

**HOW DO WOMEN WHO ARE VIOLENT IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS  
UNDERSTAND THEIR VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR?**

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**TITLE PAGE**

## ABSTRACT

This study analyses the in-depth accounts of women who are aggressors in intimate partner violence in France. These female high-risk offenders give a rich and detailed description of their understanding of their violence. It seems it is a re-enactment from past traumas and is repetitive and transgenerational. For many years research and public policy in many countries have assumed that men are aggressors and women victims. Often citing self-protection as the explanation used to explain women's violence, a reaction to their male partner who is aggressive. However, I show that women's intimate partner violence isn't always in self-defence. I also show that bidirectional violence, where both men and women are aggressors and victims, is also present.

Using a qualitative methodology the data was studied through interpretative phenomenological analysis, with six one-hour interviews from three participants in this sparsely researched area. Three superordinate themes with eight subordinate themes were produced. Superordinate themes were: *impact of early family violence*; *searching for a couple relationship without violence*; *an urgent need for change, internal world leads to acting-out*. The discussion of the results highlights psychodynamic theories, including attachment theory, object relations, and mentalization to understand the women's violence in a couple context.

Psychodynamic couple therapy will benefit from this research as there are few qualitative studies that give a voice to women who are violent in their couple. Deepening our understanding of a woman's experience of being violent in couple relationships is an original contribution to knowledge, and contributes to the broader understanding of the increasing numbers of domestic violence cases beyond gender stereotypes.

The limitations of the study are also discussed as is the need for further qualitative psychodynamic investigation to look at other types of female perpetrated violence in a similar rich and in-depth way.

## **DECLARATION**

**I HEREBY DECLARE THAT THIS THESIS IS MY OWN ORIGINAL WORK.**

Wayne Bodkin

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

- ACE** Adverse childhood experience
- APD** Antisocial Personality Disorder
- ATSA** Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers
- BBC** British Broadcasting Corporation
- BPD** Borderline Personality Disorder
- CIFAS** Congrès International Francophone Sur L'agression Sexuelle
- DA** Discourse Analysis
- DSM** Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
- GT** Grounded Theory
- IATSO** International Conference on the Treatment of Sex Offenders.
- IPA** Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
- intimate partner violence** Intimate partner violence
- IWM** Internal working model
- LGBTQ2** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer or Questioning, 2 two-spirit
- NEM** Nested Ecological Model
- PASK** Partner Abuse State of Knowledge
- PTSD** Post-traumatic stress disorder
- RREC** Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Subcommittee (UEL)
- TA** Thematic Analysis
- TCCR** Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, London, UK (now TR)
- TR** Tavistock Relationships, London, UK
- UEL** University of East London, UK
- UREC** University Research Ethics Committee, University of East London, UK
- WHO** World Health Organisation



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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Answering the research question “How do women who are violent in couple relationships understand their violence?” adds rich, detailed in-depth information and leads to a deeper understanding of this violence, but from their perspective, and the meaning they make of it. For the purposes of this paper I will use the term intimate partner violence throughout to explore violence between partners and not towards other family members. This term covers many more situations found in today’s western societies than the former term of conjugal-violence, or wife-battering that imply a gender approach of men as perpetrators of intimate partner violence and women as victims.

There is a significant lack of literature pertaining to studies that explore intimate partner violence concerning women who are violent in couple relationships. Most of the literature refers to men who are the aggressors and women who are the victims. There is some quantitative research that shows women can be violent.

Despite an abundance of research including Archer’s meta-analysis, that used the Conflict Tactics Scale, a gender-neutral survey method developed by Straus, using 82 studies and a total of over 64,000 participants, (Straus, 1979; Archer, 2000; Bates, Graham-Kevan and Archer, 2014; Bates and Graham-Kevan, 2016) for nearly four decades, governments, public health agencies, media, education and the public are still understanding intimate partner violence through a prism where men are aggressors and women helpless victims, despite research showing that this is not the case as cited above.

There are two highly fragmented positions at the centre of an acrimonious debate concerning intimate partner violence. The feminist position of intimate partner violence reflects the lengthy history of acceptance and encouragement of wife-beating, stressing patriarchal values; this is a paradigm based on a radical feminist ideology. The second position is gender inclusive where intimate partner violence reflects multifactorial aetiologies. Women perpetrators and male victims are equally valid for study as are LGBTQ2 couples.

There are different ways of conceptualising the debates about intimate partner violence including family violence, a feminist approach, the Nested Ecological Model, attachment theory and object relations theory that I will discuss in a later section.

Although this research is about female perpetrators of intimate partner violence, I do not intend to deny intimate partner violence against women. I started this study being fully aware of the universal problem of women who are also victims of domestic violence. It is through my clinical work in the psychiatric department of an important university city hospital that I became interested in researching female perpetrators in intimate partner violence from a psychoanalytic couple psychotherapy prism. Gender stereotypes have had a major influence on how society understands intimate partner violence (Dixon, Archer and Graham-Kevan, 2012; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe and Hirst-Winthrop, 2015), research has tried to understand this varied, complicated, and powerful phenomenon. My study adds to the knowledge about intimate partner violence where a woman is an aggressor in a couple relationship. During the lengthy history of intimate partner violence, there is no universally accepted definition because of its complexity and its understanding through cultural and social representations around the world (Flynn and Graham, 2010). In the UK, the government describes intimate partner violence as being part of domestic violence. This includes all types of violence by people who are personally connected as: intimate partners, ex-partners, family members or individuals who share parental responsibility for a child. There is no requirement for the victim and perpetrator to live in the same household.

### **Definition of intimate partner violence**

In the UK recently published information from the policy paper of the (Home Office, 2020) Domestic Abuse Bill 2020 that was online on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 states the UK Home Office has the following definition of domestic abuse:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexual orientation. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, economic and emotional forms of abuse. Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make

a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a person. (Home Office 2020, page 1, definition domestic abuse)

The UK Government also use this definition for intimate partner violence. Interestingly, in the guide that accompanies the Bill there is an insistence on the gender inclusive nature of the approach even though it also focusses in protecting women. The prevalence of intimate partner violence over the years shows it is still a major public issue. Partner violence appears as partner abuse and is a subcategory of domestic abuse in the crime survey for England and Wales, (Office National Statistics, 2019) year ending March 2018, with an estimated 1,34 million adults aged 16 to 74 years having experienced partner abuse in the last year, 404,000 men and 936,000 women. The research I present here is timely because it adds to our understanding that intimate partner violence includes men and women as both victims and aggressors.

### **Intimate partner violence History**

The early feminist position concerning wife abuse and the battered women's movement in the 1970s led to new policies and practices (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). Research showed that one in three individuals suffered from intimate partner violence. Governments recognised this violence as a major public issue. There followed various key developments:

- 1) Most westernised jurisdictions required police to arrest perpetrators of physical assaults on partners that tended to be mostly men (Hines and Douglas, 2010; Dutton and Corvo, 2006; Straus, 2010).
- 2) Mandatory treatment for male perpetrators (Babcock, Green and Robie, 2004).
- 3) Shelters for female victims become commonplace (Dutton and Nicholls, 2005; FVI, 2002; Straus, 2010).

An important amount of research also ensued with those populations.(Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Saunders, 1988; Pagelow and Pagelow, 1984; Browne, 2008; Walker, 1979)

Researchers interviewed women in shelters for studies and heard about female victimisation. When the research was about perpetrators, the only treatment being provided was for men, because they did not consider and acknowledge women as perpetrators in intimate partner violence. This produced results from the sample selection that perpetrators are men and women their victims because of the biases in the studies. When the samples are taken from refuges the majority of perpetrators are male, when in general population surveys, they are more equally distributed, and also points to the greater frequency of severely abusive partners being male, but less so when looking at lesser forms of violence. This prevailing understanding of intimate partner violence resulted in public policy, the media, education and support services attending to male perpetration and female victimisation. The authorities deemed male victimisation and female perpetration to be inconsequential. However, recent intimate partner violence research does not support this position depending on where the samples are drawn from.

Certain feminist researchers tend to conduct qualitative research and typically use selected samples, for example, from shelters, hospitals, police reports, and court records. Results from these samples suggest that women are overwhelmingly the victims of intimate partner violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Dobash *et al.*, 1992; Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Kurz, 1989). The feminist perspective sets men's intimate partner violence towards women in a framework of power and control, in which men use a variety of tactics to control intentionally and dominate their partner. These control tactics include: intimidation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, isolation, coercion and threats, the children, using male privilege and minimising, blaming or denying what happened (Pence, Paymar and Ritmeester, 1993). Therefore, intimate partner violence is one part of this general pattern of control where men are seen as misogynists who specialise in aggressing against women. Accurate figures pertaining to the prevalence of intimate partner violence are difficult to establish as researchers use various methodologies (Dutton and Nicholls, 2005) and

definitions of intimate partner violence (Dixon and Graham-Kevan, 2011) in attempting to identify this.

Nevertheless, women and men are perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence at similar rates across all types of intimate partner violence. Over two hundred studies have found that men and women perpetrate intimate partner violence at roughly equivalent rates. (Archer, 2000; Fiebert, 2004; Stets and Straus, 1989; Whitaker *et al.*, 2007; Dutton and Nicholls, 2005; Medeiros and Straus, 2006; Straus, 2010).

