

**When Privilege Meets Pain:  
How Gender Oppression and Class Privilege Condition University Students' Experiences  
of Intimate Partner Violence**

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## **Abstract**

Currently, sexual assault is characterized as the primary threat to women's safety on university campuses. Accordingly, many post-secondary institutions in Canada have developed specialized policies, resources, and prevention strategies to address this form of gendered violence. Although a serious concern, the narrow focus ignores university students' vulnerability to multiple other forms of gendered violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV). In an effort to address this neglected topic, this thesis explores the way five university students experienced and navigated IPV. Adopting an intersectional lens informed by feminist work on gender roles, gendered expectations, and sexual scripts as well as Pierre Bourdieu's work on class this thesis examines how gender oppression and class privilege intersect to create unique experiences of IPV for university students. To that end five semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who suffered psychological, physical, sexual, and/or financial abuse while in university. The interviews facilitated open and honest dialogue whilst providing this research project with valuable insight into how IPV plays out among class privileged university students. The thesis concludes that although the participants are oppressed in terms of gender (and susceptible to IPV on this basis) their class privilege also conditioned their experiences of IPV. While affording them access to social and economic resources, the disjuncture between their self-identity as educated, smart, and independent women inhibited their ability to accept their identity as victims; as a result, the participants struggled to disclose, seek help, and address the abuse.

**Keywords:** Intimate Partner Violence; intersectionality; feminist theory; class analysis; gendered violence

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Thesis Outline</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter One:</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>A Review of the Literature: IPV, Class, and University</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1: Defining Intimate Partner Violence</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2: The History of Mobilizing</b>	<b>8</b>
1.2.1: First Wave Feminism	8
1.2.2: Second Wave Feminism	10
1.2.3: Third Wave Feminism	14
<b>1.3: Diverse Women’s Experiences of IPV</b>	<b>15</b>
1.3.1: IPV and Marginalized Women	15
1.3.2: IPV and Privileged Women	18
<b>1.4: IPV and University Students</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>1.5: Situating my Research</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter Two:</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.1: Intersectionality</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1.1: Intersectionality and Privilege	27
2.1.2: Debates around Intersectionality	28
<b>2.2: Feminism: Theorizing Gender Roles, Gendered Expectations, and Sexual Scripts in Patriarchal Societies</b>	<b>29</b>
2.2.1: Patriarchy	29
2.2.2: Gender Roles and Expectations	30
2.2.3: Sexual Scripts	31
2.2.4: Patriarchy and IPV	32
<b>2.3: Class</b>	<b>33</b>
2.3.1: Distinctions	34
2.3.2: Capital	34
<b>2.4 Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.5 Frame Analysis</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter Three:</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>3.1: Research Design – Qualitative</b>	<b>39</b>

3.2: Epistemology – Standpoint Feminism and IPV _____	40
3.3: Ethical Considerations _____	41
3.4: Recruitment _____	43
3.5: Participants _____	43
3.6: Data Collection – The Interviews _____	44
3.7: Data Processing and Analysis _____	46
3.8: Limitations _____	47
<b>Chapter Four: _____</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>The Beginning, Middle, and End _____</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1: The Relationships – The Beginnings _____	50
4.2: The Abuse _____	52
4.2.1: Psychological Abuse _____	53
4.2.2: Physical Abuse _____	56
4.2.3: Sexual Abuse _____	58
4.2.4: Financial Abuse _____	59
4.3: The Relationships – The End _____	59
<b>Chapter Five: _____</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Privilege: A Blessing? A Curse? or Both? _____</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>5. 1: Intersectional Analysis: How did gender <i>and</i> class inform the participants’ experiences? _____</b>	<b>65</b>
5.1.1: How did gender inform the women’s experiences of IPV? _____	66
5.1.2: How was the women’s capital mobilized as they navigated their experiences? _____	68
<b>5.2: How did class complexify the participants’ experiences? _____</b>	<b>72</b>
5.2.1: How did the women frame IPV? _____	72
5.2.2: How did the women frame themselves? _____	73
5.2.3: Identifying as a Victim _____	74
5.2.4: Sympathy for their Partners _____	76
5.2.5: Resources _____	76
<b>Chapter Six: _____</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>What’s Next? _____</b>	<b>79</b>
6.1: Key Findings _____	79
6.2: Future Research _____	80
6.3: Implications for Universities _____	81
6.4: Final Words _____	82
References _____	84
Appendix A: _____	94

<b>Appendix B:</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Appendix C:</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Appendix D:</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Appendix E:</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Appendix F:</b>	<b>103</b>

## **Introduction**

For much of Western history, intimate partner violence (IPV) (also referred to as wife battery, domestic abuse, and family violence) was considered a private trouble between husband and wife; a family issue outside the purview of the law (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Harvey, 1991). Through the tireless efforts by first and second wave feminists, IPV became part of the public conversation and eventually deemed worthy of political recognition and criminal justice involvement (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). As a result of this we have seen the removal of husbands' immunity from sexual assault in 1983, mandatory charging in most Canadian jurisdictions by 1985 (Bruckert & Law, 2018), and by 1986 every jurisdiction in Canada required "prosecution of spousal assault cases where there was sufficient evidence to support the prosecution" (FPTWG, 2002, p. 10). Since then six provinces<sup>1</sup> and all three territories adopted specific legislation to address family violence (Department of Justice, 2019). Notwithstanding its transformation into a social problem warranting criminal justice intervention, the numbers remain shockingly high: IPV will affect an estimated 1 in 3 Canadian women (35%) in their lifetime (Wathen, MacQuarrie & MacGregor, 2016). Moreover, while many cases go unreported,

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<sup>1</sup> Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan (Department of Justice, 2019).

IPV nonetheless represents 30% of all police-reported violent crimes in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019).

This thesis explores one population of privileged women who endured this form of gendered violence – class privileged university students. Typically, much of IPV research centres the stories of marginalized women and explores the different ways oppression informs experiences of IPV. Although unquestionably crucial, this focus unintentionally frames racialized and under-class women as ‘typical victims’ whilst obscuring the stories of many privileged women, whose experiences, as we will see, are also conditioned by their class location.

Like many similarly positioned young women, the participants in this study graduated high school and were ecstatic about embarking on a new journey at university. They anticipated an abundance of social and romantic opportunity, freedom from their families and rigid high school schedules, and exposure to new ways of thinking. Their excitement was met by parents and orientation leaders who warned them to be careful on campus, limit their alcohol consumption, avoid walking alone at night, and to always utilize campus safety services. Unsurprisingly, like so many young university students, these women were never warned about IPV, a crime that disproportionately affects women between the ages of 18 and 24 years old – in other words university aged women (Saewyc, 2009; Tsui & Santamaria, 2015; Voth Schrag, 2017).

### **Research Question**

The goal of this thesis is to unpack how university students’ unique class location informs the ways they address and make sense of their experiences of IPV. With that being said, the research question for this thesis is: how do class privileged university students experience IPV and how are their experiences conditioned by their social location? In order to answer this

question, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with women who experienced IPV while in university.

### **Thesis Outline**

This thesis begins with *A Review of the Literature: IPV, Class, and University Students*. Drawing on the work of a variety of scholars IPV is defined and the four principle forms of abuse identified in the literature (psychological, physical, sexual, and financial) are described. Next, the history of mobilizing by feminists, specifically, how activists in the second wave organized around the premise that IPV is the result of gender inequality, not individual immoral (and drunk) men is examined. Third, the diverse experiences of both marginalized and privileged populations of women are explored, specifically, how their unique social locations inform their experiences of IPV. Next, the limited literature available around IPV and university students in Canada is described. The chapter ends by identifying the gaps in the literature and situating the research project.

In the second chapter entitled *Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege*, the foundations of Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, feminist analysis of gender roles and expectations and sexual scripts, and Pierre Bourdieu's work on capital are described. The chapter explains how these concepts work together to create the theoretical framework used to unpack and draw conclusions about the data. Moreover, Goffman's (1974) frame analysis is engaged to help unpack the different ways that the participants 'made sense' of both IPV and of themselves and how said frames conditioned their interpretation of the abuse.

Next, in *Chapter Three: Methodology*, the methodological approach adopted for data collection and examination is presented. First, the research design and epistemological standpoint are described. Next, ethical considerations and how they shaped the ways participants

were recruited are detailed. Third, the chapter outlines how data was collected and analyzed. Finally, the limitations of this study are highlighted.

The participants' stories are then presented in *Chapter Four: The Beginning, Middle, and End*. In this chapter, information about how the women met their partners, the types of abuse they endured, and how the relationships ended are provided.

We then move on to the analysis in *Chapter 5: Privilege: A Blessing? A Curse? or Both?* In this chapter the conceptual framework developed in *Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege* is mobilized to analyze the findings. Here, we see the unique ways IPV plays out among class privileged women, specifically, university students. In particular, the chapter attends to the ways privilege both benefits and hinders victims of IPV.

In the final chapter, *What's Next?*, the key findings are highlighted and reflected upon and three recommendations for future research are made. The chapter also considers what the findings mean for the university, specifically, what responsibility the institution has to promote awareness and offer resources in regard to IPV.

# **Chapter One:**

## **A Review of the Literature: IPV, Class, and University**

### **Students**

This literature review is divided into five substantive sections. The first section unpacks IPV by exploring the different forms of violence it encompasses. Next, we examine the history of feminists mobilizing in Canada, paying particular attention to their efforts to shift IPV from a private trouble into a social problem and the implications of this reframing. Section three examines diverse women’s experiences of IPV, in particular, how their different statuses in Canadian society condition their unique experiences. Section four will look at research on IPV on university campuses in Canada and attend to the ways this body of literature provides a point of entry to thinking about IPV among (privileged) university students. The chapter concludes by situating the research project in relation to the existing literature.

#### **1.1: Defining Intimate Partner Violence**

The World Health Organization (WHO; 2002) defines violence as “the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has the high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (p. 4). IPV is a form of interpersonal violence that occurs within the context of intimate relationships. IPV can take a variety of forms;

psychological (emotional and verbal), physical, sexual, and/or financial and is disproportionately perpetrated by men against women (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Mitchell & Anglin, 2009).

### *Psychological Abuse and Violence*

Psychological abuse is characterized as emotional and/or verbal abuse and is often the first form of maltreatment to manifest in abusive relationships (Bruckert & Law, 2018). This abuse works to tear down an individual's self-worth and self-esteem and harms the mental wellbeing of the victim (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; Slabbert & Green, 2013). Examples include accusations, deliberate isolation, ridicule, excessive monitoring, name calling, body shaming, and slut shaming. Over the past several years *gaslighting* has received increasing attention and is considered a form of psychological abuse where victims are manipulated into questioning their own sanity (Slabbert & Green, 2013). In this context, the gaslightee "allows the gaslighter to define her sense of reality because she idealizes him and seeks his approval" as a result of his manipulation and control (Stern, 2007, p. 3).

Although the motivation behind psychological abuse has (presumably) remained stable over time (i.e., to control or isolate), the tools used have evolved (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016; Fraser, Olsen, Lee, Southworth, & Tucker, 2010). For example, "recent technological advancements and accompanying cultural shifts [that inform] how youth and young adults communicate and interact in dating relationships" have provided new avenues for psychological abuse to play out (Fraser et al., 2010; Reed et al., 2016, p. 1557). Scholars such as Reed and colleagues (2016) refer to this technology assisted violence as, *digital dating abuse* (DDA) and suggest that it can manifest as constant and overbearing text messages, monitoring of social media, etc. (see also, Eterovic-Soric, Choo, Ashman, & Mubarak, 2017 and Fraser et al., 2010).

### *Physical Abuse and Violence*

Physical violence includes assaults such as kicking, slapping, pushing, choking, and may result in injuries (e.g., bruising, cracked ribs, broken bones, and burns) (Mahoney, 2011; Slabbert & Green, 2013). These injuries are typically inflicted in ‘bathing suit zones’ which are areas of the body that are covered by clothes (e.g., torso) (Mahoney, 2011; Slabbert & Green, 2013).

Although, in some cases, physical violence is undetectable and does not result in visible injuries (e.g., ice-cold baths) (Mitchell & Anglin, 2009; Slabbert & Green, 2013). Most often, the aggressor uses his body parts (e.g., hands and feet); weapons including knives and firearms being used less frequently (Mitchell & Anglin, 2009).

### *Sexual Abuse and Violence*

Sexual violence is sexual activity obtained without the consent of the victim through force, threat of force, or when the victim is unable to consent (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; Phiri-Alleman & Alleman, 2008; Slabbert & Green, 2013). Sexual violence also includes the experiences of women who are coerced (typically through emotional manipulation) to have sex with their partners (Phiri-Alleman & Alleman, 2008). Notably, it is only since 1983 – when Canada’s current sexual assault laws came into effect that husbands could be charged with sexually abusing their wives (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Prior to 1983 rape was defined as when a “male person has sexual intercourse with a female person who is not his wife (a) with-out her consent, or (b) with her consent if the consent is extorted by threats or fear of bodily harm, (ii) is obtained by personating her husband, or (iii) is obtained by false and fraudulent representations as to the nature and quality of the act.” (*Criminal Code*, 1970, s. 143)

## *Financial Abuse and Violence*

In the context of IPV, financial abuse occurs when an individual exercises control over their intimate partner's finances including forbidding, discouraging, or preventing a partner from attending school or work in order to restrict their economic independence (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee & Greeson, 2008; Merrill & Wolfe, 2000). It can also entail managing all finances, stealing funds, generating costs, or ruining their partner's credit by accruing debt under their name (Adams et al., 2008). Financial abuse forces the victim to become economically dependent on their partner, making leaving the abusive relationship more challenging (Adams et al., 2008).

### **1.2: The History of Mobilizing**

Today, not only can we identify the different ways IPV plays out, but legal protections are (at least in principle) available for women who experience this form of gendered violence. This was not always the case, indeed historically, men had the legal right and social authority to use physical force against their intimate partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). How did we get here? The next few sections will detail the history of mobilizing for feminists and describe how IPV was transformed from a private issue into a social trouble.

#### **1.2.1: First Wave Feminism**

Typically, social movements come to in waves, when members of particular groups (e.g., ethnic and religious minorities) seek to change their social, political, and/or economic circumstances (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). The first wave of feminism occurred during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was characterized by activists endeavouring to “emancipate women across the globe” (Forestell & Moynagh, 2012, p. 3). Feminists during this time endeavoured to demonstrate that like men, women were “human and moral persons and should, therefore, be afforded the rights and privileges that men had” (Anderson, 2017, p. 2). Ultimately, the goal was to secure basic civil rights for women (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Accordingly,

feminists focused on suffrage (the right to vote and run in political elections) and citizenship rights (e.g., property rights and free speech) (Anderson, 2017).

For the first time, IPV (called wife beating the time) became a (somewhat peripheral) topic of discussion and debate (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Harvey, 1991). The attention and framing was largely shaped by the temperance movement that linked wife beating and anti-drinking campaigns (Harvey, 1991). Liquor was seen to be the “single underlying cause of crime, poverty, prostitution, ill-health, and the disintegration of the working-class family” (Harvey, 1991, p. 134). As a result, IPV came to be seen as the problem of “brutal working-class husbands who drank and beat their wives” (Harvey, 1991, p. 133-134).

This narrative (alcohol as the cause of IPV) meant that wife abuse could no longer be seen as the legitimate chastisement or punishment of a woman by her husband (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Therefore, if abused women were respectable and took good care of their kids they were able to gain some protection from the state (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Gordon, 1988). Women were, at least in some cases, able to protect their earnings from their husbands as well as turn to emerging anti-cruelty and child protection agencies for help if needed (Fingard, 1993; Gordon, 1988).

By the beginning of the 1900s, the first wave of the feminist movement shifted its focus to “winning the vote” and securing women’s ability to run for office (Anderson, 2017; Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 132). Consequently, IPV was removed from mobilizers’ agendas. Despite the shift, abused women continued to call on support, however in the post-World War II climate characterized by a romanticized nuclear family, abused women became pathologized (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Harvey, 1991). If women were too passive, they enabled the abuse and if they were too aggressive, they asked for it; those who left their abusive partners were also villainized

for their failure to stay for their children and resolve the ‘marital issues’ (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Consequently, “IPV largely disappeared from public awareness” once again (Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 132).

### **1.2.2: Second Wave Feminism**

In the shadow of the Second World War, women began to question gender roles and expectations. Betty Friedan (1963) coined the phrase, “the problem with no name” in her book *The Feminine Mystique* to explain the depression, boredom, and unfulfillment that many middle-class women suffered as a result of being confined to the classic homemaker role. Friedan (1963) believed that the only solution to this problem was to ensure that both men and women were able to pursue education, careers, and ultimately, fulfill their potential as human beings. Women began to fight back against being underrepresented in the workforce, being confined to ‘women’s jobs’, making 57.3 cents to the man’s dollar, and the expectation they would leave the workforce upon marriage and motherhood (Friedan, 1963). As a result, women unionized, organized strikes, and campaigned for equal pay (Blackhouse & Flaherty, 1992).

The second wave of the feminist movement ultimately emerged; characterized as being the first time feminists argued that male domination in society (and the family) was at the root of women’s oppression (Basile, Hall & Walters, 2013; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Franklin & Menaker, 2014). As a result, the movement became committed to addressing the inequalities faced by women in their social, political, and most importantly their economic lives (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Specific concerns included wages, domestic work and family obligations, reproduction, access to post-secondary education, the sexual double standard, and violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

### *The Battered Women's Movement*

Wife beating re-emerged as a public concern during the second wave of the feminist movement through the Battered Women's Movement (BWM). The BWM directly addressed the needs of battered women on both an individual and collective level. According to Dobash and Dobash (1992) the movement was particularly concerned with:

the protection of abused women and change for all women: that is, to provide assistance to abused women and their children and to change gender inequalities in the domestic, economic and political arenas that form the foundation of and provide support for male violence. (p. 28)

Here we see, in the context of broader concerns about violence against women, the same gender inequality framework that was applied to the workforce was then applied to violence in intimate relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Feminists endeavoured to “seek explanations, causes, and effective responses not in terms of individual deviance, such as alcohol abuse, but in terms of power relations between the sexes” (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 27). Realizing that inequality (not alcohol) was at the core of ‘domestic violence’ meant that the issue was no longer framed as a working-class phenomenon (whose vice was supposedly alcohol). Accordingly, second wave feminists not only mobilized into the Battered Women's Movement (BWM) but also reframed the narrative in terms of the victim, taking a “We the Women” position that valued presenting one voice in order to position woman battering as a “society wide problem” (Goodmark, 2008, p. 87).

