships;

"It has made me have trust issues and become very wary when I start to date people." (Jenny, 18-20, has experienced dating violence, queer)

These findings identify ways in which female same-sex and heterosexual dating violence have potential commonalities between them, and that the inclusion of discourse regarding same-sex dating violence in support services and education responses could be extremely helpful for young people, who can feel invisible within the conversation. Suggesting that 'culture' as well as 'gender' are key concepts for discussion. It is important to note of course, that these same education and support services also need to address the ways in which dating violence is also uniquely experienced within same-sex relationships as much as there is a commonality between same-sex and heterosexual dating violence.

The young woman also demonstrated an increased awareness of gender inequality within dating relationships, and frustration over these existing issues with power and domination facing them within new dating relationships;

"Afraid to be alone with new male-identifying partners for the first time. Lack of understanding among all men of the impacts of gendered violence against women mean[s] that I have to explain things to them/educate/teach/inform. Tired of men's bullshit. Not really worth it." (Holly, 24-26, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence, bisexual)

The young women demonstrated a strong sense of 'putting off' dating, and a general lack of interest in dating altogether since their experiences with dating violence. Fear was identified as a strong driving force behind this sense of resignation and apathy to the possibility of future dating relationships, along with an overwhelming sense of

the young women feeling 'up against the world' as a result of experiencing directly the full force of the patriarchal structure of society in their personal lives;

"I no longer have any interest in sex or dating, and am afraid of both. I am seeing a psychologist to help with this, as a small part of me desires intimacy and companionship, but I find I am hypersensitive to aggressive, violent or disrespectful behaviour and comments from males. I have a strong negative view of males that is difficult to challenge because most males that I know are a product of the patriarchal environment they were raised in." (Ann, 24-26, has experienced dating violence, heterosexual)

In line with these findings, Walby (1989) argues patriarchal culture is much better understood as 'institutionally rooted' misogyny, rather than an ideology or attitude towards women. In terms of dating violence, patriarchal culture not only tolerates, but perpetuates violence against women as a way of ensuring the continuation of the status of men as the more dominant and powerful. This means that not only do men perpetrate violence against women at alarmingly high rates, law enforcement and legal systems are ill-equipped to serve victims of intimate partner violence (Schneider 2000). However, it is important to note that although the young women referred to dating violence being rooted in patriarchal culture, the impact was still experienced on a very individual and personal level. For example, references being made by the young women to their newly developed 'hypersensitivity' to violence and gender based inequality, and negative views of men in general being an individual problem for them to deal with.

The young women also made particular note of the extended length of time elapsed since last engaged in a dating relationship due to experiencing dating violence;

"I have been single 6 years just because of how i [sic] have been treated. Very hard to find a guy that respects women." (Zoe, 24-26, maybe/unsure if experienced dating violence)

This findings points to the long-lasting impact of dating violence on young women's lives, as in this young woman's case, six years down the line she is still feeling the impact of experiencing dating violence on her life and the way she moves through the world. The difficulty the young women experienced in 'finding' a dating partner who will be respectful and create a gender equality within the relationship was something the young women were openly concerned with.

Finally, young women within this study also demonstrated ways in which the experience of dating violence had potential positive impacts on their lives as it forced them to better understand their boundaries and limits within a relationship, and navigate and articulate what they really want to look for in a partner;

"It made me more wary about new partners, but I also became more eager to date so that I could forge new experiences with better people." (Flora, 21-23, has experienced dating violence, bisexual)

Here, the impact of dating violence has been shifted in focus by the young woman, from one in which she is a victim, to one in which she is a survivor, and these experiences can be utilised in order to protect against future intimate partner abuse. These findings reflect the literature (Baker 2003) which suggests the dating relationship is both a space in which intimate partner relationships can be 'practiced' for the real thing later in life, with the idea that dating violence is predominantly experienced as 'situational couple violence', the slightly less severe version of intimate partner violence than adult domestic violence more reflective of 'intimate terrorism' in which a partner threatens, intimidates, and controls the other through emotional and psychological abuse (Zweig et al. 2014). These differing results demonstrate the importance of young adult and adult romantic relationships being addressed by education and support services, along with law enforcement and policy as unique experiences within the same parent social issue of intimate partner violence.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the potential impact of dating violence on young women's lives, suggesting these impacts reach much further than the development of psychological disorders. The chapter found that the impact of dating violence can have a ripple effect into young women's understanding of their place in society among broader social structures of gender and power, how they interact with others, and their life-trajectory. The impact on friendships, future relationships, and the relationship with the self are some of the most prominent ways in which dating violence has been found to impact young women. Further, the impact on employment and education are telling of the long-lasting effect of dating violence on young women's lives – potentially impacting education and employment opportunities for young women. These social impacts can be best understood through the framework of the structural forces shaping young women's experience, such as, the ways in which law and policing can entrench misogynistic understandings of violence against women. Powerful gendered discourses within these structures relating to examining the behaviour of young women rather than an examination of the behaviour of their abusive partner directly shape the way young women understand their experiences with abuse and how they are impacted long after the dating violence has ended. These responses also work to deter young women from coming forward and disclosing their experiences to official persons, resulting in the shame inducing silencing of abuse. These findings demonstrate the need for structural and cultural changes in the way we respond to dating violence as a society, particularly with regards to the ability for dating violence to impact young women long into the future.