In 2014 the Fiebert bibliography from the California State University examined 286 scholarly investigations over four decades: 221 empirical studies and 65 reviews and/or analyses, which show that women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships with their spouses or male partners. The aggregate sample size in the reviewed studies exceeds 371,600 (Fiebert, 2014). Systematic reviews of research over the past twenty years reveal more similarities than differences between men's and women's intimate partner violence perpetration and victimisation. The Partner Abuse State of Knowledge Project (PASK), a 2300-page review of the domestic violence research literature in 17 topic areas, written by 40 scholars from 20 universities and research institutions in the USA, Canada, South Africa and Israel. The 17 PASK manuscripts appeared in special issues of the peer-reviewed journal Partner Abuse, published between April 2012 and January 2013, and included summaries of approximately 2,000 peer-reviewed studies from the past two decades, making it the most comprehensive, up-to-date and reliable domestic violence database in the world. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287265042\\_The\\_Partner\\_Abuse\\_State\\_of\\_Knowledge\\_Project\\_Implications\\_for\\_Law\\_Enforcement\\_Responses\\_to\\_Domestic\\_Violence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287265042_The_Partner_Abuse_State_of_Knowledge_Project_Implications_for_Law_Enforcement_Responses_to_Domestic_Violence)[accessed Sep 01 2020].

The Partner Abuse State of Knowledge project (PASK), (Desmarais *et al.*, 2012b) carried out literature searches in three databases (PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science). They found seventeen systematic reviews showing victimisation and perpetration. This showed that men and women have comparable rates of victimisation and perpetration. First, they looked at the victims of intimate partner violence. They identified two hundred and forty-

nine separate publications reporting five hundred and forty-three rates. They carried out most of the research in the USA. There was little research on male victims. Their results gave twenty-three percent of women and nineteen percent of men experiencing physical violence in an intimate relationship.

249 articles reporting 543 partner violence rates.

158 articles reported 318 partner violence rates for women;

6 articles reported 8 partner violence rates for men:

85 articles reported 217 partner violence rates for both men and women

In terms of victimisation, twenty-three percent of women and nineteen percent of men experience physical violence in an intimate relationship.

They then looked at perpetration that included 111 separate publications reporting 272 rates of physical intimate partner violence perpetration. Most studies were conducted in the USA. Twenty-eight per cent of women and twenty-one per cent of men report perpetrating physical intimate partner violence. In every study except for one in South Africa, women reported higher perpetration rates than men. This challenges the viewpoint men are the principal perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

They also found bidirectional lower level violence to be the most common form of intimate partner violence. In the study they report around fifty percent of couples reporting this type of aggression. Another study by (Stets and Straus, 1989) reported the following replies of women and men to the question who hit first?

For men the replies were (n=297):

He struck the first blow: 44%

She struck the first blow: 44%

Unknown = 12%

When women were asked the same question (n=428):

She struck the first blow: 53%

He struck the first blow: 43%

Unknown = 5%



Women are not just responding in self-defence. They also found that women are more likely to hit back in retaliation than men. (Langhinrichsen-Rohling *et al.*, 2012) also report in fifty studies, (forty-eight empirical studies, one meta-analysis and one book chapter) revealed:

58% intimate partner violence was bidirectional

28% female to male perpetrated aggression

14% male to female perpetrated aggression

In the US National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2011) distinct forms of aggression, sexual, and physical, rates were comparable between the sexes except for psychological aggression where male victims were four percent higher than women. Hundreds of studies confirm that the gender inclusive approach explains the complex and multifaceted aspects of intimate partner violence. Multiple studies (Straus, 1999; Straus, 2005; Straus, 2010; Straus and Ramirez, 2007) and a meta-analytic review demonstrate that women commit slightly higher rates of clinical level (severe) assaults than men, (Straus, 2010) with a meta-analytic review of 91 empirical studies. Clinical level (severe) assaults such as punching, choking, attacks with objects or physical acts resulting in injury. The median percentage of clinical level intimate partner violence perpetrated by: Women: 7% - Men: 5%.

I would point out that when results are taken from the criminal justice system, police, shelters etc women have higher victim rates. In twenty-one studies of severe assault or injury in agency samples, the results were: Male perpetrated: 63% - Female perpetrated: 48%. The existence of severe female perpetrated intimate partner violence exists and the implications are greater for female victims of serious assaults (Archer, 2000). Research also shows that not only do men and women perpetrate partner violence at about equal rates and severity levels, they do so for similar reasons. (Fiebert, 2004; Follingstad *et al.*, 1991). The most commonly reported proximate motivations for use of violence among both men and women are (Cascardi and Vivian, 1995; Follingstad *et al.*, 2002; Follingstad *et al.*, 1991; Kernsmith, 2005; Stets and Hammons, 2002) :

1) Coercion

2) Anger

3) Punishing misbehaviour by their partner.

One of the major arguments from feminist researchers holds that women can be violent but only as self-defence. The research does not support this view. Self-defence is a relatively uncommon motive. Pearson (1997): states that 90% of women assaulted their partner because they were furious, jealous, or frustrated (Pearson, 1997). Follingstad et al (1991) have about the same proportions of men and women, 17,7% men, 18,5% of women reporting that their motivation was self-defence (Follingstad *et al.*, 1991). Cascardi & Vivian (1995) sampled couples who were having couple therapy where 20% of wives and no husbands attributed their use of severe aggression to self-defence (Cascardi and Vivian, 1995). As violence escalates, there are greater gender differences in using violence in self-defence; however, self-defence is still a relatively uncommon motivation for intimate partner violence (Straus, 2010). Patriarchal motivated violence exists. Sexist perceptions, misogyny is a factor. It is only one explanation in multifactorial intimate partner violence.

In Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender relationships the prevalence of intimate partner violence is comparable and sometimes higher (Island and Letellier, 1991; Renzetti, 1989; Renzetti and Lee, 1993; Turell, 2000; Seelau and Seelau, 2005; Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch and Magruder, 1997). There were also similar patterns of recurrence and escalation of violence (Brand and Kidd, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch and Magruder, 1997). One study that looked at women who had been in lesbian relationships and heterosexual relationships reported that their lesbian relationships were more violent (Lie and Gentlewarrior, 1991). There is no explanation given in their paper for this result. Is it that some women who have been in abusive hetero relationships are then re-victimised in lesbian ones and therefore even more scared to out their partner? Intimate partner violence is not specific to men and cannot be explained on the basis of gender roles alone (Dutton and Nicholls, 2005).

We can also apply general theories of violence to intimate partner violence. Abusive and violent behaviours develop early in women who perpetrate intimate partner violence and remain as an aggressive trait and are not as the patriarchy paradigm portrays, survival-based

reactions to male violence (Capaldi, Kim and Shortt, 2004; Moffitt *et al.*, 2001; Serbin *et al.*, 2004). Many women have shown violence before being in an abusive relationship.

A unique American study looked at people who had been convicted of murder (Felson and Messner, 1998). They showed that men and women who killed their partners were equally likely to have violent criminal records preceding that event. Showing that their histories of anti-sociality, anger dysfunction often linked to mental health problems, emotion dysregulation as seen in psychiatric disorders, substance use, poor coping and personal skills, and poor social relationships is linked to people with intimate partner violence. These findings have major implications of how we treat these individuals. Individualising treatment would reflect the aetiology of the problem.

Another source of uncertainty in intimate partner violence is linked to the far less serious forms of aggression in mutual couple violence, psychological, and emotional for example, rather than the more serious forms of physical violence that some authors have named intimate terrorism (Radford, 2008) and, by reference to the severity of injuries, in that the harm caused by injury is likely to be far less in female-to-male violence than vice versa. Questions have been raised about this position. In a study conducted by Dutton and Nicholls, (2005), it was shown that a case is made for a gender paradigm having developed among family violence activists and researchers that precludes the notion of female violence, trivializes injuries to males and maintains a monolithic view of a complex social problem.

Desmarais *et al* (2012) found that the rates of physical intimate partner violence are equally distributed, based on studies that she and colleagues have surveyed, although she acknowledges that sampling bias (victims interviewed in shelters) may affect the reported rates. Controversy continues within the literature with other research that shows that emotional and psychological violence as the most damaging of all intimate partner violence (Brogden and Nijhar, 2004).

## **Psychoanalytic Couple Psychotherapy**

Part of my work as a psychoanalytic couple psychotherapist is working with intimate partner violence and helping couples understand the roots of their behaviour patterns and the impact they can have on each partner is part of my task. Understanding by the couple can help to diminish this violence and eventually to stop it altogether.

Working with couples involves trying to understand their relationship and trying to understand what this violence is communicating. This is not to say that violence is either excusable or justifiable, but that earlier damaged relationships have had an impact, and that these damaging experiences have been internalised. Partners act out their experiences and emotional states, but are very far from being able to recognise them (Monguzzi, 2011). A survey carried out by the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships (TCCR) in 2014 shows 44% of 221 cases being seen for couple therapy involved some level of violence and abuse (Humphries and McCann, 2015).

Humphries and McCann (2015) say that at TCCR both parties in the couple are involved in the fights. Usually there is no presentation at assessment of fear or control; the violence is not accompanied by other intimidating behaviour. Antunes-Alves and De Stefano (2012) add, in many couples, violence is not a means of control but, rather, as research shows, an ineffective strategy for trying to deal with personal and interpersonal issues (Antunes-Alves and Stefano, 2014). Interestingly research shows although women and men can leave abusive partners, for women, they can leave between eight or nine separate occasions, however, well over 50% of the women from refuges return to the same abusive partners (Zosky, 2003).