Regrettably, in the process of creating a *universal voice*, white middle-class women were brought to the forefront and “low-income women and women of colour [were removed] from the dominant view” (Richie, 1996, p. 52-53). Of course, from a political perspective, the

“everywoman” (white middle-class woman) trope was effective – it allowed activists to gain the attention of politicians and policymakers who appeared largely uninterested in the topic when it was characterized as one affecting working-class and racialized women (Goodmark, 2008). Politicians (primarily white, male, and middle/upper-class) were much more attentive to issues when they were branded with (conventionally attractive) white middle-class faces because these women reminded them of their mothers and sisters (Goodmark, 2008). In addition to being white and middle-class the reconstituted ‘worthy victim’ was also cast as passive, dependant, gentle, and most importantly, someone who did not fight back (Allard, 1991; Berg, 2014). As such, tropes about racialized women – Black women as the “hostile Sapphire” or “wanton Jezebel” (Allard, 1991, p. 196) and Indigenous women as hypersexualized (Bruckert & Law, 2018) are dialectically opposite to the ideal battered woman (Allard, 1991, Goodmark, 2008; Richie, 2000). Ultimately, “advocates recast the image of the battered woman to reflect society’s most powerful voices, a move designed to bring home the message that because domestic violence affected white women, it was worthy of the attention of those in power” (Goodmark, 2008, p. 88).

It follows that legislative victories and resources were envisioned with an eye to the needs of white middle-class women and as a result, marginalized women’s needs (e.g., financial aid, job training, and access to affordable housing) were largely ignored (Goodmark, 2008). Instead, the BWM saw criminal justice involvement and state action as the solution to the abused woman’s experience in her intimate relationship (Bruckert & Law, 2018). In particular, activists advocated for mandatory charging and no-drop policies which removed discretion from police and courts and demanded that in cases with sufficient evidence, men were charged and tried (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016). Sadly, this response did not consider the “special vulnerabilities

to domestic violence of immigrant, racialized, and First Nations women which are due to the systematic intersections of their gender with race, ethnicity, class, faith practice, immigration, and social class in Canada” that ultimately made the criminal justice response counterproductive (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016, p. 573).

Nonetheless, the pursuit of criminal justice action by second wave feminists was well intentioned; the (white middle-class) women who led the mainstream feminist movement believed it was a “viable source of protection” (Berg, 2014, p. 148), however, their race and class privilege blinded them to its potential harms. This is because privilege, white privilege in particular, affords women (1) the luxury of calling the police, (2) confidence that they will “serve and protect” and (3) faith that “laws are equitable and equitably applied” (Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 245). It was therefore the women’s privilege blindness that caused them to see criminal justice involvement as progress and not recognize that for marginalized women, it could be exceptionally problematic (Berg, 2014).

#### *Battered Women’s Syndrome and Battered Women’s Defence*

In addition to activist work, a great deal of feminist research endeavored to explain why women *remain* in abusive relationships. In this context, Lenore Walker’s (1979) theory of the *Battered Women’s Syndrome* (BWS) emerged and became the underlying logic of the *Battered Women’s Defence* (BWD). BWS detailed the psychological impact that IPV has on women; according to Walker (2006) battering results in *learned helplessness* where the psychological outcomes of living in a constant state of fear forces women to focus on coping with each attack instead of escaping them. In such context, an abused woman becomes increasingly beaten down and unable to envision let alone enact an escape, however, she also becomes “adept at detecting signs of another incident of abuse” (Quigley, 1991, p. 228). Here, victims of IPV who were not

technically in imminent danger when they killed their abusive partners (e.g., he was asleep, had his back turned, or was intoxicated and unconscious) are still able to claim self-defence (Allard, 1991; Walker, 2006; Ono, 2017; Quigley, 1991). In these cases, expert testimonies are utilized in courts to help explain the “experiences and context within which some battered women resort to lethal force” (Ono, 2017, p. 25).

The case of *R. v. Lavalle* (1990) marks the first time in Canadian history that the BWD was accepted by the court (Ono, 2017). Although a win for Lavalle, the normative conceptualization of a “battered woman” continued to be a white, middle-class, passive, and gentle woman (Allard, 1991; Berg; 2014). In real terms, racialized women are less likely than white women to be acquitted of killing their batterer under the BWD (Allard, 1991). Again, marginalized women fail to benefit from the ‘solution’ for which second wave feminists fought. Reinforcing that ‘progress’ (state responsibility and criminal justice involvement) was being made by and to benefit women who were class and race privileged.

### **1.2.3: Third Wave Feminism**

Essentialism in mainstream feminism has long been critiqued by socialist feminists, radical feminists, and Black feminists (Bogosavljevic, 2018) as well as scholars such as Beale (1970), Crenshaw (1989), and King (1988) who argued that race, class, and multiple other forms of oppression are critical sites of analysis in feminist work. It was not, however, until the turn of the twenty-first century and the third wave of the feminist movement that diversity in feminism was put front and centre. Accordingly, Bruckert and Law (2018) argue that the “third wave rejects the essentialism of earlier feminists and broadens the focus by recognizing the need to integrate analysis of oppression on the basis of, for example, race, class, and sexuality” (p. 4). One foundational concept – *intersectionality*, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) (and which is examined in greater detail in the thesis’ theory chapter: *Chapter Two: Conceptual*

*Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege*) was embraced by third wave feminists and used as an entry point to think about the different ways that women's diverse social locations inform their experiences. Intersectionality has been used to examine women's unique experiences in, for example, the workplace, the home, as criminalized peoples, and as victims of gendered violence.

### **1.3: Diverse Women's Experiences of IPV**

In the context of gendered violence, specifically IPV, intersectionality allows for a more fulsome understanding of how women's additional identities condition the ways that they experience and address abuse (Crenshaw, 1991). First, this section examines how marginalized women's (specifically immigrant and Indigenous women's) experiences of IPV are informed by their intersecting identities. Second, it explores what scholars say about the relationship between experiences of IPV and privilege; how privilege (although by definition an advantage) informs the ways white middle-class women experience abuse.

#### **1.3.1: IPV and Marginalized Women**

Marginalized women, who experience oppression on the basis of not only of their gender but also their race, class, sexuality and/or immigration status are compelled to navigate IPV in ways unknown to women who are otherwise privileged. This section examines the literature that attends to immigrant and Indigenous women's vulnerabilities to and experiences of IPV in Canada.

##### *Immigrant Women's Experiences of IPV*

Factors relating directly to women's immigrant status may condition their experiences of IPV (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016). In Canada, potential immigrants are required to score 67 out of 100 on the *Points Based Assessment (PBA)*, a test favouring education, skill, and wealth in potential newcomers (Anwar, 2014; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018). Many women from the Global

South, where access to education is limited, are unlikely to qualify under this category and therefore, must rely on sponsorships from their male partners (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018). This affords men considerable power and reinforces already existing power imbalances between men and women (Anwar, 2014; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018). In terms of IPV, women's immigration status can become another mechanism of control that men mobilize. For example, Immigrant women report that their partners threaten to have them deported, deny them access to their children, and refuse to sponsor extended family as a means of control (Hyman & Mason, 2006).

When it comes to accessing resources, immigrant women may have diminished access to informal means of support (e.g., disclosing to a friend) having lost their support systems and without a network in Canada (Ammar et al., 2014; Tam, Tutty, Zhuang, & Paz, 2016). Formal resources may also prove difficult to access, for example, immigrant women may face language barriers – for those who do not speak English or French contacting the police, disclosing to health care workers, or accessing services can be challenging (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016; Ammar et al., 2014; Tam et al., 2016). In cases where language is not a barrier, immigrant women may still hesitate to access formal resources in fear that it will perpetuate stereotypes around immigrant communities as backward, traditional, and oppressive (Ammar et al., 2014; Razack, 2004). For example, Razack (2004) argued that the West rationalizes “patriarchal violence within Muslim migrant communities [by] descending into cultural deficit explanations [and] inviting extraordinary measures of stigmatisation, surveillance and control” (p. 131). Said differently, when it comes to Muslim immigrants, the West ignores patriarchal factors that facilitate the conditions for IPV in *all* communities and instead diagnose the violence as a common practice in Islamic culture. The West views Muslims as “inferior peoples” whose men need to be controlled and women, protected (Razack, 2004, p. 132). The fear of perpetuating

these harsh stereotypes logically discourages immigrant women, particularly Muslim women, from using formal supports.

### *Indigenous Women's Experiences of IPV*

First Nation, Métis and Inuit women in Canada are at higher risk of all forms of gendered violence compared to non-Indigenous women. When it comes to IPV, their rate of victimization is estimated to be twice as high and their injuries are generally more severe (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Accordingly, many scholars have endeavoured to understand why this is the case and have paid particular attention to Indigenous women's social location. At the core this is colonization – the colonial imposition of patriarchal beliefs and structures on Indigenous peoples that fractured their traditional societies that celebrated equality between the genders. According to Bruckert and Law (2018) Indigenous women's "vulnerability has been attributed to the intergenerational effects of colonial violence, including the legacy of residential schools" (p. 142) – sites of sexual, physical, psychological, and spiritual abuse where Indigenous children were stripped of their culture and forced to assimilate to Western ways of life (often referred to as a *cultural genocide*).

The ways Indigenous women address IPV are also conditioned by colonialism. In particular, colonialism has "entrenched patriarchal norms in Indigenous communities, engendering IPV and the dismissal and blaming of victims, it has also informed the attitudes of community leaders who depoliticize IPV, relegating it to a private concern" (Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 142). In cases where Indigenous women do choose to seek help, their options remain limited. Social services are sparse on many rural and northern communities whilst resources off reserves are difficult to access – public transportation is either unavailable or unreliable and many women on reserves are without access to a vehicle (Zorn, Wuerch, Faller & Hampton,

2017). Moreover, when these services are utilized, they often lack cultural sensitivity, making them quite unhelpful for Indigenous women (Zorn et al., 2017).

Colonialism has also left Indigenous women fearful of the state and has informed their hesitancy to involve the criminal justice system (e.g., police) in their private matters. Christmas (2012) refers to this reluctantly as a *legacy of distrust* where Indigenous peoples' history of state inflicted trauma (e.g., residential schools) as well as ongoing trauma (e.g., over-representation in prisons and jails) has led Indigenous peoples, especially women, to mistrust and reject the state's involvement in their personal matters (e.g., IPV). Moreover, Indigenous women may fear that their calls for help will result in the loss of their children (Bruckert & Law, 2018). This fear is not without merit – the number of Indigenous children taken out of their home is higher today than it was during the residential school era (de Leeuw, 2016). Overall, Immigrant and Indigenous women's vulnerability to and experiences of IPV are conditioned not only by their gender but their other intersecting identities.

### **1.3.2: IPV and Privileged Women**

The same way intersectionality provides a point of entry for an analysis of the impact of interlocking systems of oppression, it can act as a point of entry to thinking about privilege. Privilege, in the context of this thesis is defined as a “special right, benefit, or advantage given to a person, not from work or merit, but by reason of race, social position, religion, or gender” (Liu, Pickett & Ivey, 2007, p. 195). Despite women being oppressed on the basis of gender, it is important to consider how their other identities (e.g., race and class) afford them advantages within Canada and how this plays out when they are in abusive relationships. The following subsections will examine the ways privilege conditions the experiences of white middle-class victims of IPV.

### *Race (White) Privilege*

Despite efforts to present ourselves as a multi-cultural country and “less racist and less discriminatory” than the USA, the reality is – Canada was founded on and continues to be the site of racism (Syed & Hill, 2011, p. 609). Racism in Canada can be dated back to “the first European contact with Aboriginal peoples” (colonialism) and continues to exist – evident through, for example, the “razing of Africville in Halifax, the Chinese head tax, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, [and] the experience of Jamaican-Canadians in Toronto and Haitian-Canadians in Montreal” (Syed & Hill, 2011, p. 608). In contrast to the racialized ‘other’, white people in Canada see themselves as having “no race – white is simply the default” (Bruckert & Law, 2018. p. 24). White privilege therefore appears assumed and natural (Liu et al., 2007). Peggy McIntosh (1989) characterizes this form of (white) privilege as an “invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day” (p. 1). Said differently, white people in Canada possess privilege on the basis of belonging to the dominant social group in which they reap the benefits at the micro and macro level.

In terms of IPV, although disadvantaged by their status as women, white victims benefit from race privilege throughout their experiences. One way white privilege plays out is through their pursuit of criminal justice support. White women do not fear that calling the police will perpetuate problematic stereotypes about their community, may have less distrust about the police, are less likely to be charged or co-charged, and are less preoccupied that the police will use excessive violence against their partners (Ammar et al., 2014; Bruckert & Law, 2018).

### *Economic Privilege*

Individuals can also experience privilege on the basis of their socioeconomic status. In terms of IPV, economic privilege affords victims the ability to conceal their victimization by, for

example, hiding out in second homes, staying at hotels instead of shelters, and going to private clinics (Berg, 2014; Weitzman, 2000). As a result, middle and especially upper-class women do not have to face the same discomforts that marginalized victims do (Berg, 2014; Davidson & Jenkins, 1989; Weitzman, 2000). Unfortunately, the literature fails to look beyond economic privilege and consider all the different ways that class privilege conditions women's experiences of IPV – it is a topic we examine in *Chapter Five: Privilege: A Blessing? A Curse? or Both? Privilege as a Barrier to Disclosure and Help-seeking*

Privilege is typically perceived as positive and indeed, as we saw in the preceding subsections, can benefit women victimized by IPV. According to Weitzman (2000) author of *Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages*, privilege also complicates things – privileged women may be more likely to accept the trope that “domestic violence is confined to couples with little education and few resources” (p. 4) and because many privileged women perceive themselves as modern, progressive, and egalitarian they struggle to accept this manifestation of patriarchal authority in their own homes and lives (Ammar et al., 2014). The incongruity between what they presume to be true of IPV victims (working-class and racialized women) versus what they experience (IPV at the hands of their privileged partners) causes confusion and denial among such women (Weitzman, 2000).

When the abuse is impossible to ignore and privileged women are forced to confront the reality of the abuse, they continue to struggle with disclosing and help seeking (Weitzman, 2000). Overstreet and Quinn (2013) attribute this avoidance to what they call *anticipated stigma*, one form of stigma they identify in their *IPV Stigmatization Model*. Anticipated stigma accounts for women's fear that if they reveal the abuse to friends and family they will be marked as weak or stupid (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Privileged women, who are typically perceived as,

“successful and free of problems” carry unique anxieties about how their images will be impacted if the IPV becomes known (Berg, 2014, p. 149; Kumar & Casey, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, their fear of being shamed, ostracized, and/or discredited acts as a powerful disincentive to disclosing the abuse (Berg, 2014; Weitzman, 2000). According to Weitzman (2000) this fear is not without merit – many women’s “worst fears were realized when [they] finally did talk about the domestic violence in [their] home” (p. 27). Many women report rejection, disbelief, and isolation from others and ultimately, regret their decision to disclose (Weitzman, 2000).

#### **1.4: IPV and University Students**

Today “university campuses remain environments of white (upper and middle-class) privilege in which misogyny figures prominently” (Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 99). In Canada, social class is a key factor determining educational attainment; rates of post-secondary school attendance directly correlate to middle and upper-class status (Finnie, Lascelles & Sweetman, 2005; Lehmann, 2009). Therefore, the university is a window into IPV among the privileged, especially because university provides students with new romantic opportunities and 18 to 24 year old women (in other words university aged women) experience IPV, especially physical abuse, at higher rates than any other age range (Saewyc, 2009; Tsui & Santamaria, 2015; Voth Schrag, 2017).

Despite progress made by feminists who argued that IPV is rooted in gender inequality, scholarship exploring IPV on university campuses in Canada continues to take an individualistic approach to the matter. In particular, the literature focuses on excessive and frequent consumption of alcohol on and around university campuses (Linden-Carmichael, Lau-Barraco & Kelley, 2016; Moffatt, 1991). In this scholarship, alcohol consumption is linked to higher rates of IPV and more severe injuries because alcohol reduces an individual’s ability to control their

temper, decreases their capacity to deal with situations appropriately, and alters their moods in negative ways (Johnson, 2000).

An older (and very much outdated) explanation for IPV on university and college campuses focuses on male peer groups. According to DeKeseredy and Kelly (1995) and Basile et al. (2013) these groups are spaces characterized by toxic masculine behaviours, binge drinking, homophobic beliefs, and support of violence which in turn, contribute to IPV. Some male sports teams in particular have subcultures of aggression, insensitivity, and sexism (Safai, 2002). One example, “locker room talk” focuses on sex, aggression, and misogynistic attitudes towards women (Safai, 2002, p. 380). According to Safai (2002) involvement in such settings is linked to male involvement in gendered violence, especially sexual assault and sexual abuse. These reasons combined with young men’s immaturity and greater propensity to use violence can help us make sense of why IPV happens on university campuses (Tsui & Santamaria, 2015).

### **1.5: Situating my Research**

Currently, there is limited literature that explores the experiences of economically privileged women who are victims of IPV, specifically, how their privilege informs the ways that they navigate and make sense of the abuse. Therefore, my thesis will add to the literature on IPV by exploring this understudied population of women. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of how one’s status (in this case – class privilege) impacts their experience of IPV I analyzed the stories of women who were in abusive relationships while they were university students.

Ultimately, my goal is not to shift the focus off marginalized women but instead to expand the conversation about the relationship between one’s status in society and experience of IPV by looking at how intersections of gender oppression and class privilege inform university students’ experiences of this form of gendered violence. To this end the next chapter develops a

conceptual framework that draws on Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1989), feminist work on gender roles and expectations and sexual scripts, and Pierre Bourdieu's class analysis.