Chapter Seven. Conclusion

Introduction

While young adult dating violence continues to be a major public health and safety crisis for many young women, with the continued work of social researchers, we are slowly gaining a better understanding of the context in which this particular social problem is taking place. We are establishing sounder understandings of why young adult dating violence is so common and formulating ways we can more successfully prevent abuse within the dating relationships of young people, promote healthy relationships, and support young women better as a society. At the beginning of this thesis, the young woman reporting on her experiences as a Year 12 student engaging in a school-based sexual violence education program, argued, *“rape was portrayed as something that happens when a stranger jumps out of the bushes...We did not learn about what to do if your perpetrator is someone you know...”* (Fitzpatrick, ABC Triple J Hack, 2021). Madi’s reflections are extremely telling of the normalisation and silencing of violence and abuse that happens within the ‘private sphere’ of the intimate partner relationships of young people. Without a broader and widespread community understanding of the ways in which dating violence is experienced, what it looks like, and how young women can protect themselves, young women continue to be at high risk and rates of dating violence show no signs of slowing down.

As demonstrated by this study, building upon the previous body of literature, a significant problem is that dating violence remains a highly ambiguous concept. One whose nature is dangerous, damaging, and pervasive in young women’s lives. This study sought to contribute to research exploring the ways in which we can better understand young adult dating violence in order to implement more successful methods of reporting, seeking support, and gaining early and nuanced education, particularly within the Australian context. The thesis explored the ways in which young adult dating violence is unique in comparison to other forms of intimate partner and family violence, the structural ways in which dating violence is

perpetuated within society, and the impact of dating violence on young women beyond that of the psychological impact, but rather focusing on the social impact.

Main Findings and Implications

This thesis found that the unique nature of the young adult dating relationship shapes the way violence and abuse are experienced, in comparison to other forms of intimate partner and dating violence. Grounded in these findings, this thesis demonstrates the need for dating violence to be understood as the unique, multifaceted, and ambiguous relationship it is, in order for successful reporting methods, support services and education programs to be developed. Particularly as young women understand their experience as outlying, hidden, and their own fault, in which they find themselves *“wondering if I was the problem”* (Harriet, 21-23). This study also found that, in line with previous dating violence literature, young women continue to feel under-educated and ill-equipped to deal with experiences of dating violence that are understood by young women as ‘normal’ dating behaviour, suggesting, *“I knew if he hit me it was abuse, but I didn’t register his other behaviours... as abusive”* (Meg, 24-26).

This study also found that young adult dating violence is perpetuated by numerous social, cultural, and gendered forces, and demonstrated that in order to successfully attend to the issue of dating violence we need to address the problem from multiple fronts. In particular, the combination of heteronormative relationship expectations and individualisation play a distinct role in shaping young women’s experiences of dating violence. From the way young women respond directly to violence with excusive, minimising and normalising behaviours, to the way they take responsibility and blame for both the behaviours of their partner and the maintaining and managing of the relationship. This response by young women to abusive behaviour has the perpetuating effect of both silencing and dulling the violence, providing the space for the violence to gradually escalate, unfettered, until victims have become completely isolated and trapped. Additionally, silence culture shapes the way dating

violence behaviours can be understood as “normal” and “private” – are key influences on how dating violence continues to go unnoticed and unacknowledged..

Finally, this study demonstrated the distinct impact social and cultural structures have on the way dating violence is experienced. For example, one young woman within this study referred to the way gendered power imbalances were normalised for her, *“I had been brought up to implicitly accept disrespect and violence towards women through popular culture and the actions/beliefs of my family”* (Tilly, 24-26). Further, this thesis drew attention to the way support services and police assistance persistently remain underutilised, as young women continue to seek support primarily from friends and peers in an attempt to avoid being misunderstood, having their trust further broken, or finding themselves blamed, disbelieved, or forced to end the relationship. However, rates of abuse within the dating relationships of young people remain high, both during the relationship and after the relationship has ended.