In psychoanalytic couple therapy the choice of the partner is seen as both unconscious and conscious. The women in this study express this when they talk about their partners. They are looking for someone who will help them with their needs, their emotions. In violent couples managing these feelings of being close to another and dreading separation often develops inevitable feelings of love and hate and the fear of being abandoned. Rusczyński, 2006, describes it as the inevitable human dilemma between deep-seated longing for intimacy and closeness, and the need for autonomy and separateness...both states...might

raise anxiety about separateness and loss, either the loss of self, or the loss of the desired and/or required other. (Ruszczynski, 2006, p.92)

Despite the prevalence of intimate partner violence, few studies have examined the perceptions of women who are violent and involved in intimate partner violence within a couple to understand how they understand their violence. Flynn & Graham (2010) recommend further research on perceived reasons for intimate partner violence addressing gender differences (Flynn and Graham, 2010). Psychoanalytical psychotherapy with couples or individuals has a history of trying to understand intimate partner violence (Bion, 1959; Fonagy and Target, 1995) (Glasser, 1996; Glasser, 1979; Ruszczynski, 2010; Ruszczynski, 2006). As Stanley Ruszczynski (2014) states in the Frightened Couple:

Working clinically with patients, individuals, couples, and families, who act out their difficulties through delinquent, violent, or sexually perverse behaviour, is probably the biggest challenge facing contemporary psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. Until recently I thought that such patients could not benefit from in-depth psychoanalytic work. This view is now changing and increasingly such patients are seen in psychotherapeutic clinics for treatment. (Ruszczynski, 2014, p. 85)

Certain researchers define the violence in terms of both partners. They see domestic violence as structured by behaviour that takes different forms (physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic), with an aim to perpetuate the intimidation, power, and control of one partner towards the other partner who is the victim (Hampton and Coner-Edwards, 1993). This position does not take into account the unconscious elements of the couple.

Professionals within the psychoanalytic couple therapy field are also starting to ask questions about women who are violent. Several articles on intimate partner violence and the unconscious appeared in the British Psychoanalytic Council Newsletter, New Associations, Issue 18 summer, (BPC, 2015) and prompted by significant new publications/research for example Anna Motz's latest book, *Invisible Trauma*, (2020), and her recent book, *Toxic Couples, The Psychology of Domestic Violence* (Motz, 2014; Motz, Dennis and Aiyegbusi, 2020). Intimate partner violence: new perspectives in research and

practice (Bates and Taylor, 2019). Anna Motz, (2014, p 180) in her book *Toxic couples on intimate partnership violence* calls for further research:

There is an urgent need for clinicians to engage with both perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence and to begin to understand what motivates this murderousness at its deepest level.

Yakeley (2010) states few topics in psychoanalytic history have generated more heated debate and conflict...than that of human aggression. She adds: The capacity for aggression is innate, but that aggressive behaviour or violence occurs in response to threats that the self perceives in relation to internal or external objects etc..

(Bateman and Fonagy, 2010; Yakeley, 2012) have shown that exposure to violence in childhood will significantly lead to major difficulties as adults in having empathy and in mentalization, and leads to the use of bodily action to express feelings; violence against themselves and others becomes the way of managing powerful emotions (Bateman and Fonagy, 2010). This position is also supported by Dutton (2011) “Intimacy-anger and insecure attachment have also been seen as precursors of violence in intimate relationships” (Dutton, 2011).

The psychoanalytic understanding of violence recognises that the violent act has an unconscious meaning. The precariousness of male identifications in violent patients where the internal representations of father remain primitive have been identified for some time (Perelberg, 1999). The question of identification was also raised by Anna Freud who suggested in 1937 that there can be an identification with an aggressor:

By impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat (Freud, 1937).

Perelberg develops Anna Freud’s idea when she states that violence has the function of creating a space where survival is possible in face of an object who is experienced as terrifying:

There is a pattern in which violence is exercised, a plot or narrative, which allows the underlying phantasy to be identified. This condensed unconscious narrative functions as a screen memory for a childhood 'event' (actual or phantasised) and an explanation formulated by the individual about his existence. Violence is, thus, a communication about these patients' belief systems about themselves, about their relationships with others and, I think, about their origins. The violent act or phantasy tells a story, which is their personal myth of creation and contains both pre-Oedipal and distorted Oedipal theories (Perelberg, 1999).

Initially the research concerning couples was based on a male perpetrator, but my study clearly demonstrates that women can also be perpetrators with what appears to be a similar aetiology as male aggressors in couple relationships.

### **Why women perpetrators?**

I approached this couple problem by focusing on the female perpetrator and to exclude the viewpoint of the partner for ethical and pragmatic reasons that I explain later. However, I suggest here that deepening our understanding of the woman's experience will contribute to the broader understanding of the increasing numbers of domestic violence cases presenting for help in the western world where the woman is described as the more violent partner.

Part of my work as a couple psychoanalytic therapist is within a hospital emergency psychiatric unit in France where I have had cases of violent women in their couple relationships. Following many conversations with colleagues, psychiatrists and psychologists, about the subject, I further learnt that this phenomenon seems to be more widespread than is acknowledged within our society and profession despite the lack of research.

In the UK there is a growing interest in this issue. Camden Council, 'Know it's not too late', started a campaign of domestic violence prevention in 2015, featured violent women and men (Camden-Council, 2015). A sixty-minute documentary programme broadcast on national TV, '*The Rise in Female Violence*', that looked at a broad range of female violence-girls who beat their boyfriends, to drunken brawlers to teenage girl gang (BBC, 2015a). The latest British crime statistics show that one in four violent crimes in Britain now involves a female perpetrator (Office National Statistics, 2019).

An intimate partner violence perpetrator has been described as a bullying, domineering man who intimidates and assaults a non-violent woman (Dutton and White, 2013). These ingrained societal beliefs around gender and intimate partner violence were revealed in a short video filmed by the Mankind Initiative (2014) on the streets of London, UK, in 2014, which shows public reactions to an intimate partner violence incident when the perpetrator was male compared to female and then the roles were reversed with a female perpetrator and male victim. The difference between the two scenarios shows the female victim receiving offers of help from the by-passers who try to protect the woman and looks of shock from the public. The male victim, however generated smiles and looks of amusement from onlookers with some people turning away from the scene of physical and psychological violence (Initiative, 2014). The short film was later replicated by the BBC and entitled The Social Experiment and shown in the documentary The Rise in Female Violence (BBC, 2015b). Research shows that gender bias is highly influential on people's perceptions of the severity of intimate partner violence (Sorenson and Taylor, 2005; Bates and Taylor, 2019)

The World Health Organisation, (2003) report that has impressive detailed documentation of studies of male perpetrations of intimate partner violence (Garcia-Moreno *et al.*, 2003; Krug *et al.*, 2002). However, curiously there is not one citation of one of the nearly 200 studies that were available that show women also assault their partners (Straus, 2010; Fiebert, 2004). I would add that by 1986 there were already 23 studies showing equal rates of intimate partner violence, including two national surveys (Straus, 2010).

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE SEARCH**

I started the literature review in 2015 and continued with regular updates until July 2020. Much of the recent research published during this period continues to support the gender inclusive understanding of intimate partner violence (Bates and Taylor, 2019; Motz, 2016; Motz, 2014; Bodkin, 2019). Researchers often describe violence in the couple as intimate partner violence. This term marks a difference between former gender approach terms such



as conjugal-violence, or wife-battering implying a gender approach of men as perpetrators of intimate partner violence and women as victims.

### **Search terms**

I carried this literature search initially with the list of terms I found in my reading about intimate partner violence. I then used combinations of terms. For example:

domestic abuse and/or violence,

battered female and/or male,

battered men and/or women,

intimate partner violence

abuse

marital conflict

partner abuse

family violence

male victim

female victim

victim.

Female perpetrator

Female abuser

Female abuse of men

Heterosexual abuse women on men

Heterosexual violence women on men

Bidirectional aggression

women aggressors in intimate partner violence

Couple violence

Domestic violence

Following on from there I continued to delve into the subject that I discovered is vast. I conducted a literature search using PsychInfo, MEDLINE, ASSIA, British Library Ethos, UEL Athens, PEPWeb, Google scholar, and Cairn and Science-Direct using a range of search terms for gender and intimate partner violence as listed above. I also carried out a hand search looking for key information relevant to my research. The review generated

1532 articles. I considered 98 articles applying to the research question because they dealt with women who were violent. I also searched papers on Google Scholar to find individual articles that were relevant. I have also included part of the literature research in the discussion part of the study.

### **Reviewing intimate partner violence literature**

There is a lack of literature pertaining to studies that explore Intimate partner violence concerning violent women in couple relationships.

There is now a growing body of evidence which suggests that men are not just the perpetrators, but also victims of intimate partner violence (Archer, 2000; Goldberg and Tomlanovich, 1984; Steinmetz, 1980; Willis and Porche, 2003). It has been demonstrated that women perpetrate all forms of violence, both in a wider context, and within intimate relationships (Archer, 2000; Richardson, 2005; Steen and Hunskaar, 2004).

The controversial topic of gender and intimate partner violence has caused a divide within the literature, between “family violence” researchers, and “feminist” researchers (Kurz, 1989) the first of whom believe that men are as likely, or even more likely in some cases, to be victims of intimate partner violence as women, and the second advocating that women are the indisputable victims of this abuse, and reacting violently only in self-defence in response to male aggression. Findings of family violence researchers have suggested that male victimisation is approximately equivalent to that of female victimisation (Hamel, 2007; Hamel, 2009).