## **Chapter Two:**

# **Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege**

As we saw in the literature review, women's diverse identities inform the different ways that they experience and address IPV. Whether it be disadvantaged or advantaged populations of women, their experiences of IPV are conditioned not only by their gender but their race, class, immigrant status, and so on. In this chapter, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1989), feminist analysis of gender roles and expectations and sexual scripts, and Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of class will be presented in order to develop a conceptual framework that sheds light on the unique experiences of university students who are victimized by IPV. The first section of this chapter outlines intersectionality, a concept that draws our attention to the multiple axes of oppression (and/or privilege) that condition individual women's experiences. In the second section, feminism will be used to understand how within patriarchal societies gender roles and expectations (e.g., women as weak, passive, and powerless and men as strong, assertive, and dominant) and sexual scripts make women vulnerable to IPV, inform the types of abuse they endure, and provide guidelines for how they 'should' react. In the third section, Pierre Bourdieu's work on capital will provide a way to think through the complexities of class and help move the discussion beyond economic capital to incorporate individuals' social

and cultural means as well. Bourdieu's work on class gives us the tools to tease out the ways that class conditions women's experiences of IPV. Finally, I discuss how these concepts form a conceptual framework giving us the tools to make sense of the experiences of university students victimized by IPV.

## **2.1: Intersectionality**

As mentioned in the literature review, although third wave feminists popularized diversity, (some) feminists have long attended to the ways identities interact to condition women's experiences. For example, social feminists "rejected Marxist feminism's belief that class struggles were the cause of all other oppressions and radical feminists, who argued that male dominance was the primary injustice" (Bogosavljevic, 2018, p. 44). Moreover, socialist feminists considered the multiple sites of oppression that affect marginalized women including race and class (Gordon, 2016). In the 1960s and 1970s, Black feminists involved in groups such as Black Power began to position their socio-political location in relation to the broader feminist movement (Gordon, 2016). Consequently, Black feminists "created their own organizations in which they mobilized intersectional analysis and rallied for Black women's equality by organizing political pamphlets, writing essays, poetry, edited volumes, and creating art" (Bogosavljevic, 2018, p. 44). A case in point is the work of Frances Beale (1970); her essay *Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female* discussed the unique experiences of Black women due to their multiple sites of oppression: gender and race. Beale (1970) explored how the capitalist system values the work of white women (e.g., staying home and take care of their children) yet economically and physically exploits Black women who are expected to not only to care for their children but also provide financially for their family by participating in the paid labour market. Additionally, Beale (1970) critiqued the patriarchy imbued in the Black Power movement and the racism that permeated the feminist movement of the day deploying the term

“double jeopardy” to illuminate both the racism and sexism that Black women encountered. This concept was further developed by scholars such as Deborah K. King (1988) who proposed the term “multiple jeopardy” (p. 47). This concept extended the analysis beyond race and sex to consider “racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism” (King, 1988, p. 47). King (1988) advocated for the idea that there are unlimited “interactive oppressions that circumscribe” (p. 42) the lives of Black women, while sex and race are productive entry points, they are not exhaustive.

In 1989, building on the work of authors like Beale (1970), King (1988), and Angela Davis (1983) Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in her article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-racist Politics*. Crenshaw’s (1989) concept of intersectionality offers a useful prism to think through the diversity of women’s experiences. According to Crenshaw (1989) feminist theory focuses on privileged women (white/ middle and upper-class) and antiracist policy focuses on Black men. Crenshaw (1989; 1991) argued that axes of oppression *intersect* to create unique experiences of discrimination and used a traffic intersection to illustrate her point, she wrote,

consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions.

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

As evident in the quote above, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) used *Black women* as a point of departure to illustrate how single-axis approaches fail. Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the importance of examining disadvantage by attending to the multiple forms of oppression an individual is subjected to which in turn informs their unique experiences. Crenshaw (1989) argued that their identity not as ‘Black’ or as ‘women’ but as *Black women* is what deserves independent analysis; “operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon” (p. 140). As a result, the experiences of *Black women* who are “multiply-burdened” are neglected (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

As an extension of her earlier work, Crenshaw (1991) applied an intersectional lens to gendered violence in her article, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. Here, Crenshaw (1991) alerted us that “in the context of violence against women [...] the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities” (p. 1242). Crenshaw (1991) argued that victims’ identities as both women and racialized made their experiences of gendered violence significantly different from the experiences of white women.

### **2.1.1: Intersectionality and Privilege**

Intersectionality is sometimes perceived as a study of disadvantage focused on *Black* (often ‘underclass’) *women* (Crenshaw, 1989). Of necessity, intersectional analysis often focus on those who “occupy the bottom rung of the economic ladder, and it is only through placing them at the center of the analysis that their needs and the needs of their families will be directly addressed” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 166). As a result, privilege (e.g., economic and racial) is often disregarded when deploying an intersectional lens. However, at its core intersectionality (also) illuminates privilege and alerts us to interlocking systems of privilege, specifically, how axes of privilege (sometimes interacting with axes of oppression) condition individuals’ experiences

(Evans & Lépinard, 2019; Powell et al., 2005). Coston and Kimmel's (2012) article *Seeing Privilege Where It Isn't: Marginalized Masculinities and the Intersectionality of Privilege* is one example of this. These authors argued that privilege and marginalization are not binary, instead individuals can experience privilege (e.g., male) and oppression (e.g., working-class) simultaneously; their participants' experiences of masculinity could only be fully understood when the intersections of both their privileged and their oppressed identities were considered (Coston and Kimmel, 2012). It was only in this way that Coston and Kimmel (2012) were able to achieve a nuanced understanding of their participants' performances of masculinity.

### **2.1.2: Debates around Intersectionality**

Although intersectionality proves to be a helpful prism to think through multiple types of discrimination (beyond that of Black women) its extension into these areas remains a site of debate. For example, in her work *Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era* Alexander-Floyd (2012) argues that using intersectionality outside the context of Black women “re-subjuga[tes] black women’s knowledge” (p. 1). Moreover, she uses the term “bait-and-switch” to describe the ways that “black women are focused on, but only to make visible white female suffering” (Alexander-Floyd, 2012, p. 9). Similarly, Nash (2008) argues that by universalizing intersectionality, Black women are used only to ask questions about other forms of oppression, here, Black women become “theoretically erased” (p. 8). Ultimately, scholars such as Alexander-Floyd (2012) and Nash (2008) contest the ways that much scholarship (including this thesis) grapple with and engage intersectionality.

Nonetheless, this thesis relies on the opposing side of the debate; one that recognizes intersectionality's roots in Black feminism however believes that this “should not lead one to

conclude that there is an already-mapped terrain over which intersectionality must and only can travel” (Carbado, 2013, p. 812). Instead, scholars including Carastathis (2014), Carbado (2013), and Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that we should continue to utilize intersectionality as a way to engage multiple axes of oppression (beyond just race and gender and certainly beyond just Black women). In particular, we should continue to explore “class, sexual orientation, nation, citizenship, immigration status, disability, and religion (not just race and gender)” as a way to “imagine the potential domains to which intersectionality might travel and to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work” (Carbado, 2013, p. 815). This thesis aims to follow in the footsteps of scholars already doing such work including Coston and Kimmel (2012), Doyal (2009), and Harnois (2017) who have all used intersectionality to examine a variety of oppressed and/or privileged identities to make sense of individuals’ unique experiences.

## **2.2: Feminism: Theorizing Gender Roles, Gendered Expectations, and Sexual Scripts in Patriarchal Societies**

In the context of intersectional analysis, one’s gender is either an axis of oppression or an axis of privilege. Feminist theory helps us unpack that for women living in patriarchal societies (most if not all of us), gender acts as an axis of oppression, one that conditions all aspects of our lives. This section examines what scholars have said about patriarchy, gender roles and expectations, and sexual scripts and pays particular attention to how they inform women’s vulnerability to gendered violence.

### **2.2.1: Patriarchy**

At the core, ‘patriarchy’ means ‘rule by the father’; it is a concept that has traditionally been used to explain men’s role as ‘head of the household’ and their ensuing legal and economic authority over their wives and daughters (Ademiluka, 2018; Lerner, 1986). Increasingly, the term refers to social systems where men have greater access to political, economic, and social

resources than do women (Ademiluka, 2018; Akgul, 2017). These systems privilege males and allow them to dominate females on a macro (e.g., government) and micro (e.g., family) level (Hunnicut, 2009).

At its core, patriarchy relies on the differentiation and ranking of the sexes and genders. Sex is a biological designation (either male or female) ascribed based on one's genitalia. In contrast, 'gender' is the socially constructed meaning attached to each sex; males as men and females as women (Ullah & Naz, 2017). Gender designations go beyond the simple act of categorization to "evoke a vast array of emotions and expectations and are imbued with personal and social meaning" (Fulton, 2017, p. 21). These personal and social meanings are, in patriarchal societies, ranked – those characteristics associated with men are perceived to be superior while those associated with women are deemed 'less than'. These designations play out in multiple ways, primarily through the construction of gender roles and expectations.

### **2.2.2: Gender Roles and Expectations**

One way the subordination of women is manifested and entrenched in patriarchy is through *gender roles* and *gendered expectations*. Based on a male/female binary, gender roles are the behaviours, actions, attitudes, and values that are associated with, or ascribed to, one or the other gender (Hunnicut, 2009). Men are expected to be aggressive, dominant, strong, confident, and bread-winners while women are encouraged to be accommodating, emotional, beautiful, thin, submissive, weak, and home-makers. These ascribed gendered expectations reverberate through women's and men's lives – starting very early on in childhood when girls are expected to be 'sweet', pretty, and play with dolls whereas boys, who are urged to be active and aggressive have the luxury of their misbehaviour excused with the famous line, 'boys will be boys'. Gendered expectations also manifest around presentation of self – the expectation that

women take care of their appearance – be attractive, fashionable, and slim (Bruckert & Law, 2018).

Gender roles and expectations continue to condition opportunities afforded to men and women throughout their lives – limiting and constraining their options at the same time as they condition their choices (Ademiluka, 2018; Fulton, 2017). Men are encouraged to pursue high earning careers to provide for their family while women are supported in their pursuit of jobs that require nurturing (as long as their priority remains homemaking and motherhood). It is in this context that men (logically) feel entitled to fruitful opportunity outside the home and seamless success in life (Madden Dempsey, 2009). By comparison, “societies tend to support the expectation that women should perform the majority of domestic functions such as child-rearing, house-cleaning, food preparation etc. In light of the belief that these tasks provide women with all the valuable options in life they could possibly want” (Madden Dempsey, 2009, p. 140).

### **2.2.3: Sexual Scripts**

Another way women’s behaviour is regulated in society, specifically within intimate heterosexual relationships, is through *sexual scripts* a concept introduced by Simon and Gagnon (1973) in their book *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*. Sexual scripts are cultural and social guidelines (not inherent biological behaviours) that indicate to men and women how they should behave in socio-sexual and intimate contexts (e.g., on first dates and in long term relationships) (Simon and Gagnon, 1973; 1986). Sexual scripts encourage men to exert aggression, control, sexual dominance, have high sex drives, and display “coercive seduction” (Masters, Casey, Wells, & Morrison, 2013; Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche, & Silverman, 2006, p. 581). In contrast, sexual scripts encourage women to be timid and restrained (Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 71) all while expecting them to be gatekeepers of sexual activity – she must be “desired but not desiring of sex” (Masters et al., 2013, p. 410).

Certainly, feminists have – over decades – challenged gender roles, gendered expectations, and sexual scripts, and as a result we have seen opportunities for women (primarily in the West) opening up; the pay gap has been narrowed, rates of post-secondary attendance for men and women are similar, and in some cases stereotypes around gendered occupations have been tempered (Hiller & Baudin, 2016). Nevertheless, “gender equality is not a reality yet” – girls and boys continue to be socialized differently whilst women and men continue to live with opposing (and ranked) roles, expectations, and scripts (Hiller & Baudin, 2016, p. 8). Women continue to be expected to be thin and ‘beautiful’, are encouraged to take on most (if not all) child and home care responsibilities, and in many cases, remain the victim of shame and judgement if they do not embrace pure and virtuous behavior. Although the explicit nature and presentation of these expectations may have evolved, gender inequality and antiquated gender roles and expectations persist today.

#### **2.2.4: Patriarchy and IPV**

Gender inequality permeates all social and personal spheres conditioning all aspects of our lives including intimate relationships. One brutal way that gender inequality may play out in intimate relationships is through violence, abuse, and control. Thinking about IPV as a symptom of patriarchal societies allows us to discard and recast traditional (problematic) narratives around abusers as immoral men and victims as weak women. Instead, this reframing allows us to look at men’s abuse as a reflection of “broader stratifications and discursive framings” and women’s decisions to stay as a “rational assessment of her personal and social position” (Bruckert & Law, 2018, p. 139) – this “keeps the gaze directed toward social context rather than toward [the] individual” (Hunnicut, 2009, p. 554). Similarly, sexual scripts provide guidelines for men and women’s behaviour in intimate relationships, including when those relationships become abusive – to be discussed further in Chapter Five.

### 2.3: Class

Gender is not, however, the only variable necessary to understand women's experiences of IPV; for a fulsome understanding we need to consider not only gender but their other identity markers (e.g., race, class, and sexual orientation). This thesis will mobilize the work of Pierre Bourdieu to think through class and examine the ways class intersects with gender to condition the experiences of university students in violent intimate relationships.

Upon his death in 2002, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was one of the most prominent sociologists in the world (Weininger, 2005). Bourdieu produced multiple classic works and is lauded for his revisioning of class analysis (Weininger, 2005). While class is a concept subject to much debate and defined in a wide range of ways within the discipline, in this thesis Bourdieu's definition of class is adopted. Bourdieu's interpretation outlines a variety of influential concepts that help us look beyond financial capabilities and explore how class location informs individuals' position in social and cultural spheres as well. Accordingly, Bourdieu (1984) defines social class as:

not defined by a property (not even the most determinant one, such as the volume and composition of capital) nor by a collection of properties (of sex, age, social origin, ethnic origin – proportion of blacks and whites, for example, or natives and immigrants – income, educational level etc.), nor even by a chain of proper ties strung out from a fundamental property (position in the relations of production) in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all the pertinent proper ties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices. (p. 106)

Bourdieu (1984) identified three classes (or groupings). First, the dominant class (or bourgeoisie) includes industrialists, private sector executives, professors, and others in high

status occupations. Second, the petty bourgeoisie, is made up of people such as business owners, technicians, and teachers (Bourdieu, 1984). Third, the working-class, is made up of individuals labouring in occupations deemed un or semi-skilled (e.g., manual workers and farm labourers) (Bourdieu, 1984). Importantly, for Bourdieu, one's location as part of the dominant, petty bourgeoisie, or working-class not only determines their financial means but, as we will see, shapes every aspect of their lives. In the next chapter we will discuss how participants were class privileged and belong to either the dominant class or petty bourgeoisie.

### **2.3.1: Distinctions**

One key concept in Bourdieu's explanation of class is *distinction*. In his book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* Bourdieu (1984) examined taste (or lifestyle) and its relatedness to social stratification. Bourdieu (1984) asserted that individuals' taste in terms of aesthetic (e.g., food, art, and hairstyles) are a reflection of their social class, for example, members of the dominant class enjoy the symphony while members of the working-class enjoy Elvis impersonations. These differences in taste are not only markers of social class but according to Bourdieu (1984) they are ranked and create hierarchal boundaries between the classes. According to Bourdieu (1984) the dominant and petty bourgeoisie's taste is "sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, [and their] distinguished pleasures [are] forever closed to the profane [working-class]" who enjoy "lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural" lifestyles (p. 7). Again, so much that the dominant and petty bourgeoisie enjoy *different* lifestyles from the working-class – it is that the things the former enjoy are hieratically distinguished (i.e., perceived as sophisticated and inherently *better*) (Bourdieu, 1984).

### **2.3.2: Capital**

According to Bourdieu (1894) "the primary differences, those which *distinguish* the major classes of conditions of existence, derive from the overall volume of *capital*, understood as

the set of actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital” (p. 114). Accordingly, in his essay, *The Forms of Capital* Bourdieu (1986) identified three forms of capital; economic capital (what you *have*), social capital (who you *know*), and cultural capital (what you *know*). Bourdieu (1986) argued that when all three forms of capital are considered, a more nuanced understanding of social class emerges.

### *Economic Capital*

Economic capital refers to one’s “cash, assets, property, and other forms of currency that give certain individuals power” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2010, p. 435). According to Bourdieu (1986), economic capital includes the resources that are “immediately and directly convertible into money” (p. 243). In real terms, for economically privileged university students, this means financial security – being able to rely on their parents for financial support with tuition, books, rent, and food; not having to work long hours between classes and on the weekends; not graduating with tens of thousands of dollars in debt; being able to afford additional activities such as exchange programs and tutoring; and having the ability to purchase supplies, books, and computers with ease.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital speaks to the interpersonal connections that an individual enjoys as a result of their social location (Bourdieu, 1986). In Bourdieu’s (1986) words, social capital is the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words membership to a group” (p. 248). Social capital benefits members of – to use Bourdieu’s (1984) classification – the dominant class and some members of the petty bourgeoisie because it also allows them to “use the influence of friends and social networks to

maintain or establish power and significance” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2010, p. 435). It also accounts for “membership to a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of collectively owned-capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (e.g., a family name) (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Ultimately, social capital speaks to the value of social networks and the resources one has access to as a result of these social networks (Bourdieu, 1986). This plays out in multiple ways for privileged university students, for example, their parents may have connections who offer them good paying part-time jobs and internships which in turn ensures them social connections and relevant work experience both of which can translate into occupational advantage in the future.

### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital is the knowledge, dispositions, and skills that individuals develop as a result of their social location (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital can exist in three forms,

in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. (p. 243)

Cultural capital is also referred to as ‘cultural competences’ that are obtained in subtle ways, primarily from family members and through our social environment (Chira, 2016; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). McGinnis & Gentry (2010) explained it is not just different tastes but as

mentioned, the hierarchal distinctions that are important. Again, cultural capital pivots on a “divide in terms of taste, with those having high cultural capital enjoying a privileged life in terms of occupations, the arts, and cosmopolitan consumption, while those with low cultural capital consume objects that have more mass appeal and therefore are considered less cultured” (p. 435).

In order to explain cultural capital Bourdieu (2002) developed the concept of ‘habitus’ which explains the deep-rooted nature of habits, skills, and dispositions that exist among those in each social class. Bourdieu (2002) stated that “habitus is a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking. Or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (p. 27-28). Said differently, habitus is a class informed subconscious process of understanding the world and shaping tastes and actions (Bourdieu, 2002). Habitus is central to distinguishing the different lifestyles between the classes. Bruckert and Law (2018) explored one way that cultural capital plays out in the university setting – some middle and upper-class students (who have learned about university life from their families) feel more entitled and confident in these spaces whereas working-class students (who are not familiar with university culture) report feeling undeserving and out of place (see also, Finnie, Lascelles & Sweetman, 2005 and Lehmann, 2009). Here, working-class students may feel like “cultural outsiders” (in relation to their middle and upper-class peers) as they have “been traditionally excluded” from these spaces (Lehmann, 2009, p. 632). In short, beyond economic barriers, working-class students may also face cultural barriers when pursuing higher education.

## **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

Unlike conventional intersectional analysis, the conceptual framework applied in this thesis will consider how axes of oppression *and* privilege informed the participants’ experiences

of IPV. I will use the framework to examine how the participants' social position, not as *women* or as *class-privileged* but as *class-privileged women* made their experiences unique. Specifically, how being bound by *gender roles*, *gendered expectations*, and *gendered scripts* yet privileged on the basis of *economic, social, and cultural capital* informed how they navigated the abuse. This type of analysis is important because it acknowledges that women's experiences are complex – indeed all women are oppressed on the basis of gender but in order to gain a fulsome understanding of their experiences their additional identities must be considered.

## **2.5 Frame Analysis**

In an effort to move beyond the conceptual and toward the concrete, this thesis will also examine the ways that the participants' identities as *middle-class women* informed the ways they made sense of their experiences – here Erving Goffman's work on frames becomes relevant. In 1974 Goffman brought forward the concept of frames in his text *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. At the core frame analysis allows for an examination of how people understand and interpret situations in their lives. Frame analysis considers stereotypes, messaging, images and more to explain the different ways that humans not only view the world but make sense of their individual experiences (Goffman, 1974; Molla & Nolan, 2019). Said differently, frames are an “interpretation that guide perception and the representation of reality” (Molla & Nolan, 2019, p. 324). Therefore, to understand an individual's frames is to understand the ways they make sense of their reality. Frame analysis will allow for an examination into how the participants framed both IPV and themselves, and how these ‘frames’ informed their understanding of their abusive relationships.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Methodology**

IPV, by definition, is a form of violence that permeates the most private (and intimate) spheres of women's lives. For this reason, it is challenging to conduct research in this area. At the same time, the hidden nature of this violence, that often leaves victims silenced and ignored, signals to us that knowledge about this issue is exceptionally important. Accordingly, this research project adopts standpoint feminism and uses the accounts of university students who experienced IPV to gain insight into what this type of abuse looks like and how these women make sense of (or frame) it. This chapter describes the approach to data collection and analysis mobilized to answer the research question: how do white class-privileged university students experience IPV and how are their experiences conditioned by their social location?

#### **3.1: Research Design – Qualitative**

This thesis adopted a qualitative research design. According to Merriam (1998) “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Qualitative researchers collect data through, for example, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, case studies, and ethnographic research. Due to the complexities of IPV, interviews appeared to be the most advantageous form of data collection – they allow for in-depth exploration and

clarification with each participant when needed (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

More importantly, due to the sensitive nature of IPV, one-on-one interviews ensured significantly more privacy than some other forms of data collection (e.g., focus groups).

Unsurprisingly, feminist research (especially in the realm of IPV) has traditionally favoured data collection through qualitative interviews. Indeed, Skinner, Hester, and Malos (2005) note that “the history of feminist work on domestic and other forms of violence against women began with qualitative descriptions usually obtained by interview” (Skinner et al., 2005). One example of this is Weitzman’s (2000) book *“Not to People Like Us”: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages*. Interviews proved to be an essential part of Weitzman’s (2000) deep dive into the complex stories of her participants; not only did they help her understand what the abuse looked like, but they also gave her insight into how the women interpreted and made sense of these events.

Interviews can be conducted in numerous ways including structured, unstructured, or semi-structured. Structured interviews are the most rigid and require a set of pre-determined questions (Stuckey, 2013). In contrast, unstructured interviews are extremely fluid and set out to cover a general topic – not specific questions. Midway between these approaches lies the style I adopted, semi-structured interviews – an interview style that begins with a list of topics and potential questions yet leaves room for the participants’ to guide the conversation (Skinner et al., 2005). The flexibility created space for unique yet unexpected themes to emerge (e.g., poor mental health) at the same time pre-determined questions ensured important topics (e.g., if and how they accessed formal or informal resources) were addressed.

### **3.2: Epistemology – Standpoint Feminism and IPV**

Standpoint feminism is an epistemological orientation that can be traced to Nancy Hartsock’s text *Money, Sex, and Power* (1983) which argued that women’s unique social location provides them a vantage point to make grounded assertions about women’s experiences

(see also, Brooks, 2007 and van Wormer, 2009). In other words, standpoint feminism “place[s] women at the centre of the research process” because it acknowledges that “women’s concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge” (Brooks, 2007, p. 4).

Overall, standpoint feminism values:

reliance on the woman’s personal narrative for truth telling; acceptance of a holistic, non-dichotomized view of reality including a merging of the personal and political; a focus on choice and options; an understanding of the gendered nature of power relations in the society; and an emphasis on personal empowerment and respect for one’s personal dignity. (van Wormer, 2009, p. 109)

van Wormer (2009), applying the tenants of standpoint feminism to IPV, asserted that the criminal justice system does not centre the experiences of women and therefore fails to meet the needs of IPV victims (predominantly women). For example, many studies have found that women felt disempowered by the legal process and expected more decision-making authority over the arrest and/or charging of their partners (van Wormer, 2009). These type of experiences leave women feeling disempowered because they ignore women’s valuable role in envisioning ways to address and overcome gendered violence and move towards a more equitable society. Consistent with Hartsock (1983) and van Wormer’s (2009) arguments, this thesis relies on the stories of women, university students in particular, in order to understand and unpack women’s experiences of IPV.

### **3.3: Ethical Considerations**

Before embarking on this journey and recruiting participants, I applied for ethics approval from the University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Board (REB). My ethics application, for my project then titled *Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on University Campuses in Canada* was approved on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (see Appendix A for the REB certificate). In keeping with both

the requirements of the REB and in spirit of doing ethical research, a number of protocols were implemented to ensure free and informed consent as well as to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. First, each participant was informed that they retained the option to withdraw from the project at any time without negative consequences. Second, all the transcriptions were anonymized by removing or changing any identifiable information, this included names of people (replaced with pseudonyms), schools, cities, and identifiable speech patterns or idiosyncratic use of phrases (each interview was reviewed three times to ensure anonymity). Third, no documentation was created that linked email addresses or names to particular interviews by individuals and consent was collected verbally, not written. Last, all data was kept on a password protected laptop for the duration of the project and in the interest of maximizing the protection of participants, the audio recordings of all interviews were securely deleted upon transcription and verification.

An additional ethical concern was that the interviews required the women to open up about traumatic experiences from their past which had the potential to trigger negative emotions. Accordingly, I worked to mitigate this by not pushing the participants to speak of the abuse by, for example, not asking them to describe the violence they endured; instead, I asked them to “share their story”. Additionally, participants were reminded that they were able to stop and/or withdraw from that interview at any point they should experience discomfort. Last, participants were provided with an extensive list of IPV resources in Ontario and Quebec (see Appendix B).

Some of the women did become slightly emotional (teary-eyed or a bit angry) but, although invited to do so, no one wanted to stop or interrupt the interview; indeed, participants moved past these emotions fairly quickly. When women became somewhat emotional and apologized for it, I validated their feelings and reassured them that sharing their story was

challenging and difficult and that these emotions were completely normal. Given that none of the participants became too emotional to continue or felt the desire to withdraw, I am largely confident that the women were not re-traumatized by the interviews.

### **3.4: Recruitment**

Recruitment for this project began in June 2019, shortly after it received REB approval. I was aware that some women in my immediate and extended social circles had experienced IPV while in university; snowball sampling appeared to be best approach to recruitment. I provided those in my immediate circle with general information on my project, emailed them recruitment posters (see Appendix C), and asked them pass along the information. This allowed those who qualified for participation to decide whether or not they wanted to contact me.

In July 2019, a few women in my social circle reached out and offered to be a part of my study. Once I secured three interviews, interest in my study halted which necessitated that I reach out to a few more people. Thankfully, by August 2019 I had secured two more interviews and reached the (minimum) goal of five participants. A few months later, in November 2019, I recruited the sixth and final participant.

### **3.5: Participants**

In order to take part, participants had to be 18 years or older, identify as a woman,<sup>2</sup> have experienced IPV while they were in a relationship with a man and at university,<sup>3</sup> and have had no children at the time of the abuse.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, IPV was defined as interpersonal violence – psychological (emotional and verbal), physical, sexual, and/or financial

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<sup>2</sup> This decision was made because the experiences of abused men (heterosexual or homosexual) are different from the experiences of abused women.

<sup>3</sup> This decision was made because the experiences of women abused by men are different from the experiences of women abused by women.

<sup>4</sup> This decision was made because the experiences of abused women with children are different from the experiences of abused women without children.

abuse – that occurred within the context of an intimate relationship. Six women were interviewed but upon coding it became clear that one of the participants experienced sexual assault (in the context of a first date) and not IPV – accordingly the decision was made to exclude that interview from the project.

### *Demographics*

This thesis relied on the stories of five women; Sarah, Vanessa, Tammy, Sydney, and Kelly. Demographically these women were quite homogenous. First, they were all white women between the ages of 22 and 25 who not only self-identified as middle-class but also had all the markers of class-privilege. Accordingly, all of their parents owned their own homes (in one case – owned additional property as a second stream of income) and none of the participants had to rely on Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to pursue post-secondary education.<sup>5</sup> Expectedly, all the participants, at the time of the interview, had undergraduate degrees and three of the participants have gone on to pursue graduate studies.<sup>6</sup> The women will be introduced in further detail in the next chapter.

### **3.6: Data Collection – The Interviews**

Data collection occurred from June 2019 to December 2019 in Toronto and Ottawa, Ontario. The interviews were conducted in spaces that were comfortable and convenient for the participants and at times that best suited their personal and professional commitments. This looked different for each participant – some felt most comfortable in their own apartments, some in a mutual friend’s home, and others in a room at the University of Ottawa library.

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<sup>5</sup> One of the participants did utilize OSAP in her master’s degree, once she was determined to be ‘independent’ from her parents.

<sup>6</sup> One of the participants plans to pursue graduate studies in the coming year.

As a first-time interviewer, I was excited but also nervous about embarking on this journey. I was concerned that the interviews would be awkward; I questioned if I was equipped to conduct a 45-minute interview, ask the appropriate probing questions, and have the ‘right’ reactions to their responses. Ultimately, these types of issues did materialize but instead of causing anxiety, they felt like expected and natural elements of the interview process. Despite the overall success of the interviews, there are some things I would have changed. In particular, I wish I had invested more time in learning about interview techniques. Primarily, I wish I had been less reactionary (appeared less shocked/ saddened) when the women shared sad stories/ details about the abuse. In the moment the emotional response felt necessary but in hindsight, it may have been somewhat unprofessional.

I began the interviews by informing each participant of their rights, walking them through the process and purpose of the research, and discussing potential negative consequences. I then gave them an opportunity to ask any questions before we began (they all declined). At this point, each participant was furnished with a consent form (see Appendix D) that outlined their rights, including their right to withdraw from the project at any time without any negative repercussions. Participants then provided consent verbally and were given a hard copy of the consent letter that included both my and Chris Bruckert’s (thesis supervisor) contact information as well as the list of IPV resources mentioned above.

I planned for each interview to last approximately 45 minutes although this proved to be unrealistic as each story was unique and required different amounts of time to tell. While three interviews lasted 50 – 60 minutes, one ended up being only 30 minutes and another exceeded 80 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide (see Appendix E). The interview guide had four categories, (1) demographics (e.g., how old are you?), (2) opening

questions (e.g., please tell me your story), (3) your decisions (e.g., did you confide in any family members regarding the abuse?), and (4) perceptions of IPV (e.g., how did your opinions [of IPV] change after your experience?). It turned out that when I asked participants to ‘share their story’ at the beginning of the interview, they often went on to answer many of the subsequent questions, which I was then able to skip over.

My favourite thing about the interview process was how affirming and healing the experience appeared to be for some of the women. According to Scaletti and Hocking (2010) storytelling may help young people in “eliciting their interpretation of events and assisting them to make sense of the experience” (p. 66). For some of the participants, I was the first person to whom they told their IPV story; many of them even expressed gratitude for allowing them to finally share their experience. I was friendly with some of the participants and had previously heard bits and pieces of what they went through, yet it appeared that the structure of the interview (that required a chronological account of the relationship and some reflection on their experience as a victim) produced a unique form of relief.

### **3.7: Data Processing and Analysis**

As previously mentioned, upon completion of the interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim and all identifiable information was deleted or changed. Next, I reviewed each transcription three times to ensure precision; at that point all audio recordings were securely deleted. Following this, I used manual coding to conduct a thematic content analysis (TCA). TCA is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79); this technique allowed me to pull out a variety of themes from my interview transcripts. TCA can be either inductive or deductive in nature. I adopted an inductive approach which is described as a *bottom up* and *data-driven* form of analysis “whereby the coding of the data is performed without a priori coding frame and free of the researcher’s

preconceptions” (Halili, 2018, p. 6).<sup>7</sup> In order to achieve this I deployed manual coding, a form of coding that requires researchers to start by reading through the interviews in order to get a sense of the data and assign codes based on themes that arise.

As I read through the transcripts a few major themes became evident; the women described the typical victim, typical abuser, and typical situation in contrast to them, their partner, and their situation. All the women expressed how their situation was not typical of what they believed an abusive relationship to be and drew many comparisons between the two. Mental health also arose as a theme, many of the women brought up their partner’s poor mental health and in some cases, suicidal ideations. Once I had established all the themes I created a document to organize what each of the women had said about each of the topics (see Appendix F).

Coding did present some challenges, specifically the use of manual coding meant that I had to read through the transcripts several times to ensure that I was not overlooking any themes or important information. I also had to work really hard to bracket my pre-conceived opinions about what I thought I would ‘find’ in search for what the women’s stories actually communicated. I ensured this by again, reading through the transcripts multiple times to confirm nothing was missed and that the themes I pulled were the best and most authentic representation of the women’s stories.

### **3.8: Limitations**

Limitations are an expected factor of every research project and this thesis was no exception. One limitation in my study was snowball sampling. According to Cohen and Arieli (2011) snowball sampling is a drawback for many studies, for example, it is not a random sample and instead is “dependent on the referrals of the respondents first accessed and on the willingness

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<sup>7</sup> In contrast, deductive approaches are *top down*, *analyst-driven*, and shaped by the researcher’s theoretical interests (Halili, 2018).

of the research subjects to participate – hence the common claim that most snowball samples are biased and cannot be generalized” (p. 428). One way I mitigated this was by ensuring that I reached out to all my different circles (grad school friends from Ottawa, undergrad friends from Toronto, high school friends from the Greater Toronto Area) and asked them to do the same. This ensured some randomness as multiple different groups/types of people were being reached.

A second limitation to my study was the small sample size of five participants. This restricted my ability to draw definitive conclusions about the population in which I studied. That said, I understand the project to be exploratory in that I was endeavouring to investigate and understand an understudied issue instead of making conclusive claims about it. Although small, the women I spoke with are a hidden and unique subpopulation of IPV victims. Typically, women who are interviewed about IPV are recruited through the criminal justice system and/or abused women’s shelters, leaving those who do not utilize formal services invisible; “most of these findings have been based on research on lower-income battered wives. These are the women who call the police and seek refuge in battered women’s shelters” (Weitzman, 2000, p. 5). In contrast, my research project included the stories of women who “do not report the tirades and tantrums, who refuse to press charges or even call the police despite the broken bones and blackened eyes inflicted on them by the men who purport to love them” (Weitzman, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, despite being small, the sample of five women allowed for in-depth exploratory research of an extraordinarily invisible population of victims.

The homogeneity of the participants may also be considered a limitation; the participants were all white, class privileged, educated, and between the ages of 23 and 25. With that being said, the reality of my population (university students) is quite homogenous, therefore samples being pulled from this population will inevitably reflect that. Moreover, while gender and class

are productive entry points to think through IPV among university students – I do so mindful of the limitation inherent to such a two- axes analysis that implicitly renders other intersecting identities (e.g., sexual orientation, Indigeneity, race, and immigration status) outside the frame of analysis.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **The Beginning, Middle, and End**

This chapter explores the stories of five women, specifically, how their childhood best friend, their neighbour's cute buddy, and the smart boy from their hometown became the men who stole their money, threatened fatal violence, and raped them. The chapter begins by introducing the participants and explaining how they met their partners. Next, I tease out what the psychological, sexual, physical, and financial violence looked like for each woman. The chapter concludes by exploring how each relationship ultimately came to an end.

#### **4.1: The Relationships – The Beginnings**

##### *Sarah and James*

Sarah and James met in high school where they gradually became a part of the same social circle, sharing a mutual attraction but rarely communicating outside the context of the group. Towards the end of high school their friendship grew stronger – they began making plans to see each other outside of the group setting and did so quite regularly. After confessing their feelings for each other at a birthday party later that year, their relationship became romantic. Sarah and James had been dating for five months when James announced he was going to apply to the same university as Sarah, one she had been planning to go to for years. Upon graduation,

they moved across the country and embarked on this new journey together. It was during this stressful time that Sarah admits seeing “*emotional issues come up*” (Sarah).