Contribution

This thesis contributed new findings in the consideration of the social impact of dating violence on young women, beyond the psychological. The young women within this study identified dating violence as negatively impacting numerous social aspects of their lives. In particular, the young women identified their inability to trust others - particularly men, their lack of desire and fear of engaging in new dating experiences, lack of trust in law enforcement and legal responses, and their feelings of responsibility and self-blame for the abuse as being significant ways in which they experienced the long-lasting impact of dating violence on their lives. This study also contributed to the body of literature arguing the importance of including both young women who had experienced dating violence, along with those who remained unsure, and those who had no personal experience with the phenomenon into the conversation. This inclusion contributes broader understanding of attitudes towards and understanding of young adult dating violence, and the stark differences in knowledge that can emerge between those who have and those who have not

experienced dating violence themselves. These differences were particularly notable in the suggestions the young women made with regards to how we can better support young women experiencing dating violence. Finally, and more broadly, this thesis contributed empirical findings regarding the young adult age group of dating violence – a highly under researched group within dating violence literature. In doing so, this study demonstrated the need for young adult dating violence to be addressed and understood as a unique experience within the broader context of intimate partner and dating violence.

Limitations and Recommendations

While this study was able to attend to some of the concerns and areas requiring further research within dating violence literature, the limited body of research currently available within the social sciences means that there are still many areas requiring urgent further research. From this study, several areas that arose, pointing to directions for possible further research beyond the scope of a Master's thesis. These included, the differences and similarities between same-sex and heterosexual dating violence; the differences between the experiences of dating violence by younger (13-17) and older (18-26) cohorts of young people; the intersectional experience of dating violence; the continuation of dating violence experienced after the relationship ends; the extent of the impact of dating violence on young women's lives, and how this shapes understandings of gender and romantic relationships; and, the ways in which we can take the lead from young women with regards to how young women can better be supported and encouraged to seek support and report abuse.

Conclusion

Overall, this thesis has demonstrated the complexity of young adult dating violence and reinforced the need for extensive further research in this area. Dating violence goes well beyond the experience of "*a stranger jumps out of the bushes*" (Fitzpatrick, *ABC Triple J Hack*, 2021), instead being perpetrated by someone you know and trust,

and is deeply entwined with social, cultural and gendered structures in which we organise and define our society. Contributing empirical data, the thesis found that young adult dating relationships uniquely shape the way violence and abuse are experienced in these relationships due to the age of the couple and the variety of dating relationships. This thesis argues dating violence is perpetuated through multiple social, cultural and gendered means, and that young women experience the impact of dating violence on their lives well into their future. This thesis also emphasises the urgency with which changes need to be made within policy and practice to enable young women to primarily experience safe and healthy dating relationships – particularly within the framework of school-based and post-school education efforts, dating violence specific support services and more accessible and nuanced reporting methods.

We are entering a pivotal point, where sexual violence against women is being drawn out from the shadows by young women activists and advocates who are coming forward and speaking up about their experiences. Our next challenge is expanding this awakening to include the violence and abuse taking place within the intimate partner relationships of young people.

Appendix

Online Survey

Q1. Participant information sheet (tick to accept)

☐ I agree, start survey

Q2. What is your age? (select one)

☐ 18-20

☐ 21-23

☐ 24-26

Q3. What is your gender? (short answer)

Q4. What is your sexual orientation? (short answer)

Q5. Are you currently living in Australia? (select one)

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q6. What do you consider a “dating” relationship to be? (tick all appropriate)

☐ Seeing someone on a regular basis but not living together

☐ Being in a sexual relationship

☐ Being 'exclusive' and not seeing other people

- ☐ Only the first initial stage of a relationship where you go out on 'dates'
- ☐ Other, please specify

Q7. Do you feel you have a good understanding of what dating violence is? (select one)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Q8. Which of the following behaviours do you think could be considered a sign of dating violence? (tick all appropriate)

- ☐ Yelling during a disagreement
- ☐ Hitting or punching
- ☐ Banning a partner from seeing opposite sex friends
- ☐ Banning a partner from seeing same sex friends
- ☐ Stopping a partner from working
- ☐ Stopping a partner from going out
- ☐ Tracking a partner through apps
- ☐ Calling regularly to check up on a partner's whereabouts
- ☐ Reading partner emails, instant messages or texts without permission
- ☐ Continuing to ask for sex even though partner has already refused
- ☐ Forcing partner to engage in sex when they don't want to
- ☐ Putting down a partner in front of other people
- ☐ Putting down a partner when alone