More recently, literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about this position with the gender approach to intimate partner violence coming under criticism (Dutton and Corvo, 2006; Hamel, 2013) (Straus, Kantor and Moore, 1997). Dutton (1995, 2006), developed a theoretical framework, the Nested Ecological Model (NEM), to understand intimate partner violence by attempting to incorporate individual and societal factors. This model is also useful in understanding certain psychological information regarding violence in a couple.

An alternative theoretical framework within which to understand intimate partner violence has been proposed by Dutton (1995, 2006) and attempts to incorporate individual and societal factors. The Nested Ecological Model (NEM) describes four levels that are said to

interact with one another, the macrosystem, the exosystem, the microsystem and the ontogenetic level. The macrosystem refers to the broad cultural and societal values and beliefs that influence the other three systems. The exosystem incorporates the social structures which influence the immediate setting an individual is in such as their social support or work. The microsystem refers to the immediate context within which intimate partner violence occurs such as the family unit and the ontogenetic level refers to the individual developmental factors which influence their perpetration of intimate partner violence. Stith et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analytic review of the risk factors associated with perpetration and victimisation by examining the risk factors within the exosystem, the microsystem and the ontogenetic level. They concluded that factors which are closely related to the individual or the immediate context within which the violence occurs are more predictive of intimate partner violence than those which relate to the exosystem.

There is considerably less research examining intimate partner violence by females and bidirectional intimate partner violence where both members of the couple use violence (Hamel, 2013; Smith, Fowler and Niolon, 2014). This gendered approach to Intimate partner violence has come under much criticism and there have been calls for a gender inclusive approach for over three decades (Straus, Kantor and Moore, 1997; Dutton and Corvo, 2007; Swan, 2008; Bates and Taylor, 2019; Motz, 2014; Bodkin, 2019; Yakeley, 2009; Welldon, 2018a; Welldon, 2018b).

### **Bidirectional violence**

The violence in this study happens within a couple context. Kelly & Johnson (2008) have identified four types of intimate partner violence: coercive controlling violence, violent resistance, situational couple violence and separation instigated violence. Coercive controlling violence is described by Kelly & Johnson as “emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion and control coupled with physical violence used against partners”. They note that this usually occurs in the context of other controlling behaviours. Violent resistance is a violent response to coercive controlling violence, and separation instigated violence is a violent response to separation, (Kelly and Johnson, 2008; Morgan, 2018). The Partner Abuse State of knowledge (PASK), a comprehensive review of the literature using forty-

eight studies reported on rates of unidirectional and bidirectional intimate partner violence (Langhinrichsen-Rohling *et al.*, 2012). They found that nearly sixty percent was bidirectional violence. This is important because yet again it powerfully shows that the gendered argument of men as aggressors and women as helpless victims is not reflected in the research. There are several explanations for the violence as we have already seen previously in this study. Another element is problematic attachment styles that have also been considered as being one of the causes of this situation, (Doumas *et al.*, 2008). Intimate partner violence can also be viewed as an attempt to establish or maintain a level of personal security within the relationship. When a threat to the attachment relationship is perceived, individuals become alarmed and the resulting anxiety leads to responses designed to preserve the attachment system (Bowlby, 1973). A violent episode may be precipitated by a real or imagined threat of abandonment or rejection by the attachment figure as one of the participants in this study, Saïda explains:

*Saïda: I'm afraid he'll actually leave me, I'm afraid he'll leave me, I think....356-357*

*I get jealous. 360*

*Well, I've lost it. I don't know what I did exactly, but I lost it. There you go (pauses) 370-371*

*With him and even with the girl, oh yes. 374*

*Well, I had hit her, and I gave her a black eye, I remember. 386*

*I don't know what I did to him anymore. I had to scratch him. 396*

*He fought back. Then I left. 398*

*Because it can escalate and go a long way afterwards 401*

*I left because it can escalate and go a long way. I could do a crazy thing afterwards. I can't see when I get angry. I'm not in control of myself anymore. I could do something I might regret because sometimes I do things I regret, when I'm at the end of my tether. That's all. 405-409*

Attachment theory also implies intimate partner violence may be used as an attempt to manage conflict created by opposing needs for closeness or distance (Pistole, 1994). Research suggests that bidirectional violence is a common intimate partner violence pattern that tends to result in severe violence, (Sullivan *et al.*, 2013; Bates, 2016; Bates and Taylor, 2019).

## **Other Sources**

I watched how intimate partner violence was being reported and explained in our modern societies through TV, radio, magazines and newspapers, adverts, intimate partner violence prevention campaigns, websites and social media. I also found various books about the psychology of female violence and of intimate partner violence.

I attended conferences where intimate partner violence was on the programme, including, IATSO in Copenhagen in 2016, Vilnius 2018, the International French speaking conference on sexual violence, CIFAS held in Montpellier, France, May 2019, Charleroi, Belgium, 2015, Montreal, Canada 2017, and ATSA in Atlanta, USA 2019.

I also read various government reports concerning domestic violence and crime statistics. For certain researchers, (Hampton and Coner-Edwards, 1993) intimate partner violence is structured by behaviour, and takes different forms (physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic), with an aim to perpetuate the intimidation, power, and control of one partner towards the other partner who is the victim. This position does not always take into account the unconscious elements of the two subjects that form the couple, nor the couple as a group. For psychoanalytical psychotherapy researchers, bidirectional and unidirectional intimate partner violence can be understood with various psychodynamic theoretical references including projective identification, attachment theory and mentalization. (Bion, 1959; Fonagy and Target, 1995; Glasser, 1998; Glasser, 1979; Bartholomew, Henderson and Dutton, 2012; Rusczyński, 2010; Rusczyński, 2006).

## **Reporting issues**

One reason there is an underestimation of women perpetrators within intimate partner violence toward men is that men are less likely to view intimate partner violence as a crime or to report it to police. Research carried out to discover the rates of male victims of intimate partner violence and if they had pressed charges reveals less than 1% of men who had been victims of assault by their partner had called police (Stets and Straus, 1989). In that same survey, men assaulted by their partner were less likely to hit back than were their female partners assaulted by their male partners. Men were also far less likely to call a

friend or relative for help (only 2%). It is not the case that these assaults were inconsequential, many were classified as serious assault. Male socialisation diminishes the likelihood of reaching out for help (Goldberg and Tomlanovich, 1984). Historically, men who were victims of assault by their wives were made into objects of social derision, a practice in medieval Europe called charivari that involved riding the victim around town, seated backwards on a donkey and punching his genitals (Dutton, 2011). Men are socialised to bury problems under a private veil (Goldberg and Tomlanovich, 1984), including being the object of abuse from female partners.

In 2005, Brogden & Nijhar, published a paper in which they described emotional violence intimate partner violence perceived as the most severe form of abuse, especially when conducted with an audience of children. Control may be exercised obliquely over household affairs, such as by rationing income and expenditure or exclusion from family meals. In their study some men also claim that false accusations regarding alleged violence to their female partner, either to the police or their children, is another way the female partner could assume dominance. Finally, they state psychological abuse could also occur through the denigration of the partner's sexual competence compared to other males; while sleep deprivation was also perceived as particularly pernicious according to some men, especially where their job required concentration (Brogden and Nijhar, 2004).

## CHAPTER 3 – METHOD

In order to address the question of how women understand their behaviour I needed to identify a suitable methodology, one that would generate rich and unique data. The sparse literature search showed that there was little that offered detailed, and in-depth information from women explaining their violence.

Qualitative methods of research aim to generate new ways of understanding the phenomena of interest. The literature on women perpetrators of intimate partner violence has largely been part of the statistics together with male perpetrators of intimate partner violence within quantitative studies. The experience of women perpetrators and informing others of their experience is not well understood or researched, therefore an exploratory study investigating this experience seemed an appropriate first step for the research. A qualitative study enables deeper insight into the experiences of women, allowing women to describe their experience in their own words and interpreted by the researcher.

Before deciding to use interpretative phenomenological analysis, I looked at Grounded Theory for this study, however it is often used for sociological research due to its emphasis on social processes with its principal aim is the development of theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Willig, 2013).

IPA looks for depth of analysis among a small group of participants (Smith, 1995). Grounded theory looks for larger groups to support a wider conceptual explanation (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Willig, 2013).

Discourse Analysis (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Smith, Harré and Van Langenhove, 1995) has a focus on language that it regards verbal data as behaviour (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). It examines the role and structure of language in describing a person's experience (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1997). IPA is interested in how individuals ascribe meaning to their personal experience within their social environments (Smith, Jarman and Osborne, 1999).

I also considered using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Several researchers claim that thematic coding is already an integral part of other major analytic traditions such as grounded theory (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). However, others argue that thematic analysis should be used as a technique in its own right (Roulston, 2001). It is flexible like IPA (Roulston, 2001). However, certain researchers claim thematic analysis can be used to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Unlike IPA, there remains uncertainty as to what thematic analysis actually is and how one should go about doing it (Tuckett, 2005). The validity of thematic analysis is complicated because there is no certitude as to how the researcher carried out their analysis and how it was informed (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

IPA was selected as an appropriate methodology because, within the realm of qualitative research, the phenomenological approach accords the lived experience primacy over what is known (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011). IPA is 'iterative, inductive, fluid and emergent' (Finlay, 2005).

The process of selecting the most suitable qualitative research design requires a comparison and evaluation of established qualitative methodological approaches, a process which is concerned less with choosing 'the tools for the job' and more with identifying 'what the job *is*' (Smith, 2009). An explanation of the epistemological basis and methodological requirements of the particular approach is therefore required in order for it to be possible to meaningfully evaluate them. Willig (2013) proposed three questions to guide the researcher's identification of a methodology's epistemological origin:

What kind of knowledge does the methodology aim to produce?