#### *Vanessa and Patrick*

Vanessa’s family moved across the street from Patrick when she was six years old and the two of them instantly became “*childhood best friends*” (Vanessa). Their friendship continued well into their teen years as they attended much of elementary and high school together. Right before Vanessa’s first year of university they developed romantic feelings for one another and started dating. They were, according to Vanessa, inseparable – he stayed at her student residence building so often that “*the people downstairs thought he was a student, because he was there from the first day until we essentially moved out of there, they used to give him the nod and everything*”. Despite the happiness that she felt as she began to date her childhood best friend, Vanessa stated that “*very quickly into the relationship, maybe three or four months[...] that’s when it started to get abusive and it was pretty abusive for a good three years in various ways.*”

#### *Tammy and Adam*

Tammy and Adam met through mutual friends on a night out, Tammy stated she had “*an instant crush on him and it was reciprocated.*” Eventually, Tammy and Adam began spending time together – this is when their feelings for each other flourished. Tammy describes the day that Adam asked her to be his girlfriend as “*amazing*” she states that, “*I spent the night with him and the next day we were walking down White Street to Yellow Road and there it was, the Santa Clause Parade and he was like “oh look they threw a parade for you and I” It was this whole thing, I was like, oh my god, this guy’s amazing.*” Despite the romantic beginning, Tammy admits “*there were red flags very early on.*”

### *Sydney and Joseph*

Sydney and Joseph had crossed paths a few times throughout high school, in fact Joseph was a close friend of Sydney's neighbour, Myles. Sydney admits to always being fascinated by Joseph, thinking he was attractive and charming. Despite her interest, Sydney never pursued Joseph because he was in a long-term relationship. Years later, after that relationship ended, Joseph reached out to Sydney on Facebook, complementing her on a recent weight loss picture she posted. They continued chatting for a few days at which point they decided to hangout. After a few dates and increasing levels of mutual attraction and interest, Sydney and Joseph entered into an exclusive romantic relationship. Sydney admits that she was excited to finally be at this point with Joseph but fairly early on in the relationship he displayed troubling anger, sadness, and negativity.

### *Kelly and Ben*

Kelly and Ben both grew up in a small town outside Vancouver, British Columbia. They became good friends midway through high school where they were both in the cooking club. Ben was one year older than Kelly and therefore graduated and began university the same year she entered grade 12 – this was when their romantic relationship began. After graduation Kelly opted to attend a university approximately 20 minutes away from Ben's school which meant that they were able to spend much of their spare time together. According to Kelly, their relationship started out "*perfect*," they were each other's "*first love*," had their first sexual encounters with each other, and even discussed marriage early on – signs of abuse only becoming apparent a year into their three-year relationship.

## **4.2: The Abuse**

In this section we draw on the IPV literature to consider the types of abuse the participants; Sarah, Vanessa, Tammy, Sydney, and Kelly endured. Accordingly, the experiences

are categorized as psychological, physical, sexual, and financial violence – all the women experienced multiple forms.

#### **4.2.1: Psychological Abuse**

As we saw in the literature review, psychological violence is emotional and/or verbal abuse that functions to tear down an individual's self-worth and self-esteem and/or inflict psychological harm (Slabbert & Green, 2013, Merrill & Wolfe, 2000). For the women I interviewed this manifested through a combination of monitoring, manipulating, gaslighting, slut shaming, and body shaming.

##### *Monitoring*

Excessive monitoring was present in Tammy's story, for example, she asserted that Adam would always scrutinize her location and her interactions with others. Tammy noted that Adam would "*walk me home, stand there, make sure I was going home and for, like, fifteen minutes [he remained outside the door] to make sure I was not leaving.*" At times when Tammy was staying with Adam at his apartment, she was prohibited from taking her phone with her when she left the house, in order to ensure that she did not communicate electronically with anyone out of his sight. While dating Adam, Tammy worked at a local restaurant; Adam would sit at the bar all night observing her interactions with customers and become enraged when men made harmless gestures such as touching her arm. Adam's fury propelled him into episodes of rage, where he punched steel doors and got into verbal altercations with clients (which untimely got him banned from the establishment).

As mentioned in *Literature Review: IPV, Class, and University Students* new technology has provided abusive intimate partners new and more subtle ways to "track and monitor their victims" (Fraser et al., 2010, p. 39; Reed et al., 2016). This was the case for Tammy who's partner heavily monitored her social media and "*would go through everyone who liked [her]*

*photos, everyone who commented, every photo that [she] liked, everyone who followed [her], every interaction [she] had with anybody else, whether it was a girl or a guy.*” On one occasion, Tammy woke up in the middle of the night to find Adam on her computer looking through the emails, pictures, and messages she had sent and received over the course of the past several years.

### *Manipulation*

Many of the abusive partners expressed suicidal ideations as a tactic to control their partners and keep them in the abusive relationships. These threats ranged from trying to “*jump out of the window of a thirteen story building,*” (Vanessa) saying things such as, “*if I didn’t have you I’d kill myself,*” (Kelly) and in Sydney’s case, claiming he wanted to poison himself. The threat of suicide was routinely deployed by the partners of Vanessa and Sydney. Vanessa asserted that, “*he definitely used it against me[...] if you don’t do this or if you don’t stay with me, I’ll kill myself.*” Sydney shared a story about a time she was doing homework and unintentionally ignored Joseph’s text messages for a few hours. When Sydney finally got around to checking her phone, Joseph had gotten so angry that he was “*saying all these weird things to me and like he was telling me he was not going to talk to me again and he was going to kill himself, write a suicide note, and put my name in it so everyone knows who’s fault it was that he died.*” Joseph subsequently blocked her number and stopped responding to her attempts to reach him which led her to believe he may have committed suicide, forcing her to call the police. A few days later he texted her and told her she was a “*stupid bitch*” for believing him and proceeded to block her again.

### *Gaslighting*

As mentioned in the literature review, *gaslighting* is a newly named phenomenon where victims are manipulated into questioning their own sanity (Slabbert & Green, 2013). This was the case for Tammy whose partner would deploy abuse in a variety of ways (e.g., slap her and monitor her movements) and then accuse her of being “*out of control*” and “*crazy*,” in the process, implying (or actually stating) that he was the victim for having to cope with her lack of mental stability. Tammy began having panic attacks during their relationship, which she believes were triggered by the chronic abuse and her perpetual state of fear. As a result, she saw a therapist and on one occasion a severe panic attack forced her to voluntarily check herself into an inpatient mental health program. These events were then in turn used by her partner as evidence that she was indeed “*insane*” and “*psycho*” (Tammy).

Assertions of mental instability went beyond gaslighting however – Adam even convinced Tammy’s parents that she was still the wild and “*crazy teen*” (Tammy) they once knew. When Tammy’s parents witnessed minor fighting Adam would suggest that he was doing them a favour by putting up with her. Tammy asserted that Adam would “*flip a switch – it would go from him trying to kill me to she’s driving me crazy*”.

### *Slut Shaming*

Vanessa and Sarah also experienced slut shaming from their partners – ultimately, they were both accused of failing to act in accordance with sexual scripts that women be (or appear to be) pure(ish), sexually restrained, and sexual gatekeepers. For example, Sarah’s partner James continuously brought up that she had previous sexual partners and demanded extensive validation and reassurance. In Vanessa’s case, Patrick was so angry that she had past sexual partners that he insisted, “*since you have five exes why can’t I have sex with five other girls while*

*we're in a relationship.*” Patrick then proceeded to deploy manipulation and threats telling her: *“if I can't do that, I'm going to kill myself.”* Vanessa felt forced to accept this arrangement.

### *Body Shaming*

Kelly experienced body shaming by her partner, whereby Ben had made comments about her weight/weight gain and made it clear that he wanted her to diet. This began with subtle comments such as *“I do yoga every day – you should come with me”* and pointing out that she never wore sexy lingerie anymore, but it got *“substantially worse”* (Kelly). The comments about Kelly's body became more frequent and harsh and began to negatively affect Kelly's self-esteem to the point where she felt ashamed of her body and as a result, was less interested in and more insecure during sex. This is consistent with the findings of Eisenberg, Franz, Berge, Loth, and Neumark-Sztainer (2017) who established that (negative) weight related comments made by male intimate partners had detrimental effects on young women's well-being, specifically, their body satisfaction, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms.

### **4.2.2: Physical Abuse**

Vanessa, Tammy, and Kelly all experienced physical violence. Vanessa said the physical abuse was a regular occurrence and began early in the relationship. At the time Patrick was heavily abusing drugs and alcohol and the physical abuse was correlated with this; when his drug abuse tapered off so did the physical abuse (although, as we will see in the next section, this was not the case for the other forms of abuse present in their relationship). The physical abuse Vanessa endured often included being slapped across the face, however, in one case he intimidated her when he *“started flipping furniture and making a huge scene[...] and his little cousin was there and very scared.”*

For Tammy, the physical abuse came in waves and ranged in severity. It was typical for disagreements to result in a lot of pushing and shoving – he would push her out of his way or

down stairwells. For example, “*he pushed me down the whole flight of stairs and it was a steep flight of stairs, I don’t know how I didn’t break anything. I don’t know how I landed down that flight of stairs.*” Tammy shared an anecdote of an argument that escalated into a screaming match that resulted in him back handing her so hard she could not see – it was only after sitting down for thirty minutes that she started to regain her vision. Tammy was left with a debilitating three-day long migraine.

Kelly also experienced physical violence, “*sometimes when he would drink, he would hit me, or there was one time that he got drunk and threw a plate at me and then smashed it against the wall.*” In the mornings following the abusive outbursts Ben would claim that he did not remember a thing – to this day Kelly wonders if Ben’s claims of forgetting were true or not.

#### *Physical Threats/ Intimidation*

In addition to the physical violence that was carried out, the men also deployed threats of violence. According to Birenbaum and Grant (2012) an “alarming number women” (p. 206) are violently threatened by their male partners in order to deter them from leaving, to isolate them, or to prevent them from reporting the abuse to the police. This was the case for Sarah, Tammy, and Vanessa whose partners all threatened to harm them if they tried to end the relationships – using the threat of violence to manipulate them into staying. James routinely warned Sarah that “*if [she] ever did something like that [breakup with him] he would drive his car into [her] house.*” Likewise, Adam often told Tammy he would “*fucking kill [her]*” if she ended the relationship.

In Vanessa’s case, her partner habitually told her he would kill *both* of them if she tried to leave. Vanessa admits, “*I just thought that he was going to drive us into oncoming traffic or drive off the road or something and that’s not something that happened once [or] more than once – that was very very common for him to do.*” This is consistent with Logan, Ertl, and

Bossarte's (2019) findings that established threats of *homicide-suicides* are one brutal way abusive partners scare and intimidate their (often female) partners; homicide-suicides account for roughly 1,000 to 1,500 deaths in the United States every year. Although Statistics Canada (2013) does not report on homicide-suicides among dating partners, they did conclude that 49% of all victims were currently or previously married to the accused and 97% of those victims were women.

#### **4.2.3: Sexual Abuse**

Sexual violence manifested in the relationships of Vanessa and Kelly. For Vanessa, unlike the physical abuse which, as noted above, was related to her partner's drug and alcohol abuse, the sexual abuse – defined as sexual activity obtained through force or threat of force but also through coercion (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; Phiri-Alleman & Alleman, 2008; Slabbert & Green, 2013) was ongoing throughout the relationship. Vanessa explained that the sexual abuse she endured was both overt – explicitly forced – and more subtle, including persuasion and refusing to take “no” as an answer. Vanessa shared, “*I [didn't] want to do things and I [had] to do things, and [I told] him that I didn't want to, and it didn't matter.*”

Kelly also experienced severe sexual abuse – both in the form of coercion and explicit force. When Kelly would turn down sex, Ben would display outbursts of anger, drink heavily, and scream things such as “*I do everything for you, you'd be nothing without me*” – implying that he is entitled to have sex with her. Kelly admits that these outbursts made her feel hesitant to refuse his advances and that she found herself “*having sex with him so he would calm down.*” Kelly also described the “*worst day of [her] life*” as the day Ben came home and tried to initiate sex with her while she was half asleep, he then “*grabbed [her] hands, put them over [her] head and rap[ed] [her]*” (Kelly). Ben justified the assault by using her “*kink against [her]*” saying things like, “*you like it rough anyways*” (Kelly). Although the relationship ended years ago,

Kelly continues to deal with the psychological outcomes of this assault, in particular, she has been diagnosed with PTSD. The long term impact Kelly is experiencing is not unique, indeed, PTSD is not an uncommon by-product of abuse, according to Perez, Johnson, and Wright (2012) 64% of IPV victims would meet the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

#### **4.2.4: Financial Abuse**

Financial abuse was present in the relationships of two of the women I interviewed; Sarah and Vanessa. In Sarah's case, the financial abuse was a significant and primary form of IPV; instead of getting his own job and supporting himself, James manipulated her into "*financially taking care of him*" which included paying for his rent, groceries, cannabis, and gym membership. This upset Sarah as she stated, "*I felt like I was working thirty hours a week and doing full time school while he was working two shifts a week, not going to class, and smoking weed, and I just thought that that wasn't fair to me. I wanted to at least see an effort for him to pay me back or at least stay afloat.*"

Vanessa's partner also financially exploited her. She stated, "*I didn't give him money specifically for drugs or alcohol, or anything like that, it was like he would just blow his money on that type of stuff and then not have the means to live.*" As a result, she paid for his rent, food, gas, and covered other assorted expenses. Beyond these "*means to live*" Vanessa also spent "*eight to ten grand [on him] which is a lot of fucking money*"— she bought him "*big ticket items*" including a laptop and a gaming console.

### **4.3: The Relationships – The End**

#### *Sarah and James*

Sarah recognized that she wanted to end her relationship with Patrick quite early on but decided that they embarked on their university journey together and therefore decided to "*see*

*him through.*” Despite this, after spending a summer apart Sarah changed her mind; being away from him allowed her to recognize how truly unhappy she was, and she decided she would end the relationship in September. Before Sarah was able to present James with a letter she wrote explaining her decision, he went through her phone, saw text messages she exchanged with a friend and realized that the breakup was imminent. James then “*pounced*” her which forced Sarah to abruptly end the relationship.

During this time, they were living together and upon breaking up James refused to sublet the apartment because “*he didn’t really believe [they] were truly breaking up and when he did come to that conclusion, all he had over [her] was that apartment, the way he could stay connected to [her] and keep tabs on [her] was to keep the apartment [they] both had to live in*” (Sarah). Therefore, they were forced to live together for about eight months after the relationship ended. Sarah shared, “*when I went home, he made me feel like shit [...] I felt unsafe in the house because I didn’t know if he was going through my stuff, my phone, or my laptop.*” It was only when she finally moved out that she “*felt such a lift off [her] shoulders. [She] was moving, [she] was graduating, and essentially, he was out of [her] life and that was a huge relief*” (Sarah).

#### *Vanessa and Patrick*

The end of Vanessa and Patrick’s relationship was sparked by a fight they had at a Halloween party. After the party they made the last-minute (and on Vanessa’s part – intoxicated) decision for Patrick to drive them about an hour away to Vanessa’s off-campus apartment instead of sleeping at their friend’s house as planned. When they reached the apartment, Vanessa realized that she did not have the things she needed (e.g., phone charger, wallet, spare clothes) so she asked Patrick if they could drive back. Patrick was enraged by this request and responded by abandoning Vanessa at the apartment and taking her car to go “*see the other people he was*

*having sex with*". Vanessa (now stranded with no phone charger, no money, no car, and somewhat intoxicated) used the last of her phone battery to call her friend Sadie who agreed to pick her up. At this time, Vanessa was forced to tell Sadie everything that had been happening which sparked a "*domino effect*" – she began disclosing to a few other friends at which point she realized "*I'm going to need to get out of this.*" It has been three years since the relationship ended yet Patrick still contacts Vanessa with "*very long abusive manipulating messages [that] come through [her] phone all the time*" in which he "*tells [her] that he wants to work things out and he'll always love [her].*" Vanessa is looking to get a restraining order when she moves back home after graduating from a school in British Columbia.

#### *Tammy and Adam*

Tammy described her breakup with Adam as happening slowly over the course of a few months. Tammy found out through a friend that Adam had met someone on a dating app who he had been out with a number of times and had brought her back to his apartment more than once. Supposedly, Adam told the new girl that he and Tammy had "*broken up, like she's crazy, she's a stalker.*" It was clear that despite still being in a relationship Adam was pursuing other women and claiming that his relationship with Tammy had ended.

Once aware of the infidelity, Tammy and her mother went to Adam's apartment (that was in their building and being paid for by Tammy's father) and told him he needed to be out by the end of the month and "*he didn't fight it – nothing.*" A few days later Adam approached Tammy and said, "*if I have to leave by the end of the month you're dead.*" Tammy disregarded this threat and a few weeks later agreed to help him move out because "*I just wanted him to be gone, he didn't have a car, I was like you know what, I'm just going to do it.*" The next week, in the

process of helping him move, they got into a severe altercation. Tammy explained that after he had assaulted her, she fled outside:

*I burst through the door, ran to my car and there's this guy – a serviceman with his truck outside and his truck battery died so he needed a boost. He sees that I'm like terrified [...] and he's like are you okay? He's like, listen, I understand that you are going through it and I will stay with you, but I need some help jump starting my car. So, he has booster cables, I turn on my car, I'm boosting his car, and at some point Adam comes back and gets into the back of my car. I didn't know so I started driving and it was like slow motion, like he sits upright and in my rear-view mirror I just see him dead eyeing me. I pull over the car and I don't even remember. I have zero memory after that moment. I like saw him in my rear-view mirror and I don't remember what I did, I don't remember. I pulled over my car and then I don't remember. I know I got home without him, in my car, in one piece. I don't remember anything else, like zero recollection.*

This was the “official end” of Tammy and Adam’s relationship, however, for a few weeks he would “pop up wherever [she] was.” Their relationship has been over for a number of years; however, Tammy still sees him around the city and admits to feeling anxious when she goes anywhere near his new apartment or locations he frequents.