- ☐ Banning a partner from wearing revealing or tight fitting clothes
- ☐ Threatening physical violence
- ☐ Making a partner feel jealous on purpose
- ☐ Making a partner feel guilty on purpose
- ☐ Other, please specify

Q9. Why do you think abuse occurs in some dating relationships? (tick all appropriate)

- ☐ The victim does not have high enough self-esteem
- ☐ The victim does not have supportive family and friends
- ☐ The influence of drugs and alcohol
- ☐ The couple does not have enough money
- ☐ The victim lets it happen
- ☐ The abuser does not respect women
- ☐ The abuser has trust and anger problems
- ☐ The victim does not realize it is happening
- ☐ Other, please specify

Q10. How widespread and serious a problem do you consider dating violence to be for young people in Australia? (select one)

- ☐ Not a problem at all
- ☐ A problem for only a few vulnerable young women
- ☐ A problem for some young women
- ☐ A very serious and widespread problem

Q11. Do you think alcohol and other drugs contribute to an abusive relationship?

(select one)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Q12. Which of the following may be a reason a person would have a difficult time leaving an abusive dating relationship? (tick all appropriate)

- ☐ They still love his/her partner
- ☐ The abuse isn't really happening, and the person is lying to get attention
- ☐ They may lose their social circle if they leave their partner
- ☐ They are afraid to leave as the violence may escalate
- ☐ They are afraid of being alone
- ☐ They may not be aware they are in a violent relationship
- ☐ They have been manipulated into believing they are not strong enough to leave
- ☐ The abuse only happens occasionally
- ☐ Other, please specify

Q13. Please answer **true** or **false** for the following statements (select 'true' or 'false')

- ☐ Ending an abusive relationship ends abuse
- ☐ Dating violence is rare among young people
- ☐ Dating violence is rare among educated people

- ☐ Drugs and alcohol can contribute to abusive relationships
- ☐ Hitting or punching a partner may just be due to frustration
- ☐ Dating violence happens through social media and instant messaging as well as in person
- ☐ Partner can be excused for verbal violence if it is within the context of a fight
- ☐ You can force a friend to leave a violent relationship by walking away from them
- ☐ If someone confides in you that their partner is being violent, you should always disclose it to parents or other authorities
- ☐ If violence occurs once in a dating relationship, it is likely to happen again in that relationship
- ☐ If violence occurs once in a dating relationship, it is likely to happen again in subsequent relationships

Q14. Have you personally experienced dating violence? (select one)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Q15. What impact has dating violence had on you? (tick all appropriate)

- ☐ I am afraid of being in another relationship
- ☐ I trust less than I did before
- ☐ It takes me longer to trust new partners
- ☐ I do not feel that I want to have another relationship
- ☐ I am afraid that violence will happen again

- ☐ I am afraid that I may not be able to leave my current violent relationship
- ☐ I am afraid I may not be able to leave another violent relationship
- ☐ Other, please specify

Q16. Has dating violence affected your desire to be in new relationships? (select one)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Q17. Can you tell us a little about how dating violence has affected your desire to have new relationships? (short answer)

Q18. Did you report your incident of dating violence to anyone? (tick all appropriate)

- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Siblings
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Counsellor
- ☐ Other, please specify

Q19. Have you accessed any support services after an incident of dating violence?
(select one)

- ☐ Yes

☐ No

Q20. Which support services did you access? (tick all appropriate)

☐ 1800RESPECT

☐ Lifeline

☐ Counselling

☐ Other, please specify

Q21. What kinds of support do you think young women experiencing dating violence should have available to them? (short answer)

Q22. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your understanding of or experiences with dating violence in Australia? (short answer)

Should you require support, please contact one of these Australia-wide services:

Phone

1800 RESPECT - 1800 737 732 (Free call)

Safe Steps, Family Violence Crisis Response Centre - 1800 015 188 (Free call)

Lifeline Australia – 13 11 14 (Local call to nearest Lifeline Centre)

Emergency Assistance – 000 (Emergencies only)

App / Website

Daisy (1800 RESPECT) – an app providing information about local support services available to you (download app from app store)

Ask Izzy - a mobile website connecting people to the local services and support they need (<http://askizzy.org.au/>)

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