What kind of assumptions does the methodology make about the world?

How does the methodology conceptualise the role of the researcher in the research process?

IPA is committed to favouring participant voices via the presentation of a contextual understanding of idiographic experience. A central spirit of an epistemology for phenomenology is the assumption that understanding can never be simply cognitive.



Instead, it is always interweaved with senses, mood, and intersubjective contexts. IPA research assumes that the data collected is able to ‘tell us something about people’s involvement in and orientation towards the world’ (Smith et al., 2009, p. 47); however, it does not make any claims about what may be ‘true’ or ‘false’ about the participant’s experience or its connection to an external reality; what matters to an IPA researcher is how the experience is experienced. In this sense, it subscribes to a more relativist ontology, and that reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively. It is recognised that the production of knowledge occurs through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). It is accepted in IPA that any understanding of a participant’s accounts gained by the researcher are reliant on their personal engagement and interpretation. The researcher is unavoidably implicated in analysis. The conceptualisation of the researcher’s role in IPA is further explicated in a later section in relation to the notion of reflexivity as understood within this study.

While IPA can be applied to a wide range of issues, it comes into its own when examining people’s perceptions of major experiences that are happening to them and which engage ‘hot cognition’. It is in these circumstances in particular that the participant is forced to reflect on what has happened and attempts to make sense of its meaning. As a consequence, the event engenders a lot of cerebral activity and that cognition is emotionally laden (Smith, 2009). IPA was used to gain a rich and detailed understanding of participants’ experiences. IPA is inductive in nature, with no pre-existing hypothesis, ‘IPA aims to capture and explore the meanings that participants assign to their experiences’ (Smith, 2009).

‘IPA seeks to retain the rich and personal detail of the particular whilst pointing to ways in which the particular illuminates (and is illuminated by) characteristics of the lifeworld that are common to us all’ (Eatough and Shaw, 2019).

### **Approval & Consent.**

Ethical approval for the study was granted from the Ethics bodies at The Tavistock Relationships (TR), and the University of East London (UEL). The agency where the

interviews were carried out for this research agreed to this project providing that ethical approval was granted by TR and UEL.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any moment without prejudice to any parallel therapy. They would not have to explain why they wish to stop. No payments were made to the agency or the participants. All identities of participants were masked and any references that could identify them will also be changed to guarantee total anonymity. This included geographical locations and the name of the agency.

### **Confidentiality of the Data**

The researcher has changed the names and locations given in this study so that confidentiality can be maintained. The recordings are stored on two encrypted USB sticks. They are kept under lock and key in two separate locations by the researcher. The transcription has been translated and all identities of participants have been masked and any references that could identify them have also been changed to guarantee total anonymity. Once the thesis has been completed the material will maintained securely and confidentially in accordance with the requirements of UEL. With three participants in the study there will be distinct limitations in the level of anonymity that can be afforded. The participants have given an oral and written authorisation for the research findings to be published in a doctoral thesis. They may also be used in other relevant publications including internet sites. Anonymised quotes could be used in the thesis and in other publications linked to this research. The findings may also be used in conferences.

### **Philosophical underpinnings of IPA**

IPA is an experiential qualitative approach developed by Jonathan A Smith. IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with a detailed examination of personal lived experience. It is interpretative as it recognises that this process involves an active process of interpretation on the part of the researcher. IPA is idiographic as it is committed to the detailed study of the particular case before moving to more general claims.

IPA is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and with how participants themselves make sense of their experiences. Therefore, it is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants.

IPA has three key positions of IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, 2009). IPA is informed by these three key positions. Phenomenology describes the “what” and “how” of individuals’ experienced phenomena, develops descriptions of the essences of experiences, but does not explain or analyse descriptions (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation concerning textual meaning, “repeated reading of the text” (Smith et al., 2009), as in the techniques used in speaking and writing that divulge the intentions and context of the speaker/writer (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, ideography relates to details and thorough analysis of small cases, which differs from mainstream psychological studies that are nomothetic in nature (Smith et al., 2009). As a psychoanalytically trained couple therapist I am also looking at the violence through a psychoanalytic prism, with the concepts of transference and counter-transference, the conscious and unconscious having particular relevance.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is an umbrella term, conceived by the philosopher Edmund Husserl in 1901. He defined the goal of the phenomenological method as seeking an understanding of what he described as the essence of conscious experience. The aim is to describe and analyse everyday experience, evoking what it is to be human. IPA is also influenced by the phenomenological and existential perspectives of Heidegger (Heidegger, 1962/1927), Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and Sartre (Sartre, 1956), who considered the person as both immersed and embedded in the world, in a particular historical, social, and cultural context. The subject matter of phenomenology that began with consciousness and experience was expanded by Heidegger to include the human life world, and by Sartre to include human action (Kvale, 1996). In developing Husserl’s work, (Heidegger, 1962/1927) moved attention away from a commitment to the descriptive towards a more interpretive focus. Indeed, he questioned the possibility of knowledge existing outside of an interpretative stance at all. His emphasis centred on personal involvement in the lived world, an endeavour which Heidegger (1962) insisted was

a property of our relationships to the world and to others, rather than to us alone as self-contained individual subjects. This view of human existence embedded within a worldly context results in the inseparable nature of language and understanding, as only via language can our *Dasein*, or being-in-the-world, be manifest and hence, be understood (Heidegger, 1962). Following the original Greek etymology of the term ‘phenomenon’, meaning ‘to show itself’, Heidegger understood the tasks of phenomenology as being to ‘bring to the light of day, to put in the light’ (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51), or ‘to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself’ (Heidegger, 1962, p. 58).

Extending the existential phenomenological project, and in his key existential work ‘Being and Nothingness’ (1956), Sartre uses phenomenological description to explicate the fundamental aspects of lived experience (Sartre, 1956). Similar to Heidegger, he applies emphasis to the worldliness of our experience, yet extends this by developing the point within the context of personal and social relationships. For Sartre, the absence of things is as important as those things which are present in defining who we are and how we see the world (Sartre, 1956). Our projects in the world inevitably lead us to encounter others who unavoidably shape and influence our perceptions. Drawing our attention to this through his use of vivid portraits and vignettes of ‘embodied, interpersonal, affective and moral’ encounters (Smith et al., 2009), Sartre makes possible our conception of experience as reliant upon the presence - and absence - of our relationships to those around us. The endeavours of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have each contributed to the evolution from the transcendental pursuits of Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology to provide an understanding of the individual as a creature immersed as opposed to isolated, a creature at one with a directed involvement in the lived world which, within IPA research, phenomenologists seek to interpret.

## **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation concerning textual meaning. Originally used to describe the process of biblical interpretation, the term ‘hermeneutics’ is now used to refer to interpretation generally. It is important to draw attention to the fact that hermeneutics has long been engaged with, and informed by, other concerns. It provides a rich and sophisticated philosophical background for the practice of qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 1988; Lalli,

1989). One of Heidegger's aims was to communicate the case for a hermeneutic phenomenology by highlighting that our access to lived time and engagement is always by means of interpretation. His articulation of the relationship between interpretative work and the fore-structures of our understandings results in engagement with a hermeneutic circle when working out fore-structures in terms of the things themselves, moving between 'implicit pre-understandings and explicit understandings; between the reciprocal relationship between the interpreted and the interpreter; between understanding parts and the whole. Understanding deepens by going round the circle again and again (Finlay, 2005). Analysis resembles that of a dance in which the interpretations of the observer and the observed are interwoven as a sophisticated understanding (Ezzy, 2002). Thus, 'the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole' (Gadamer, 1989), continually re-developing the interpretation via the continuous movement between pre-existing interpretative frameworks and the data. This hermeneutic circle is enacted within this study by the reading, and re-reading of the data.

### **Idiography**

Concerned with the 'particular' rather than the 'general', qualitative approaches which subscribe to an idiographic approach stand apart from the nomothetic research approaches commonly found within psychology, which aim to establish laws of human behaviour to be applied across groups and populations (Smith et al., 2009). An idiographic sensibility, such as the one subscribed to in IPA, is demonstrated in the researcher's commitment to understanding experiential phenomena from the perspective of a particular individual contextualised in a particular place and time. Furthermore, the detail with which individual accounts emerge during data collection results in the offering of in-depth analysis. Such micro-level analysis can be an end in itself (Smith, 2011). IPA advocates for the re-evaluation of the importance of the single case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006), because rich, detailed and in-depth information adds to our understanding of phenomena. (Smith, 2004)

Analytical procedures in IPA which do involve a sequence of similarly detailed cases should still permit the identification of particular claims for any of the individual participants involved, drawing attention to the commitment to present across case themes idiographically.

## **Epistemological Considerations**

Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to make their epistemological position clear, conduct their research in a manner consistent with that position and present their findings in a way that allows them to be evaluated appropriately” (Madill, Jordan and Shirley, 2000). For this research I have chosen to adopt a critical-realist position, also known as ontological realist; situated between realism, assuming a direct relationship between observation and reality, and relativism, where truth is always constructed (Harper and Thompson, 2011). In doing so, I acknowledge my position as researcher within the process of analysis; that whilst trying to understand what is happening in the real world, I will ultimately shape this process and outcome (Willig, 2001).