### *Sydney and Joseph*

Sydney routinely dismissed Joseph’s manipulation as normal fighting and his threats of suicide as cries for help. It was not until he threatened to put her name in a suicide note that she was confronted by the reality that this was not acceptable behaviour. At the time one of her co-workers, Brooklyn, was dating a police officer who was able to provide Sydney with a direct phone number to a suicide prevention line. Ultimately, law enforcement located Joseph, arrested

him, and brought him to the hospital where they kept him for a few hours and gave him a psychological assessment. At this point Sydney realized “*one thousand percent [...] this isn't normal*” and decided to end the relationship.

### *Kelly and Ben*

After dating for nearly three years Ben told Kelly that he was unsure if he loved her anymore. Kelly was “*distraught,*” felt “*numb,*” and “*cried for twenty-four hours.*” A few days later, Ben went to Kelly’s parent’s house (where she had been staying) and said, “*I didn't have time to go buy the engagement ring, I'm so sorry.*” Ben ultimately claimed that he loved her deeply and that his declaration from the other day was not true and simply a result of being stressed out. Kelly decided that she needed a few more days to sort out her feelings and told Ben she would reach out to him when she was ready. A few days passed and Kelly went to Ben’s house, without the intention to break up with him, however she explained that when she arrived she had an epiphany:

*When I saw him standing up against the cupboards where I'd seen him multiple times with alcohol, where he's thrown stuff at me, where he's hit me, where he's insulted me nine ways till Sunday, it's like my brain just clicked. It was almost like all the memories came rushing back. I remember hanging up my coat and being like why am I even hanging up my coat? I don't want to be in this place. Like I remember I literally started shaking thinking I don't want to be here, oh my god, I don't want to be here! It was like the most unreal experience because every other time it was like, but I really want to be with him, whereas this time I almost felt nauseous about how much I didn't want to be in that place.*

It was at that point that Kelly ended the relationship and left the apartment; she “*felt like [she] was finally alive after being a zombie for like a year and a half.*” Kelly now lives in a different province but admits to feeling anxious whenever she returns to her hometown in British Columbia (where Ben lives with his wife and children).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter explored Sarah, Vanessa, Tammy, Sydney, and Kelly’s experiences of IPV, specifically, how each of their relationships began, how the abuse played out, and how their relationships ended. Although each story is unique, they all (to varying degrees) resonate with what the literature says about psychological, physical, sexual, and financial abuse. In the following chapter, I conduct an analysis and apply the conceptual framework developed in *Conceptual Framework: Intersecting axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege* to the findings described above.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Privilege: A Blessing? A Curse? or Both?**

This chapter analyzes the narratives of five women who experienced IPV while in university. The chapter starts by applying an intersectional lens to examine how being *class privileged women* conditioned the participants' experiences. This type of analysis allows us to look beyond gender and unpack how the participants' class privilege not only aided them in unique ways but informed the ways they navigated their (abusive) relationships. Next, the chapter explores how their privilege also made their experiences more complex. Specifically, how their (self) identity as smart, educated, strong, liberated women positioned them outside of normative tropes that frame IPV victims as uneducated, working-class, weak, stupid women. Also noted was how this disjuncture made it challenging for them to identify as victims and, as a result, inhibited their ability to address the abuse and violence to which they were subjected.

#### **5. 1: Intersectional Analysis: How did gender *and* class inform the participants' experiences?**

As we saw in *Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege* intersectionality has become an important lens to engage when doing feminist work. Intersectionality, a concept coined by Crenshaw (1989) posits that multiple axes of oppression intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination for different types of people; women who are oppressed on the basis of gender, class, race, and/or sexual orientation

experience gender discrimination and gendered violence differently than women who are middle or upper-class, white, and/or heterosexual (Crenshaw, 1991). Although intersectionality is conventionally a study of disadvantage (often and rightfully centering racialized and working-class women) it can also alert us to how interlocking systems of privilege (e.g., white and middle-class) inform experiences. This section first unpacks how all women, including the participants in this study, are vulnerable to IPV on the basis of gender and second, how the participants' class location conditioned their experiences.

### **5.1.1: How did gender inform the women's experiences of IPV?**

As mentioned in this thesis' theory chapter, men have historically enjoyed explicit legal and economic power over the women in their lives; today men maintain this power in more subtle ways (e.g., encouraged and supported in the pursuit of high paying jobs outside the home) (Ademiluka, 2018; Lerner, 1986). This thesis focuses on one intimate yet brutal manifestation of gender inequality – IPV.

#### *Women's Vulnerabilities to IPV*

Within patriarchal societies, not only are men expected to be assertive, strong, and aggressive but they are also granted a sense of ownership over women (especially their intimate partners). According to Towns and Scott (2013) men's sense of ownership which manifests in possessiveness, jealousy, and control, are "discursively constitutive of men's entitlement to authority and associated control over their partners" (p. 539). Normative gender roles along with men's sense of ownership over their intimate partners make women vulnerable to psychological, physical, sexual, and/or financial abuse. This was the reality for the participants; their social position facilitated the conditions for them to be "*really controlled*," (Sydney) "*emotionally manipulated*," (Sarah) "*slapped across the face*," (Vanessa) made to feel "*ashamed of their body*," and "*raped*" (Kelly) by their male partners.

### *The Nature of the Violence*

The nature of the violence can also be understood as a symptom of normative gender roles, gendered expectations, and sexual scripts. First, some of the women were slut-shamed based on their ‘failure’ to behave like ‘good women’ and embrace guidelines for acceptable behaviour. As mentioned, Vanessa and Sarah were profoundly slut-shamed and guilted for having previous boyfriends and sexual partners. Sarah shared that James “*was very insecure that [she] had had other sexual partners and he hadn’t because he had lost his virginity to [Sarah] and he would hold that over [her] head.*” Similarly, Patrick often asked Vanessa if she “*even love[d] him?*” while making her feel guilty for having slept with “*other people that aren’t [him].*” Likewise, Tammy was slut-shamed on the basis of her outfit choices which Adam considered “*raunchy.*” In one extreme case, Adam threw Tammy’s ‘sexy schoolgirl’ Halloween costume over their balcony because he felt it was too revealing for her to wear around other men. The nature of this abuse may be understood as a form of backlash against the participants’ deviation from gender roles, gendered expectations, and sexual scripts that demand women be virtuous and if not pure then at least monogamous and unexperienced. As mentioned, Kelly was body-shamed based on her (assumed) failure to meet gendered expectations of beauty and thinness. Ultimately, it was the women’s inability to conform to traditional gender roles/expectation (thin, innocent, meek, virtuous, pure) and sexual scripts (to be desired but not desiring of sex) that provoked the men and gave them a narrative to critique the participants on and informed some of the abuse they endured.

### *The Women’s Reactions to the Abuse*

The participants’ reactions to the violence can also be understood as conditioned by normative gender roles and gendered expectations. Women are encouraged to be caring,

nurturing, selfless, and always put other's needs before their own. This proved true for the participants who put their feelings aside, displayed "*mama bear strength*," (Vanessa) and remained "*his lifeline*" (Tammy) through it all. Tammy stated, "*I was his caregiver [...] he needed me and that, like, sense of being needed I guess kind of kept me from leaving most of the time despite the fact that he was an absolute lunatic.*" Sarah also felt the need to support James throughout this "*hard time in his life.*" Similarly, Vanessa noted, "*as someone who was his best friend for a while [and] as his girlfriend at the time I felt like a lot of responsibility to help him. I'm going to put my pain and my, like, awareness kind of to the side and try and lift this car off you.*" In this case, it was the participants' adherence to (not deviation from) their role as women (as loving and nurturing) that informed how they responded to the abuse.

### **5.1.2: How was the women's capital mobilized as they navigated their experiences?**

As the literature review highlighted and the participants' experiences demonstrated, all women, because they are women, are vulnerable to gendered violence, including IPV. At the same time, women's experiences are conditioned by more than just gender; there are an unlimited number of axes (e.g., class, race, and sexual orientation) that intersect with gender to inform how IPV plays out for particular women. This thesis adopts an intersectional lens and endeavours to tease out the significance of class location. Bourdieu's (1986) work on social class, specifically his ideas around capital will be used to unpack this. As we saw in *Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Axes of Gender Oppression and Class Privilege*, Bourdieu (1986) argued that social class is complex and goes beyond economic capital (money and assets) to include social (interpersonal connections) and cultural capital (knowledge, dispositions, and skills). This section describes how the women mobilized their economic, social, and cultural capital (privilege) during and after their relationships and what this meant for their experiences.

### *Economic Capital*

Being class-privileged informed many, if not all, aspects of participants' lives, including the way they experienced IPV. Their access to financial resources also conditioned how they navigated their violent relationships. First and foremost, their economic stability may have minimized tensions in the relationship. Vanessa had the financial freedom to give Patrick money (as he spent his own money on illicit substances) instead of arguing with him about his financial irresponsibility. Vanessa stated, "*you kinda just have to flip a bill and, like, hope that he pulls his shit together*" – something many working-class women do not have the luxury of doing. Many of the participants (or their partners) were also able to afford off-campus housing and their own vehicles which meant some of the abuse played out in very private settings. This helped the women keep the abuse hidden (which in turn prevented criminal justice involvement they did not want) and also meant that they could drive home to be with their families and escape their partners. Moreover, all of the participants could drive away to their parents homes without having to rely on shelters or public transportation in pursuit of safety. Finally, as we will see in the coming section, their economic capital also gave them the financial freedom to pay for therapy during and following their traumatizing relationships.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital refers to one's interpersonal connections, social networks, and membership to particular groups (Bourdieu, 1986). The dominant class and petty bourgeoisie are able to use these social connections in order to maintain their social location (McGinnis & Gentry, 2010). Said differently, middle and upper-class people leverage friends and family 'in high places' to help them secure their status (e.g., obtain post-grad employment for themselves

or their children). For the participants, who (unconsciously and consciously) mobilized their social capital in all aspects of their lives, their abusive relationships proved no exception.

The participants' social circles were peopled of other class-privileged women who often helped ease their situations. Primarily, the participants had close connections who were able to give them professional and reliable guidance. For example, when the mother of Tammy's friend (who is a professional counsellor) witnessed the end of a fight between Tammy and Adam, she approached Tammy and told her, "*you know I don't want to tell you what you should be doing with your life, but this is not what you should be doing in your life. This is not okay.*" Similarly, Sydney's ability to access professional criminal justice guidance was facilitated by her friend Jessie who was in a romantic relationship with a police officer at the time; when Sydney's boyfriend threatened to commit suicide and put her name in his suicide note, Jessie "*called her boyfriend and he gave [her] a direct line[...] so [she] called and said listen I got threatened with someone saying they were going to commit suicide.*" Ultimately, the women's social location positioned them to interact with professionals and receive dependable advice with ease.

Social capital conditioned the participants' experiences in another way as well. Typically, victims of IPV are isolated and often estranged from family and friends (Kim, 2019). This isolation often leaves abused women trapped in their relationships with little or no social support (Kim, 2019). This was not the case for the women I interviewed who all "*had a good social life [and were] close with family*" (Sarah). For example, Kelly hosted karaoke nights and volunteered with her friends regularly. The participants' vibrant social lives stand in sharp contrast to the trope (and often reality) of the isolated victim who has no way out. Instead, the participants had many friends with whom they socialized – they were regularly invited to brunches, football games, and parties. The validation that they were 'good people' and worthy of

rewarding social interactions made their experiences of IPV vastly different from the insular and lonely realities that many abused women have expressed enduring.

### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital is another way privilege extends beyond one's financial capabilities, it speaks to the knowledge, disposition, and skills that people have due to their class location (Bourdieu, 1986). It plays out in a variety of ways, one way being cultural competencies, where middle to upper-class men and women (often unconsciously and almost by osmosis) learn and absorb ways of being, social competencies, and 'everyday' knowledge. For example, participants were able to confidently navigate the criminal justice system, therapy, and hospitals when they were obliged to do so. Moreover, as we saw above, Sydney did not hesitate to call the police when her partner threatened to kill himself and (perhaps unsurprisingly given both her and his class and white privilege) they were helpful and responded appropriately through his mental health crisis. Similarly, after her breakup with Patrick, Vanessa explored the possibility of filing a restraining order, "*I am seeking out, like, getting restraining orders and whatnot [...] when I move back into the province and have to be living close to him.*" It was the participants' cultural capital – not only their intrinsic knowledge of *how* to access help but their confidence (not fear) *while* doing it – like many class privileged people, the participants never questioned if the police would be helpful, they *knew* they would. As we saw in *Chapter One: Literature Review: IPV, Class, and University Students* this is not the case for many marginalized women who instead (and accurately) view criminal justice involvement as potentially counterproductive and harmful.

As mentioned, some of the participants also felt confident and comfortable pursuing therapy during their relationships. According to Weitzman (2000) it is common for class

privileged women who are “enduring emotional and physical abuse at the hands and whims of their powerful and well-educated” partners to seek professional help for anxiety, depression, and stress yet “keep silent about [the root of their] suffering” (p. 6). This was the case for Tammy who was in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) during her relationship to address some of the anxiety she was experiencing. Kelly is the only participant who sought out therapy to address specific traumas from her relationship – as was previously noted following her breakup with Ben she began to display signs of PTSD and secured professional counselling.

## **5.2: How did class complexify the participants’ experiences?**

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the participants’ experiences of IPV were conditioned not only by their gender but also by their class. Evidently, their class privilege specifically their economic, social, and cultural capital helped them navigate the abuse and brought some relief to their situations. This section unpacks how the participants’ privileged identities (as educated and class privileged) complexified their experiences. As mentioned, Goffman (1974) defines frames as the ways that people interpret, define, and construct experiences or things in their lives. This section relies on Goffman’s (1974) definition to examine how the participants’ framed IPV, how they framed themselves, and how the disjuncture between the two limited their ability to recognize the abuse and/or identify as victims.

### **5.2.1: How did the women frame IPV?**

Many scholars (e.g., Ammar et al., 2014 and Weitzman, 2000) have highlighted the harsh stereotypes attached to IPV – typically understood as a phenomenon belonging to those with “little education and few resources” (Weitzman, 2000, p. 4). Their own experiences notwithstanding, many participants reproduced these classed stereotypes about the type of woman who endures and the type of man who perpetuates abuse and violence in the context of

intimate relationships. The participants framed IPV as “*Eight Mile type shit*”<sup>8</sup> (Vanessa) that happened among those who were “*lower-class*” (Sydney). They understood abusive men to be the sort of man who is “*constantly angry and abusive [who] everyone [knows is] a violent person. No surprise he takes his anger out on you, because he takes his anger out on other things*” (Vanessa). In contrast, participants framed IPV victims as women who “*didn’t have self-worth*” (Sarah), were too “*passive*”, too “*quiet*”, and/or too “*dependant*” (Vanessa); women who may or may not have invited the abuse but certainly allowed it to continue. They also framed victims as women who lacked education or altogether had low intelligence; they were “*uneducated*” (Sarah) or “*too stupid*” (Tammy). Additionally, mindful of structural or cultural factors that restrict the ability of some abused women to leave the relationship, the participants believed that abused women typically had external factors forcing them to stay – they might be “*dependant on like, maybe like religion for example, you have to stay with your partner or have children and are linked to something that holds [them] there more*” (Vanessa).

### **5.2.2: How did the women frame themselves?**

In their studies, both Ammar et al., (2014) and Weitzman (2000) found that middle and upper-class women who were educated and/or worked high-status jobs (and typically dated or married men of similar status) perceived themselves (and their partners) as smart, modern, and progressive. This was true for the women I interviewed who described themselves as being educated and all around, smart women – they had all gone to university and asserted that at the time of the abuse they were “*doing well in school, working hard, [and had their] shit together*”

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<sup>8</sup> Eight Mile (2002) is a film depicting rapper Eminem’s life before fame. The film details Eminem’s rough upbringing in Detroit Michigan (near the street Eight Mile – a street famously known for separating the rich from the poor). This reference implies that the participant viewed IPV as something happening among ‘poor’ couples.

(Vanessa). This was also the case for their partners who were “*smart*” (Kelly) and “*in university*” (Sarah) – in Ben’s case, studying to become a lawyer.

The participants also embraced their economic privilege and for some, it was a significant factor in how they constructed their identities. For example, Sarah mentioned “*I grew up in a home that was safe, and I had what I needed.*” Likewise, Tammy stated, “*I was not spoiled, but I never really had to work for anything*” – she saw her experience (not having to work for anything) as normal (not spoiled) and in the process, revealed the significant class privilege she enjoyed. This was also the case for most of their partners, for example, Vanessa drew attention to the fact that Patrick was “*the rich kid who was the first one in our high school to get their own car.*” Evidently, the women not only framed themselves as educated women who were too smart to fall victim to IPV, but they also embraced their class privilege which further removed them from the stereotype of a victim who, as we learned, is typically viewed as working-class.

### **5.2.3: Identifying as a Victim**

Participants’ attachment to conventional tropes about typical victims and their concurrent belief that IPV did not happen amongst class privileged and/or educated couples (like them) was striking. Sarah explicitly stated, “*I had friends in similar socioeconomic classes and so I didn’t see, or I didn’t visibly see a lot of IPV and these troublesome relationships.*” Similarly, Tammy shared, “*I didn’t think that what I was feeling was valid. I didn’t think that what I was feeling was worth pursuing. When I pictured an abusive relationship, I instantly equated it with something or someone of a lower caliber. I wouldn’t think that I would, I personally, you know.*” This quote in particular speaks to Bourdieu’s (1984) work on distinctions – Tammy designated IPV as a working-class phenomenon, in her opinion, petty bourgeoisie women like her, who were class-privileged do not experience this indelicate, vulgar, and as a result, under-class behaviour. Quite simply, for many of the participants, victims are helpless and stupid while they themselves are

smart and educated; victims are poor, they are financially stable and well-connected; victims are stuck in bad situations with no way out, they were independent and liberated. It was these binary subject locations between who a victim is and who they were that acted as a significant barrier to realizing the abuse in their relationships and/or identifying their victimhood.

It would appear that the same class location that eased some of the tensions in their relationships (as we saw earlier in this chapter) also complicated their experiences. Their (self)identities as smart, educated, class privileged women so far removed them from the normative tropes around victims – which pivoted on stigmatic assumptions about the working and under-class – that were entrenched in their minds. This clash caused confusion and denial among the participants who ultimately “*never thought of [themselves] as, like, his victim*” (Tammy). Kelly’s perspective was unique, she stated, “*I don’t like identifying as a victim, it’s like ‘woe is me’.*” Although Kelly is now aware of her victimization, she was unable to diagnose it at the time, she remembers believing “*this can’t be abusive, you know he’d buy me like, necklaces*” and do “*these grand gestures of romance*” that “*are typically associated with healthy relationships.*”

The idea that IPV simply does not happen to women like them (educated and class privileged) may have been (unintentionally) reinforced by the failure of universities to bring awareness and address IPV on campus. Many of the women noted that they were not aware of any IPV resources available to them at their university. Vanessa stated, “*the school that I went to was beside a forest and there was a lot of sexual assault that happened, which is unfortunate, but it happened and so there were resources for that, and the emphasis was, hey, girls and boys of this school be careful when you’re walking on campus.*” Placing the attention on sexual assault

and ignoring IPV implicitly validated the participants' belief that IPV does not happen on university campuses; it did not happen to educated and class privileged women like them.

#### **5.2.4: Sympathy for their Partners**

Although the participants did not identify as victims, in some cases, the abuse was irrefutable; *“when someone hits you in the face, you're like, oh, shit I just got hit in the face. I knew I was in an abusive relationship and I remember I didn't believe it for a little while, I was like, what is this?”* (Vanessa). Instead of understanding the abuse as a symptom of IPV, many of the participants dismissed it as one manifestation of their partner's mental health struggles. All five of the men, to varying degrees, expressed suicidal ideations. As mentioned in *Chapter Four: The Beginning, Middle, and End* some of the men voiced having suicidal ideations. This led the participants to diagnose their partners as *“depressed,”* (Sarah) *“sick,”* (Vanessa) *“emotional,”* *“detached from reality,”* (Tammy) *“messed up,”* (Sydney) and *“in need of help”* (Kelly). In some cases, even referring to their partner as a *“victim of many things”* – *“a system that failed or a family that failed”* (Vanessa) which led to feelings of guilt – *“I felt like I needed to be there for him”* (Kelly).

#### **5.2.5: Resources**

Unsurprisingly, the participants, who did not see themselves as victims, were unlikely to utilize both formal and informal resources. In only one case was an official IPV resource accessed during the relationship; Vanessa called a domestic abuse hot-line, explained her situation and asked, *“is this an abusive relationship?”* yet reported feeling guilty for taking time away from councillors who could be helping *“real victims.”* Vanessa explained, *“I thought I was in a unique situation [and that I could] take care of myself.”* Weitzman (2000) argued that educated women often experience these emotions because they feel as smart and well-resourced individuals they should *“be able to fix it [themselves] and [were] sure it wasn't happening to*

anyone else [they] knew” (p. 7). Notably, as previously mentioned, Tammy and Sydney both went to therapy to address their mental health struggles, yet both neglected to talk about their relationship troubles. For Kelly, she currently attends therapy to address the PTSD she developed as a result of being “raped” by her former partner, Ben. Informal resources were also used sparingly by the participants. For some, disclosing to friends only happened when they had no other options, for example, when Vanessa was stranded after her partner took her car and abandoned her at her off-campus residence. For others, disclosing the abuse to friends came shortly before or following the end of the relationship. For example, Kelly’s friends and family remain unaware of “*what really went down*” with the exception of her best friend Brooklyn who ended up “*hearing quite a bit of it*” once the relationship ended.

Evidently participants were hesitant to access either formal or inform resources. Weitzman (2000) argued that middle and upper-class women feel unmotivated to seek formal or informal assistance because they “buy into the myth that domestic violence afflicts only the underprivileged. The myth becomes a type of institutionalized oppression for the upscale. If a culture’s tribunal rules deny a phenomenon, then it is truly bound to silence” (p. 8). Additionally, many professionals “who are unaware of domestic abuse among the upscale” (Weitzman, 2000, p. 10) overlook significant warning signs which further silences this population. This creates a vicious cycle where a lack of representation prevents help-seeking behaviours which further silences and hides the population.

### **Concluding Reflections**

In this chapter we deployed an intersectional lens to shed light on the ways that gender intersects with class location to condition participants’ experiences of IPV. First, I used an intersectional lens to unpack how gender acted as an axis of oppression that conditioned the

participants' vulnerability to the abuse, the nature of the abuse they endured, and their reactions to it. Next, I highlighted how their privileged class location both benefited and complicated their experiences of IPV. Specifically, the participants' were able to mobilize their privilege while enduring the abuse but at the same time, believed that IPV happened among women who were unlike them (e.g., working-class, uneducated, stupid, weak). Consequently, it hindered their ability to fully realize the abuse and/or identify as victims which complicated their experiences addressing the violence.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **What's Next?**

It became evident through the literature review that IPV research mainly focuses on the experiences of marginalized women – women who are racialized, working-class, and/or immigrants. Evidently research that unpacks the experiences of marginalized women is vital, however, when it occupies a majority of the scholarship, it upholds the narrative that marginalized women are the ‘typical victim’. At the same time, it neglects and therefore makes invisible the stories and needs of many privileged women who also experience IPV. The aim of this thesis was not to shift the conversation to centre privileged women but instead to broaden the conversation to include privileged women’s experiences. To that end I interviewed five women who experienced IPV while in university. I asked the participants to share their stories of abuse, describe their help-seeking behaviours, and reflect on themselves and their partners. This gave me insight to how privileged women address and navigate IPV.

#### **6.1: Key Findings**

All women, because they are women, are susceptible to IPV, however it is their unique (and secondary) identities that inform their individual experiences. In this research we saw that participants’ experiences of IPV were conditioned by their class privilege. I found that their class location allowed them to mobilize their economic, social, and cultural capital in ways that made

their experiences different from those of many working and under-class women. For example, participants had large family homes to escape to, direct access to counsellors and police officers, and felt confident navigating resources including therapy. It was undeniable that their class location brought some ease to their situations and provided them with unique advantages while enduring the abuse.

At the same time their class location made their experiences more complex. I found that the participants framed IPV as a phenomenon that belonged to women who were: working-class, too dumb, too weak, too unstable, and/or too isolated to leave. Said differently, they framed IPV as a form of gendered violence that happened to women who were *unlike* them. Their identities as educated and class privileged women so far removed them from the ‘typical victim’ that when they experienced IPV they were left confused and in denial about their circumstances. Therefore, the same privilege that benefited the participants in many ways hindered their ability to name their experiences. The inability to recognize their sufferings had collateral affects; they felt unworthy of utilizing some resources (e.g., hotlines), blamed themselves for the abuse, and identified their experiences as rare and uncommon.

## **6.2: Future Research**

Literature that highlights the unique stories of class privileged women who experience IPV is far and few between. When it comes to university students, the literature is not only sparse but, the little that exists is outdated. Through consideration of my findings, I believe future research would be useful in a few areas. First, I think it would be advantageous to examine the different ways that IPV is represented throughout media sources. For example, exploring the ways abused women in films and television series are presented or the different ways that IPV is discussed (or failed to be discussed) on the news. This type of analysis could help us understand why some women come to frame IPV in particular ways. Second, further analysis is needed to

determine the different ways that class privilege plays out when women experience IPV. Additional and more in-depth studies could help conclude that class privilege does indeed subsidize some forms of abuse and/or create opportunity to access beneficial resources. Third, it would be useful to adopt my findings around ‘typical victim’ narratives and apply them to different types of crimes. Specifically, looking at what other ‘typical victim’ narratives exist and what they mean for help-seeking and reporting behaviours for those who become victims of that crime.

### **6.3: Implications for Universities**

My conclusions alert us to the possibility that the lack of representation and understanding of IPV among class privileged women not only casts marginalized women as the typical victim but also signals to university students that they are, if not immune, at least unlikely to become victimized by IPV. Accordingly, in addition to broadening the focus of research, there must also be a more practical shift at the university level. First, the university community needs to be more cognisant about the reality of IPV on campus. First, faculty and staff (including counsellors) should be educated on the different ways IPV plays out on campus, be aware of signs to look for, and have a clear idea of what to do if they suspect a student is being victimized. Students should also be educated on what IPV looks like and how it plays out and actions to take if they or a friend is being victimized. Creating awareness on campus can begin through events such as social media campaigns and fundraisers but in my opinion must go beyond this. I believe that universities should be mandated to require their students to take an online or in-person course about IPV and its presence on campuses. This ensures that IPV education and awareness are not only taken seriously but are uniform across the province.

Next, there needs to be IPV specific policies and resources to ensure that victims have reliable and safe ways to address it. Currently, University of Ottawa students are encouraged to

report any violence to campus security (typically men who lack sensitivity training or education on IPV). This irresponsible approach to reporting is not true for other forms of gendered violence such as sexual assault. In 2019, the Senate and the Board of Governors approved University of Ottawa's Policy 67b – *Prevention of Sexual Violence* which affirmed the university's commitment to provide support to members of the uOttawa community who have experienced sexual assault (University of Ottawa, 2019). Although such policies are vital, they are not all encompassing. Women on university campuses many encounter many types of gendered violence, the focus on sexual violence further silences victims of IPV who (1) are indirectly fed the idea that sexual assault is the biggest threat whilst (2) leaving them with no accessible or specific supports to utilize.

#### **6.4: Final Words**

Contrary to the tropes that frame IPV as a working-class phenomenon impacting racialized communities, the reality is, no *type* of woman is immune. That said, and women's universal vulnerability to IPV notwithstanding, no two stories are the same, instead, women's unique identities (e.g., class-location, racial identity, education level, immigration status) inform their particular experiences of this (disturbingly) common form of gendered violence. It would appear that despite the (successful?) efforts of second wave feminists to transform the victim into a white middle-class woman in order to gain the attention of policy makers, IPV (stereotypically) continues to be a social ill belonging to marginalized communities. The consequences are felt by both marginalized and privileged women whereby marginalized women are profusely stereotyped and privileged women remain confused and in denial when this 'foreign' phenomenon infiltrates their white class privileged lives.

I believe that if both academia and the university work to approach IPV in ways that include a variety of women's unique experiences, marginalized women will no longer fall victim

to harmful stereotypes and privileged women will begin to recognize and have more adequate tools to address the abuse in their lives. Overall, this thesis is one step in that direction.

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## Appendix A: Research Ethics Board (REB) Certification

**Université d'Ottawa**

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

### **S-04-19-3364 - REG-3364 - Certificat d'approbation éthique / Certificate of Ethics Approval**

*(English message follows)*

Cher/Chère Danielle Guarino,

Veillez trouver ci-joint le certificat d'approbation éthique pour le projet intitulé «Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on University Campuses in Canada ».

Le certificat est valide jusqu'au : 09-06-2020

I wish you pleasant and fruitful research activities.

Recherche financée : veuillez faire suivre une copie du certificat au [Service de gestion de la recherche](#).

Si vous avez des questions, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec le Bureau d'éthique à [ethique@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethique@uottawa.ca) ou en composant le 613-562-5387.

Vous pouvez voir votre demande en vous connectant à votre compte [eReviews](#).

Cordialement,

Germain Zongo  
Responsable d'éthique en recherche

*Ceci est une réponse automatisée, merci de ne pas répondre à ce courriel.*

---

Dear Danielle Guarino,

Please find attached the certificate of ethics approval for your research project titled "Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on University Campuses in Canada ".

This certificate is valid until: 09-06-2020

I wish you pleasant and fruitful research activities.

Funded research: A reminder that you must provide a copy of this certificate to [Research Management Services](#).

If you have any questions, please contact the Ethics Office at [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca) or by telephone at 613-562-5387.

You can view your project at any time by logging into [eReviews](#).

Best regards,

Germain Zongo  
Protocol Officer

*This is an automated message. Please do not reply directly to this email.*

### **Attachement(s) / Attachment(s)**

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154    550 Cumberland Street, Room 154  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada    Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • [ethique@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethique@uOttawa.ca) / [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca)  
[www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie](http://www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie) | [www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics](http://www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics)

## **Appendix B: List of Resources**

Find below a list of resources related to intimate partner violence and mental health. If you are in

immediate danger at any time please call 911.

### **National Resources:**

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention  
(204) 784-4073

### **Ontario:**

Assaulted Women's Helpline  
1-866-0511 (Toll-Free)

Ontario Mental Health Helpline  
1-866-531-2600

### Ottawa

Sexual Assault Support Centre  
Crisis phone number: (613) 725-2160

Ottawa Coalition To End Violence Against Women  
Business phone number: (613) 237-1000

Family Services a La Famille Ottawa  
Business phone number: (613) 725-3601

The Walk-in Counselling Clinic  
2255 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON, K2B 7Z5  
Business phone number: (613) 722-2225

### Toronto

Family Service Toronto Violence Against Women Program  
Business phone number: (416) 595-9618

Victims Services Toronto  
Business phone number: (416) 808-7066

### **Québec:**

#### Montréal

Assistance aux Femmes de Montréal  
Business phone number: (514) 270-8291

Auberge Shalom Pur Femmes  
Crisis phone number/ business phone number: (514) 731-0833

Quebec City

Maison Helene Lacroix

Crisis phone number/ business phone number: (418) 527-4682

## **Appendix C: Recruitment Poster**

### **Participants Needed for Research on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on University Campuses in Canada**

Are you a current or former university student (graduated within the last 3 years) who has experienced physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, and/or financial abuse in a relationship (former boyfriend, husband, live-in partner etc.)?

If so, you are invited to take part in a study focused on exploring how intimate partner violence plays out on university campuses within Canada.

You are eligible for this study if:

- You attend or have attended a Canadian university within the last 3 years.
- You have endured physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, and/or financial abuse in an intimate relationship.
  - Are 18-years-old or older.

As a participant in this study, you will be a part of one individual and in-person interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Any data collected up to the time of the withdrawal will be promptly and securely destroyed. The interview will be audio-recorded.

Limited space available: 10 participants needed – first-come, first-serve.

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact:

Principal investigator:  
Danielle Guarino

Thank you!

## Appendix D: Consent Form

**Title of the study:** Intimate Partner Violence on University Campuses in Canada

**Researcher:** Danielle Guarino

**Supervisor:** Chris Bruckert

**Department:** Criminology

**Institute:** University of Ottawa

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the above mentioned study conducted by Danielle Guarino.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to explore how IPV plays out in privileged settings, specifically the Canadian university.

**Participation:** My participation will consist of one interview lasting approximately 45 minutes during which I will answer questions pertaining to my experience of IPV with my university partner.

**Risks:** My participation in the study will entail that I volunteer very personal information that may lead to feelings of discomfort and vulnerability. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. For example, I will not be asked to explicitly describe any episodes of violence. Instead, questions will centre around how I addressed the violence, decisions to seek help, etc.

**Benefits:** My participation in this study will advance literature on IPV among privileged communities, as this appears to be a grossly understudied topic.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for analysis and discussion in Danielle Guarino's MA thesis entitled, *Intimate Partner Violence on University Campuses in Canada*.

**Conservation of Data:** The data collected, both hard copy (written and typed notes) along with electronic data (tape recordings) will be kept in a secure manner. The data will be stored by the principal investigator (Danielle Guarino) on a password protected computer and USB in a locked cabinet and conserved for the duration of the project (until August 2020). All hard copies will be securely deleted upon transcription and verification. Copies of anonymized transcripts and consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet in the supervisor's (Chris Bruckert) office throughout the project and for a retention period of five years after the completion of the project (September 2020 – September 2025).

**Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. In the case I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be discarded (shredded) and will not be used for analysis in this study.

**Acceptance:** I agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Danielle Guarino of the Criminology Department in the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Chris Bruckert.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5  
Telephone: (613) 562-5387  
E-mail: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of this consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Interview Guide

**Project title:** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) on University Campus in Canada

**Principal Investigator:** Danielle Guarino

**Supervisor:** Chris Bruckert

**Department:** Criminology

**Institute:** University of Ottawa

**Interview date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview time:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Demographic Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. What do you identify with in terms of ethnicity?
3. Which gender do you identify with?
4. What level of education do you possess?
5. Did you apply and/or qualify for OSAP throughout your education?
6. Do your parents own their home?
7. How do you identify in terms of sexuality?

### Opening Question:

8. Please tell me your story.

Probes:

- What types of abuse did you endure? (e.g., physical? financial? sexual? psychological?)
  - What type of relationship was the abuse endured during? (e.g., boyfriend? casually dating? married?)
  - How long did the relationship last?
  - When did the relationship end?
9. Have you ever had informal or formal education on IPV?
    - Where did it occur?
    - What did it entail?
    - Did you find it useful? Why or why not?

### Your Decisions:

10. Did you confide in any family members regarding the abuse?

If yes:

- Who did you confide in?
- Why did you choose this person or persons?
- In what ways did they help/not help?

- How did the respond/react?
- Were you glad you confided in this person(s) or do you regret it?

If no:

- Why not?
- Were you scared that there would be negative repercussions? If so, explain.
- Is there anything that would have made you decide to confide in a family member?

11. Did you confide in any friends regarding the abuse?

If yes:

- Who did you confide in?
- Why did you choose this person or persons?
- In what ways did they help/not help?
- How did the respond/react?
- Were you glad you confided in this person(s) or do you regret it?

If no:

- Why not?
- Were you scared that there would be negative repercussions? If so, explain.
- Is there anything that would have made you decide to confide in a friend?