### **The character of IPA in this study**

Drawing on Ricoeur (1970), Smith et al. (2009) described hermeneutics of empathy and hermeneutics of suspicion as a way in which to explicate the double hermeneutic. Within IPA, hermeneutics of empathy is considered as an approach to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms. It is the means by which it is possible to enter into the words of the participants and gain the insiders’ perspective. The hermeneutics of suspicion or questioning invites the interrogation of participant accounts to ‘puzzle’ over why a participant says something in a particular way that therefore constructs a certain meaning (Ricoeur, 1981). Smith et al. (2009) were clear that ‘successful IPA combines both stances’ (p. 36). However ‘within such an analysis the empathic reading is likely to come first and may then be qualified by a more critical and speculative reflection’ (Smith, 2004). Whilst this research study has sought to embrace the hermeneutics of empathy, the critical and interrogative level of interpretation advocated within IPA presents some problems for this study. Willig and Stanton-Rogers (2007) argued that this second level of interpretation raises some ethical concerns regarding the imposition of meaning and the denial of a participant voice. A hermeneutic of faith (Willig and Stanton Rogers, 2008; Josselson, 2004), however, invites the researcher to engage in the interpretative activity of examining ‘the various messages inherent in an interview text’ (Josselson, 2004). Then, rather than seeking to problematise the participant’s narratives, the researcher explores various ways in which to give the ‘voice’ to the participants.

IPA also provides guidance for novice researchers. This method permits the use of discussion across common themes that emerge as well as discussion across the data from each participant. I carried out the steps recommended when conducting an investigation with a sequencing of analysis following the iterative cycle from the simple to the complex:

1. Reading and re-reading
2. Initial noting involving descriptive comments, conceptual comments-anything that catches the eye and imagination
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Making connections across themes
5. Patterns across cases

### **Bracketing**

I understood Smith & al.'s, (2009) recommendation to bracket ideas from previous material during analysis to be an invitation to resist making cross-comparison early in the process. In contrast to other methods (e.g., grounded theory or thematic analysis) where researchers are looking at the whole material, with IPA the idea is to do one's best to pay each piece of material its due. It is more a question of stance toward the material as some metaphysical claim to be able to purify oneself from the previous material by "bracketing". In other words, I read it as a pragmatic suggestion, and that is what I did in my own work. The further I analyse one particular interview transcript, for instance, the more the other transcripts recede in the background. Not that they are perfectly "bracketed", they are always there, but have receded into the back of my mind.

### **Method details of this study**

IPA is carried out on a small scale with three participants each providing two interviews

where a female perpetrator of intimate partner violence has been identified often through the male partner and victim.

In terms of criteria to assess validity Yardley (2000) gives 4 general criteria:

- a) Sensitivity to context or empathic identification with the subject.
- b) Commitment and rigour which includes a judgment about the quality of the interview and completeness of the analysis
- c) Transparency and coherence,
- d) Impact on and importance to the field (Yardley, 2000).

Smith et al (2009) also argue for the research being written in such a way that an outside colleague could undertake an independent audit of the work.

An audio recorded documentary record of the sessions was used because research shows that there is a significant loss of material in process notes, as much as two thirds (Bailey *et al.*). Audio recordings enable the rich data to be captured in a transcription. I have already had experience of using audio recordings and these proved to be invaluable. I carried out the transcriptions myself so that I could start the iterative process recommended within IPA to become familiar with the data. These transcriptions were then translated into English for the analysis and inclusion in this study. I was able to not only read and re-read the transcripts but also to listen and re-listen to the interviews. I have been living and working in France for thirty years and having been teaching at a French University since 2006. As a further precaution to ensure the accuracy of the translations I asked a French therapist living in London to check the translations. Her letter is attached in the annexes.

The participants had full freedom to refuse to take part and/or withdraw at any stage during the study.

### **Sample size**

The sample size number is in line with that recommended by Smith 2009, (Smith and Osborn, 2008). The authors recommend between four and ten interviews, they insist on the number of interviews and not participants. I have three participants and six interviews. Having a sample as such gives an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between individuals (Meier, Boivin and Meier, 2008);



In a post on the Global IPA forum, Larkin explains:

Good quality data from small numbers of cases is what IPA requires. If we want to show why this is, we can point to examples of good published studies, many of which are  $n=1$ .

The first of the interviews was a pilot study which tested the viability of the research method including the initial questions and subsequent prompts. Following this the other interviews went ahead.

### **Exclusion criteria**

Women who were at the beginning of their treatment were excluded because there has not been sufficient time to assess their capacity to participate. Participants had to be able to articulate in words some of the reasons for their violence. This is an important assumption for volunteers who have previously resorted to violence as a means of resolving their emotional problems and communicating with their partners. Women suffering from psychosis or other co-morbid mental health problems were also not included in this study.

### **Inclusion criteria for the sample.**

Only women who were in therapy and were currently being supported by professionals were included in this study. The woman's therapist and psychiatrist decided on whether or not the participant could be interviewed based on their ability to control their violence and also to articulate the reasons that led them to react in a violent manner. All participants had been assessed and considered to be at a point in their treatment where it was considered appropriate and safe for them to participate in the study. The agency that provides treatment for the women had regularly allowed research projects to further understanding of the people who present for help.

### **Ethical concerns.**

In order to minimise the possibility of the research interviews having a destabilising effect on participants, perhaps by revisiting difficult life events, various measures were taken to

ensure their well-being. An administrator at the agency invited any potential participant who fitted the inclusion criteria to participate if they wished in this research project. All potential volunteers had been given a Participant Information Sheet outlining the broad aims of the study, explaining the details of the research commitment and outlining their rights to anonymity and the protection of any data given. They also had the opportunity to read the Consent Form, which later they were all asked to sign. Two weeks elapsed between them being given the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form. Once they agreed to take part, they were asked to seek the written backing of their therapists evaluated if they consider them able to manage the research interview. Given that violence is often impulsive the need for on-going therapist support is essential and available if necessary, over a long period of time.

### **Collecting data.**

A pilot interview with the first participant was part of the study that was restricted to three women. The participant information sheet and consent form were forwarded to each participant two weeks prior to commencing the interviews. Two sixty-minute interviews were audio recorded with each participant. In the second interview I was able to get a more in-depth view of how my participants made sense of experiences that they had identified in the first interview. I felt that it was necessary to meet with participants twice to gather data and once after I had written up the interviews to check my own assumptions and interpretations

As an added precaution before the start of each first interview the participant information sheet and the consent form were read by the researcher to each woman who was then asked to sign the document. Subsequently an interview schedule was developed, and each woman was interviewed twice over a period of eight weeks. They were asked how they understood their violence, its meaning for the participants and how they made sense of it. The semi-structured questions were used to guide rather than dictate the course of the interview. Participants were treated as experiential experts and any novel areas of inquiry they opened up were followed. Data collection lasted approximately 16 weeks. A first interview of sixty minutes with demographic details, age, nationality, employment, followed by a narrative question based on their replies:

**Sample semi-structured questions:**

Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Your background?

Your family?

Your educational background?

Career/work background?

How did you meet your partner?

What happened then?

You mentioned X?

Tell me some more about that?

The questions about violence came towards the end of the first interview.

A one hour second interview a week later with first interview criteria, but including any contradictions, absences, and avoidances that the researcher had noted.

**Participants who are violent**

Each participant in this study is being followed by mental health professionals following acts of physical violence. I approached the agency in France that treats men and women who are perpetrators of intimate partner violence and discovered there were few women who were in their care.

I have not named the agency or its location for ethical reasons. Revealing this information could lead to an identification of the participants. All names and places have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

I had initially thought I would have five participants for this study. Five women were recruited, but two of the women who initially agreed withdrew with no explanation. I speculate whether the stigma attached to being a violent woman, the fear of re-traumatisation in talking about their violence or perhaps shame could be some of the reasons the two women decided not to participate. I had informed all participants that they could withdraw at any moment without explaining why.

After discussion with my supervisors it was agreed to proceed with three participants that fulfilled the sample requirement of an IPA doctoral thesis.

It would seem that only the more extreme cases of female perpetrated violence in couples are seen and treated by the agency. I would argue that further investigation is needed in this area to understand the difference between the research during the last forty years that shows in intimate partner violence men and women have equal levels of perpetration rates and yet far fewer violent women are seen in agencies dealing with intimate partner violence in France. Nevertheless, the violent acts perpetrated by the women in this study led me to try and fathom out how they understood that violence and how I was understanding it as a man, as a psychoanalytic couple therapist and as researcher. I understand the motivation of violence as part communicating an unconscious symbolic meaning, (Yakeley, 2009).

There was a heavy sense of the past in all the participants' accounts. Najat's, Marie's, and Saida's interviews reveal their absent fathers, and their violent Mothers who used both physical and psychological aggression. They link this to their own anger and rage-type behaviour. Their violence seems to be a complex manifestation of these earlier unresolved traumatic experiences. As they speak about their pain their rage seems raw. They sometimes seem unable of recognising and acknowledging themselves as perpetrators of violence.

Curiously, as adults they seem to be on a quest for a couple relationship without violence. It seems almost idealistic because their adult couple experiences have always been violent. They all speak about the men that rejected them in their lives. Rejection appears to have left what seems like an indelible mark on the way they function and understand their couple relationships.

The violence also seems to be an urgent need for change, a transformation of a situation that is unbearable. Their internal world reacting to a perceived external reality. Marie describes it as being like a 'pressure cooker' that explodes. Najat says it is a way of saying STOP. They also talk about their loneliness and being alone that is also at times unbearable.

Research confirms childhood trauma can be detrimental on later adult couple relationships (Brown *et al.*, 2009). It affects and can cause behavioural, health, and social problems. Children who watch and experience intimate partner violence within the family home can

also be affected by this stressful or traumatic experience (Brown *et al.*, 2009). Participants also describe how they relate with past conflict and rejection they experience. The women experience 'losing control' despite being able to recall the details of the violent event. They seem to oscillate between being victims and aggressors and can be both. Bidirectional aggression has also been present with all three women. This finding is also important in furthering understanding of women perpetrators in intimate partner violence. Sometimes perceived threats of abandonment can generate anger directed towards their attachment figure. I will go on to develop this in a later section, but firstly I will come back to their childhoods.

## **CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS**

The childhood memories of witnessing suffering and pain conjure up powerful emotions for each of the women. Their memories of specific events and situations were recalled with graphic detail. This suggests that they were deeply impacted in witnessing this violence.

An important amount of literature shows that childhood observation of intimate partner violence and intergenerational transmission of violence in families is a factor in future intimate partner violence (Straus, 1991). A meta-analysis of the links between a violent home and future intimate partner violence, (Stith *et al.*, 2000), confirmed weak to moderate links. (Holt, Buckley and Whelan, 2008) also underline the effects of ACE and the violent repercussions this can have on future relationships.

## **Participants**

### **Najat**

Najat is thirty-six and is French. Her Mother has Algerian origins, and her Father is French. She grew up with three brothers and sisters from three different Fathers. Her biological Father left her when she was two months old. Her Mother says he never wanted children. Close friends raised her. She calls them Godparents. They had no children. Her Godmother had one son who died in a road traffic accident at twenty-one. She divorced her husband and Father of her son. With her second husband, they had no children until Najat and her brother arrived. The Godmother died when Najat was thirteen years old. During her childhood Najat witnessed a serious conflict over custody of her between her Mother and Godmother. Najat has five children with two different companions.

### **Marie**

Marie is forty-nine. She is a single Mother, and her son is sixteen. She is French. She works as a secretary. She has had several companions but has only lived with one for around six months when she was in her twenties. Both her parents are alive and are in their eighties. Marie discovered her biological Father was one of her Mother's lovers. Her Mother revealed the information during a violent argument between her parents, with breaking plates and tears. The refusal of her Mother to explain more about her biological Father is painful.

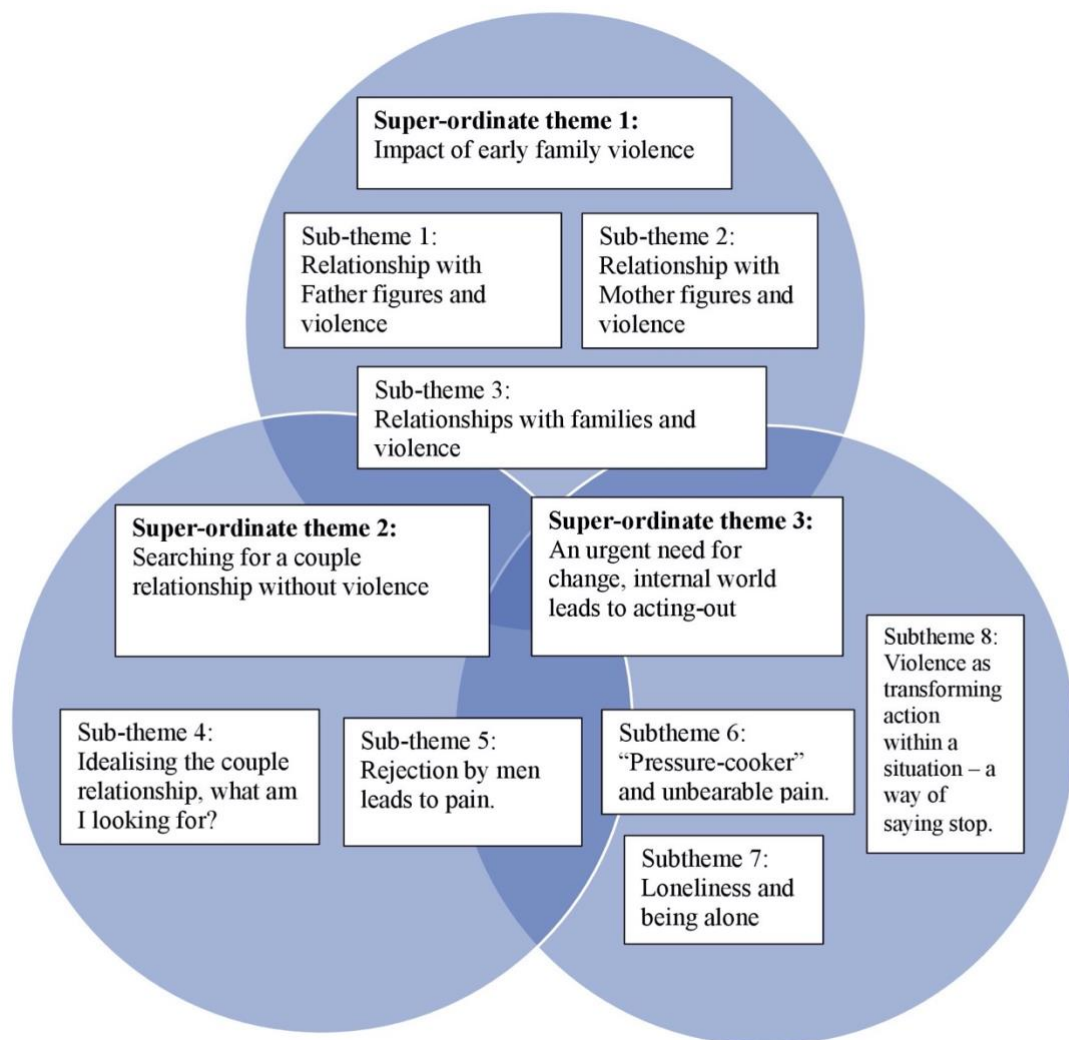
### **Saida**

Saida is twenty-nine. She is French, of Moroccan origin. Her parents separated and divorced when she was ten. At twelve her Father died of cancer. His death triggered her fear that her Mother would forget her Father forever. Her Stepfather moved in a few months after her parent's separation. It was following this event she says she lost control of her emotions. Social Services placed her in care at the age of twelve. She then cut-off all relationship with her

Mother. At sixteen she served her first prison sentence. She has spent nearly a third of her life incarcerated. Complicated relationships with men involving physical violence followed in which she is often the aggressor. Onlookers sometimes called the police because of the violence that happened in private and public. She can now control her violence.

### **SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 1: IMPACT OF EARLY FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Figure 1. Diagram of super-ordinate themes and sub-themes.



In line with the phenomenological approach of IPA I present the detailed examination of the participant's lifeworld in the extracts that follow. I attempt to explore personal experience and I am concerned with the participant's personal perception and account of the people and events as they see them, and their understanding of why they are violent in their couple relationships. I am not attempting to produce an objective statement of their life stories or the events that they speak about.

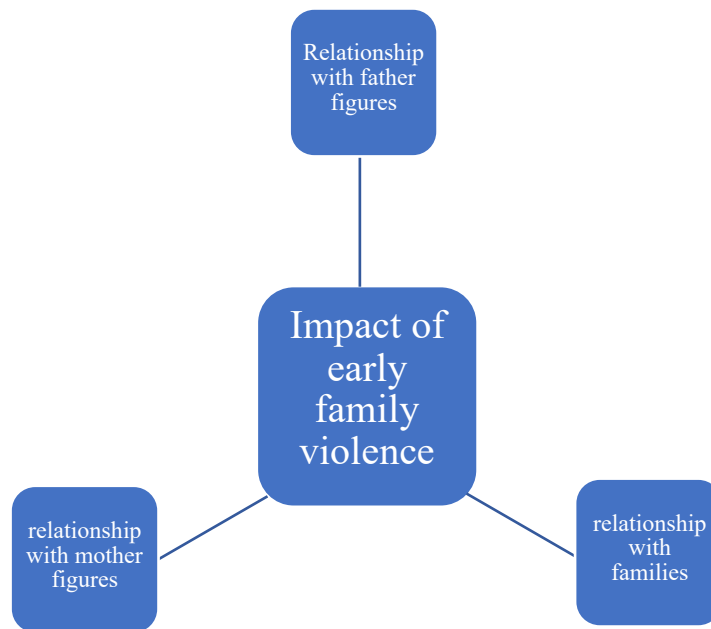
At the same time, IPA also emphasizes the active role of the researcher in this process. I am trying to get close to the participant's personal world to have an 'insider's perspective'.

Nevertheless, I cannot do this directly or completely. In the following extracts I attempt to make sense of the participants world through a process of interpretation. The participants are trying to make sense of their world and their violence and I am trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world and their violence.

Consistent with the phenomenological origins of IPA I take the side of the participants in trying to understand what their lives are like from their point of view.

There was a heavy sense of the past in all the participants' accounts. In particular, participants foregrounded experiences of past abuse and trauma endured in their family of origin and in previous intimate relationships, reiterating these experiences to the extent to which they seemed stuck in a narrative about being abused. Further, it seemed they confirmed this narrative about themselves by forming further abusive and destructive relationships.





**Figure 2: Superordinate theme 1**

The first sub-theme, ‘Relationship with Father figures and violence’, reflects how the violence they lived with from either their Father, biological, step or adopted, had affected their lives. Their preoccupation with this parental figure and returning to him, looking for him, shows how they remained tied to him. The participants often focused on what had happened to them rather than what they had done.