12. Did you utilize resources at your university?

If yes:

- What resource or resources did you utilize?
- How did you discover this/these resources?
- Did you find it/them helpful? Why or why not?
- Was the process of finding and contacting said resource(s) challenging or simple? Explain.

If no:

- Why not?
- Did you ever consider utilizing resources at the university?

Additional questions:

- In your opinion, what resources could the university have offered that would have been ideal and helpful? Why?

13. Did you address the violence with your partner?

If yes:

- In what ways did you address it?
- How did your partner react?
- Did the situation improve or worsen after you addressed it?
- Are you happy with your decision to address the violence with your partner?

If no:

- For what reasons did you choose not to address the violence with your partner?

- Are you happy with your decision to not to address the violence with your partner?

14. Did you utilize any resources (community groups, police etc.) not listed above?

If yes:

- What resource or resources did you utilize?
- Did you find them helpful? Why or why not?
- Was the process of finding and contacting said resource(s) challenging or simple? Explain.

If no:

- Why not?
- Did you attempt to reach out to any resources? If so, which ones?

Feelings around abuse and victimhood:

15. What *opinions* did you hold regarding victims of IPV prior to experiencing IPV in your relationship?
16. Did these opinions change after your experience? If so, in what ways?
17. Which *attributes* did you associate with victims of IPV prior to experiencing IPV in your relationship?
18. Did these opinions change after your experience? If so, in what ways?

## Appendix F: Themes

### Types of Abuse

#### Psychological

#### Monitoring

#### Tammy

- “He would walk me home, stand there, make sure I was going home and for, like, fifteen minutes to make sure I was not leaving.”
- “He would go through everyone who liked my photos, everyone who commented, every photo that I liked, everyone who followed me, every interaction I had with anybody else, whether it was a girl or a guy.”
- Tammy was not allowed to take her phone outside of the house when she was staying with Adam.
- Adam would go to work with Tammy and watch all her interactions with patrons, fight with men who she interacted with, and eventually got banned from the establishment.

#### Manipulation

#### Vanessa

- Patrick tried to “jump out of the window of a thirteen story building” or kill himself in alternative ways when Vanessa threatened to leave the relationship.

#### Sydney

- Joseph often threatened to commit suicide (e.g., poison himself, lie on a bed full of razors, drink cyanide).

- Joseph would say “all these weird things to me and like he was telling me he was not going to talk to me again and he was going to kill himself, write a suicide note, and put my name in it so everyone knows who’s fault it was that he died.”
- One time Sydney was doing homework and forgot to check her phone and when she finally got around to checking it Joseph had gotten so angry that he was “saying all these weird things to me and like he was telling me he was not going to talk to me again and he was going to kill himself, write a suicide note, and put my name in it so everyone knows who’s fault it was that he died.”

### Kelly

- Ben often told Kelly “if I didn’t have you I’d kill myself” – this made her feel obligated to stay in the relationship despite her sufferings.

### Gaslighting

### Tammy

- Adam constantly told Tammy she was “out of control” or “crazy.”
- Tammy suffered from anxiety and in one case checked herself into a mental health program and Adam used this as proof that she was “insane” and “psycho.”
- Adam even convinced Tammy’s parents that she was still that “crazy teen” they once knew and that she’s was in fact the one “driving [him] crazy” even suggesting that they should be lucky that he’s dealing with her.

### Slut Shaming

### Vanessa

- Patrick was enraged that Vanessa had past sexual partners – he said, “since you have five exes why can’t I have sex with five other girls while we’re in a relationship.”

- Patrick said that if Vanessa did not agree to the arrangement he would kill himself.

### Sarah

- James constantly brought up that Sarah was not a virgin – he held it over her head and made her feel guilty about it.

### Body Shaming

### Kelly

- Ben made constant comments about Kelly's weight gain and made it clear that he wanted her to diet (e.g., "I do yoga every day – you should come with me").
- Kelly began to feel ashamed of her body and insecure during sex.

### Physical Abuse

### Vanessa

- Physical abuse was correlated with Patrick's drug and alcohol use.
- Vanessa was slapped across the face on many occasions.
- Patrick once threw furniture around in front of his little cousin.

### Tammy

- For Tammy, the physical abuse came in waves.
- It often manifested in pushing and shoving (pushed her out of his way and down stairwells).
- "He pushed me down the whole flight of stairs and it was a steep flight of stairs; I don't know how I didn't break anything. I don't know how I landed down that flight of stairs."
- One time he back handed her so hard she could not see – it was only after sitting down for thirty minutes that she started to regain her vision; she was left with a debilitating three-day long migraine.

## Kelly

- Physical abuse for Kelly was correlated with Ben's alcohol use – Ben would often deny that he remembered the abusive outbursts – “sometimes when he would drink, he would hit me, or there was one time that he got drunk and threw a plate at me and then smashed it against the wall.”

## Physical Threats

### Sarah

- “If I ever did something like that [breakup with him] he would drive his car into my house.”

### Tammy

- Adam threatened that if Tammy ever broke up with him he would “fucking kill [her].”

### Vanessa

- Patrick regularly threatened to kill them both if Vanessa tried to leave – “I just thought that he was going to drive us into oncoming traffic or drive off the road or something and that's not something that happened once [or] more than once – that was very very common for him to do.”

## Sexual Abuse

### Vanessa

- Sexual abuse was an ongoing and consistent form of abuse in Vanessa and Patrick's relationship – both subtle (coercion) and overt (explicit force) – “I [didn't] want to do things and I [had] to do things, and [I told] him that I didn't want to, and it didn't matter.”

## Kelly

- Kelly also experienced coercive and explicit sexual abuse – Kelly often felt bad not having sex with Ben as he made her feel like he was entitled to it.
- In one severe occasion, Ben “grabbed [her] hands, put them over [her] head and rap[ed] [her]”.
- Ben justified the assault by using her “kink against [her]” and argued that “you like it rough anyways.”
- Kelly has since been diagnosed with PTSD from this episode.

## Financial Abuse

### Sarah

- Financial abuse was a significant and primary form of abuse for Sarah.
- Sarah was forced to pay for James’ rent, groceries, cannabis, and gym membership because he refused to work enough hours to support himself.
- Sarah stated, “I felt like I was working thirty hours a week and doing full time school while he was working two shifts a week, not going to class, and smoking weed, and I just thought that that wasn’t fair to me. I wanted to at least see an effort for him to pay me back or at least stay afloat.”

### Vanessa

- Vanessa shared, “I didn’t give him money specifically for drugs or alcohol, or anything like that, it was like he would just blow his money on that type of stuff and then not have the means to live.”
- Therefore, she had to pay for his food, gas, and some big ticket items (laptop, gaming console) – “eight to ten grand which is a lot of fucking money.”

## Mobilization of Capital

### Economic Capital

#### Everyone

- None of the women relied on OSAP throughout their undergrad (Kelly only qualified during grad school).
- All of their parents owned their home (Tammy's parents owned more than one and used it as a second stream of income).
- All the women except for Sarah has access to their own vehicle.

#### Sarah

- Sarah was able to give James money to survive when he blew all his money on other things.

#### Vanessa

- Vanessa was able to "flip a bill" when Patrick needed new big ticket items.

#### Tammy

- Tammy was able to afford therapy during and post-breakup.

#### Kelly

- Kelly was able to afford therapy post-breakup.

### Social Capital

#### Sarah

- "Had a good social life [and] was close with family."

### Tammy

- “You know I don't want to tell you what you should be doing with your life, but this is not what you should be doing in your life. This is not okay” – Tammy’s friend’s mom who was a councillor.

### Sydney

- Sydney’s friend “called her boyfriend and he gave [her] a direct line[...] so [she] called [the police] and said listen I got threatened with someone saying they were going to commit suicide.”

### Kelly

- Had tons of friends – hosted karaoke, volunteered with her friends, and had a great group of friends at school.

### Cultural Capital

### Vanessa

- “I am seeking out, like, getting restraining orders and whatnot [...] when I move back into the province and have to be living close to him.”

### Tammy

- Accessed therapy (CBT) following her relationship to address the anxiety she developed from her relationship.

### Sydney

- Contacted police when Joseph threatened to write her name in his suicide note/ threatened to kill himself.

## Kelly

- Accessed therapy following her relationship to address the PTSD she developed as a result of being raped by Ben.

## Concern's About their Partner's Mental Health

### Sarah

- James was depressed and had emotional issues.
- If Sarah ever broke up with him he planned to drive his car into her house and claimed he would not be able to live/survive.
- Following the breakup James became “detached from reality.”

### Vanessa

- Patrick suffered severely with drug and alcohol abuse.
- Patrick also suffered from suicidal thoughts and depression – Vanessa knew killing them both was in the “realm of his thought process.”
- Patrick tried to jump out of a window of a 13 floor building.
- Vanessa believed Patrick was the victim of a system that failed or a family that failed and he was taking it out on her because she was there for him
- Vanessa had “mama bear strength, I cared about him for so long, I’ll put my pain to the side and help him.”
- “When someone hits you in the face, you're like, oh, shit I just got hit in the face. I knew I was in an abusive relationship and I remember I didn't believe it for a little while, I was like, what is this?”

## Tammy

- Adam's "mom died and so it left him messed up and he used this as an excuse for everything (I don't mean to do these things, but where would I be without you, I don't have a mother to go home to)".

## Sydney

- "[Joseph] had anxiety and depression"
- Joseph had severe suicidal ideations – said he wanted to lay on a bed full of razor blades or drink cyanide.
- Joseph threatened to put Sydney's name in a suicide note so "everyone would know whose fault it was."
- Joseph told her he was getting his noose ready (to kill himself) which forced her to call the police – he then called her a stupid bitch for doing that and said there's nothing wrong with him.

## Kelly

- Kelly believed Ben was "in need of help" – he also hinted at wanting to kill himself.
- Ben told Kelly he had "no reason to live."
- Kelly felt she needed to "be there" for Ben despite the suffering he put her through.

## Framing of a Typical Experience vs. their Own Experience

### Framing the 'typical' victim, abuser, and situation

## Sarah

Victims:

- Sarah believed victims were not smart or strong enough, didn't have self-worth, or were uneducated and that's why they stayed.

Situation:

- “I had friends in similar socioeconomic classes and so I didn’t see, or I didn’t visibly see a lot of IPV and these troublesome relationships” – insinuating that IPV happens among those in the working-class.

Vanessa

Victims:

- Vanessa believed victims were quiet, passive, dependent, and typically older.
- Vanessa also believed victims had to stay for religious reasons or felt guilty leaving because they had children – “dependant on like, maybe like religion for example, you have to stay with your partner or have children and are linked to something that holds [them] there more.”

Abusers:

- Vanessa saw abusers as constantly angry, of low intelligence, and a “smashing bottles type guy.”
- “It’s very obvious, like everyone knows that he’s a violent person.”
- “No surprise he takes his anger out on you, because he takes his anger out on other things; is rude to customers, to people who serve him.”

Situation:

- “I saw rape as something happening outside of clubs and dumpsters or a guy with a gun or a horrible uncle” – not your childhood best friend.
- “There’s broken windows and constantly smashed windows and you can hear the screaming from next door.”
- Vanessa believed if IPV was happening on campus there would be tons of resources.

- “The school was beside a forest and there was a lot of sexual assault and the emphasis at school was be careful while you’re walking on campus.”

### Tammy

#### Victim:

- “When I pictured an abusive relationship, I instantly equated it with something or someone of a lower caliber.”
- Tammy also viewed victims as too stupid to leave – women who were uneducated and lacked intelligence.

### Sydney

#### Victim:

- Sydney saw victims as “coloured,” “lower class,” and “stupid.”

#### Situation:

- Sydney believed IPV required physical violence.

### Kelly

#### Victim:

- Kelly was aware that people stereotyped victims as weak.

#### Situation:

- “I was a soc student so we learned about it, and I guess even like obviously high school sex ed is like, “this is unhealthy, this is unhealthy, no means no” and you know you have those ideas and then from media [...] you know battered women’s syndrome, all these things” but when it came to her own relationship Kelly says, “you know, this can’t be abusive, you know he’d buy me like necklaces.”

## Framing their own victimization, abuser, and situation

### Sarah

Me:

- “I grew up in a home that was safe, and I had what I needed.”
- “I had friends in similar socioeconomic classes and so I didn’t see, or I didn’t visibly see a lot of IPV and these troublesome relationships.”

Situation:

- Sarah and James were friends from high school who decided to embark on a new journey together at university.
- “While this was all happening, I had a good social life, was close with my family, so I felt like nothing was slipping, I never felt like oh I’m a victim and this is stopping me from living my life, it was more so just repressed feelings, there’s a finish line I just need to see him through.”

### Vanessa

Me:

- “I was doing well in school, working hard, had my shit together – bad shit was happening to me, but it didn’t stop me from chasing my goals.”

Him:

- Patrick was quiet, awkward, had a lot of friends, graduated high school, hot, well off, from a picture perfect family, and a private high school graduate.
- Patrick was also “the rich kid who was the first one in our high school to get their own car.”

Situation:

- Patrick was her childhood love who grew up across the street.
- Vanessa's parents loved Patrick.

Tammy

Me:

- "I'm too smart for this, I have too much going on for this."
- "I was not spoiled, but I never really had to work for anything."
- Tammy had "the luxury of being a rebellious teen".

Him:

- Tammy believed Adam was stunning, gorgeous, and had the most perfect face.
- Adam also did magical things and always knew the most perfect thing to say.
- Adam was the "golden boy in [her] parents eyes."

Sydney

Him:

- Joseph was her neighbour's best friend who she had known for a long time.
- Sydney saw Joseph as attractive and charming.

Kelly

Him:

- Ben was "smart," in university," and studying to become a lawyer.
- Ben was a nice boy from a small town outside Vancouver, BC.
- Ben also showered her with gifts: e.g., flowers and lingerie.

#### Situation:

- Ben was Kelly's "first love" and when their relationship began Kelly perceived it as "perfect."
- Kelly trusted Ben a lot – they had their first sexual encounters with each other and discussed marriage early on.
- "You know, this can't be abusive, you know he'd buy me like necklaces."
- Ben often did "grand gestures of romance."
- Kelly's friends and family saw them as a "picture perfect couple."

#### Identifying with Victimhood

##### Sarah

- Sarah "felt he was going through so much emotional distress and I was the one holding it together, how could I be the victim?"
- After the breakup is when the emotional manipulation was most pronounced but Sarah "didn't associate with a victim because [she] was out of it in some ways."

##### Vanessa

- "I knew I was in an abusive relationship and I remember I didn't believe it for a while."
- "Trying to help him and therefore ignoring that I was a victim the whole time, I was a victim on the back burner, he had the main problems, he needed help, he was the victim."
- "I still thought my situation was unique and the uncommon situation."
- "I felt bad calling the hotline because I was like, there are people who are in horribly abusive relationships, with children, and I'm taking up a call."
- "I don't want to take up a spot from someone who's in a really abusive relationship, what I thought was more typical."

- “I was doing well, and even though I knew bad things were happening to me, I was doing well in other aspects of my life and therefore I wasn’t the victim, he was, he couldn’t get it together, he was struggling, not me.”

### Tammy

- Tammy never considered herself a victim, she thought she was doing something wrong (due to his master manipulation).
- “I’m not meeting his standards, I wasn’t doing enough, I was in the wrong.”
- “He was great at the beginning and I must have done something to spark this rage.”
- “I didn’t think that what I was feeling was valid. I didn’t think that what I was feeling was worth pursuing. When I pictured an abusive relationship, I instantly equated it with something or someone of a lower caliber. I wouldn’t think that I would, I personally, you know.”
- “I never thought of myself as, like, his victim”

### Sydney

- Sydney wrote off much of the abuse as “normal fighting” until Joseph threatened her with a suicide note – at that point she realized it was not normal.
- Due to the fact there was no physical abuse – it was challenging for Sydney to realize she was in an abusive relationship.

### Kelly

- “I don’t like identifying as a victims, it’s like ‘woe is me’ it’s like ‘I was hurt I was broken’ – it’s like no I am fucked up, like generally fucked up.”

- Kelly was aware she was in an abusive relationship (looking back) but dislikes the term victim, she thinks she is much more than her experience and does not want to be labeled as such.
- Kelly also says that at the time of her relationship she believed “you know, this can’t be abusive, you know he’d buy me like necklaces.”
- “In a healthy relationship check list all the healthies were checked off so why even look at the unhealthies?”

### Resources Utilized

#### Sarah

- “I would never think to reach out to anything in terms of myself and helping victims because I just didn’t see myself that way”
- After the relationship ended and she moved out of their shared apartment (8 months later) she was able to finally begin disclosing to friends.

#### Vanessa

- Vanessa called a hotline and asked, “what’s happening to me, is this is an abusive relationship?” Vanessa stated that she just needed someone to say yes – yet when they did, she “did not act on it.”
- Vanessa has self-diagnosed PTSD.
- “The school that I went to was beside a forest and there was a lot of sexual assault that happened, which is unfortunate, but it happened and so there were resources for that, and the emphasis was, hey, girls and boys of this school be careful when you're walking on campus” – therefore there were no resources available at her university (to her knowledge).

- At one point, Vanessa had disclosed to her friend because she was stranded by Patrick and had to ask her friend to pick her up (and in turn, explain why she was stranded).
- “Once I started telling friends it became a domino effect that ultimately ended the relationship.”
- “I didn’t tell my family, it was an image thing, I didn’t want that problem to define me.”

### Tammy

- Tammy utilized CBT therapy for the anxiety disorder she developed as a result of her relationship with Adam.
- Tammy admits to isolating herself from friends and therefore didn’t tell them the true extent of the relationship issues until after it ended, and she reconnected with them.

### Kelly

- Kelly utilized resources post-breakup – she has started going to therapy to address her PTSD.
- Kelly said, “to this day they don’t really know what happened, I never really told my parents [...] obviously they know something went down because they know I have PTSD, the extent to what went down has never been spoken to.”
- “I talk about it with my therapist, I make inappropriate jokes with friends.”
- Most of Kelly’s friends do not know “what really went down” except for one friend who she disclosed information to after the relationship ended.