***“I only have terrible memories”* Sub-theme 1: Relationship with violent Father figures and their violence**

**Extract 1**

*WB: How do you know he rejected you? 646*

*Marie: Well, it was my Mother who told me that on the day of my birth, the day I was born, he didn’t come to see me. He didn’t even come and see me..., she told me he was with another woman. I don’t know. 647-649*

Marie’s father’s rejection of her at her birth still resonates with her over thirty years after learning about what happened from her mother. She insists twice, “*day of my birth, the day*

*I was born” and then again “he didn’t come to see me. He didn’t even come and see me..., ”. The way she narrates this account gives a sense that this event was traumatic for her. It is as if she wants to make sure I have understood and heard what she is saying. Her parents have rejected her. Her Father who was not with her the day she was born but was with another woman. This man had also abandoned both her and her mother.*

## **Extract 2**

*\_\_\_Marie: I suffered from the lack of a Father because my Father is not my real Father, he’s my stepfather... He had married my mother. 647-649*

Marie talks about the pain she suffered because she never knew her ‘real’ father. He never knew her, and she never knew him. Therefore, the projection is on an idealised father. Her stepfather was present, but she has no fond memories of him. The emphasis she places on this pain suggests the impact it has had on her and still has today. The word ‘lack’ of a father would suggest that there was no father present in her life. Her stepfather was present a few months after her birth. She adds that her mother had married her stepfather, suggesting that he was legitimate.

## **Extract 3**

*Marie: This man adopted me even though I’m not his daughter. I am the daughter of my Mother’s lover whom I don’t know. She has never wanted to tell who my real father is. 30-32*

She accepts that her stepfather recognised as his own but cannot accept that she is his daughter. She refers to him as ‘this man’ that puts an even greater distance between her and his place as a father figure. Her mother has told her that her biological father was a former lover but refuses to reveal any more information. It is perhaps a way of maintaining a hold on Marie. The refusal by her mother to reveal the name and details of her biological father gives the mother a power over her daughter because only she has the answer to this secret. This account comes at the beginning in the interview. The refusal to give this information

to her daughter seems to reinforce the rejection of her stepfather and also the tension between the Marie and her mother.

#### **Extract 4**

*Marie: It was during an argument, so my Stepfather had slammed the door, he had left and my Mother, my Mother, she had broken plates, she was in tears and, in tears, she announced to me: "Anyway, it's not your real father" and then my blood boile, my head was turning and then I didn't feel good, I had good marks in school, well, everything was going well for me, and from then on I dropped out of school and everything and took an interest in boys, after that. 121-128*

It was during a very violent argument that Marie learnt that her stepfather was not her father. She was nineteen. The truth came out in this emotion moment. There was a physical reaction in Marie to this news. She describes her emotions as her blood boiling. It seems there is pain, and a rage within her. The smashing plates and the tears, together with the banging of the door, signal the announcement. Marie is a young adult when she learns that something about her Father, who then becomes her stepfather and her mother. She says this event is the reason she dropped out of high school and was the catalyst for her interest in boys.

#### **Extract 5**

*Marie: My Stepfather has always been violent.1196*

In a later extract she explains that her stepfather has always been violent. The model of a violent Father figure seems also her way to understand her own violent behaviour.

#### **Extract 6**

*Marie: When she got married Roger forced her to leave her job, so that she was totally dependent on him. 1213-1214*

Marie's dream is to get married. Nevertheless, her references to marriage seem often to be negative as in this quotation. The suggestion here indicates that her stepfather controls her mother as he 'forces' her to stop working. She then becomes dependent on him. It also seems that the mother does not make any major decisions and yet she refuses to tell her daughter about her biological father and apparently the ongoing parental fighting would suggest that

she is not in a position of submission as described by Marie. Another possibility is that she could be fighting back because she is still victimised. It is interesting to note that her sister leaves home to get married at eighteen. Marriage would also seem to be a way of being liberated from the home. And yet her parents remained married despite the fighting.

#### **Extract 7**

*Najat: Two months. I was two months old, but I got to know him later. I first saw him when I was 10, then he disappeared again and then three years later he reappeared. I spent a few days with him in Tours, then he disappeared again. 15-18*

Najat's account also reveals an absent Father at two months. She finally meets her father ten years later. In this extract she met him on various occasions but each time she mentions that he 'disappeared' and then reappears three times. A father she could not rely on.

**Extract 8** *Saida: My journey is a little chaotic because when I was ten years old I lost my Father. When I was twelve, I went into residential care. 6-8*

Saida lost her father at ten. Her parents divorced. This separation for her was a profound loss, causing pain and suffering. Her father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a year later and died when she was twelve. It was a traumatic event for her. She is very emotional when she speaks about her father.

#### **Extract 9**

*Marie: I have only terrible memories. Once I was very young, I had an earache, an earache, I cried and so my Stepfather put me on the balcony, outside, on the balcony, in the middle of winter. My sister left because of the constant fights between my two parents. When she turned 18, she got married and went to live her life. 83-88.*

The phrase "I have only terrible memories" is poignant. Marie recalls this childhood abuse with her earache. She also recalls the constant fighting between her stepfather and mother, whom she calls 'parents'. She understands that her sister got married not out of love but because it was a way of escaping her parent's disputes.

#### **Extract 10**

*Najat : I realised that it was not a man I was looking for, but a father and from that moment my relationship with men changed again, and from there I really sought a relationship with my partner. What has happened is that I have been hard on men. I have always been a little mean to men, and I think about the resentment I had towards my Father who (planter) abandoned us, that's for sure. 7-12*

Realising that she was looking for a father in the men she met, Najat says she has been 'hard' and 'mean' to men because of the resentment she feels towards her father. She does not mention that she has stabbed some of her partners. Her father causes her attitude towards men. There is not a reflection that she is also responsible. In French she uses the verb 'planter' that is slang and can mean not showing up for an appointment, and it can also mean stabbing someone. She uses the plural that her Father abandoned her Mother and also her and her brothers and sisters.

### **Extract 11**

*Najat: When I was seventeen, I found myself in the arms of a forty-year-old man in Paris and that was the moment I said to myself 'I'm not looking for a man, I'm looking for a father'. I was doing so many things I shouldn't. My adolescence lasted a very long time. I think I must have done just about everything. 1243-1247*

In the second interview Najat explains again her search for a father figure. She proudly recounts the excesses she experienced as an adolescent without constraint. She repeats that during this unbridled time of her life she finds herself with a forty-year-old man.

### **Extract 12**

*Najat: In fact, out of four children, there are three different Dads and two of us have the same Dad. He didn't want us. 25-26*

Najat says their father did not want her and her brother. She uses the word Dad to describe the fathers. This is a more affectionate and informal term than father and reflects her emotions and feelings rather than father.

### **Extract 13**

*WB: It was your Stepfather's arrival?*

*Saida: That's what made me ...I didn't accept it. I don't know. I was afraid he would take my Father's place...(pause)756-757*

*WB: What did he do?*

*Then he moved in at home and I didn't want him to and that's it...763*

*WB: How did it feel?*

*(She is gently weeping) It hurts my heart, it hurts me...766*

*WB: What were you thinking?*

*(Hesitates)My Mother would forget my Father, and all that. 769*

Saida describes the way she reacted during the two years between her stepfather moving in when she was ten and her father dying when she was twelve. Her greatest fear was that her stepfather would replace the father whom she adored. The father she adored. When her stepfather moved in, she remembers she didn't want him at home. She was in so much pain. This emotional suffering from grieving and the fear her mother would forget her biological father. They placed twelve-year-old Saida in residential care because the tension was so intense just after the death of her father. She describes this two-year period as the turning point in her life. Firstly divorce, then her stepfather and finally the death of her father.

### **Extract 14**

*Saida: Whereas today I regret it, (Stepfather) He is too kind. He was careful around me. He listened to me, but I was the one who was screwed it up. I was young, and that's it. 826-830*

She now acknowledges that her stepfather wanted to take care of her. He acknowledged her, but she tells of her pain as a ten-year-old was so great that she could not understand. This extract reflects the way Saida can question her past. She highlights the fact she was a child and can discern the intentions of her stepfather. It is still very painful for her as she shows her emotion of sadness as she says she 'regrets' what happened.

### **Extract 15**

*Marie: He knew things about me I never disclosed to my mother or, even less, to my stepfather, so somewhere along the line, I considered him, if I can say so, a little like a father, the father I missed. I think so. He was a male reference and when things didn't go well, it's true that I went to see him, all that and I often cried, I told him my worries what. My worries of all kinds, whether sentimental or health concerns, that's it. 272-283*

Marie had a very long relationship with her partner Paul, the man she killed following a violent argument. They had been seeing each other for over thirty years. She was nineteen when she met him in a gym, and he was sixty. She says she considers him as a father but doesn't explain the role of her stepfather who she thought was her father for the first nineteen years of her life. She met Paul at the time she found out that her father was not her biological father. She also mentioned it was at nineteen she discovered boys. She seems to point to this ambiguous relation with Paul where she would frequently visit him not only for friendship but also for sex. Paul was a confidante for her. She shared intimate details about herself with him she had never disclosed to her parents. She shared her emotional and health fears with him. She mentions that she often cried

### **Extract 16**

*Marie: He was my sports teacher for thirty years and I had a relationship with him at the beginning, that's it. But yes, lately, he was sexually harassing me because he was looking for a sexual relationship and, in the end, he was groping me, all that and it's true that he was*

*blackmailing me a little because I was unemployed at the time and I needed him, he was helping me financially and it's true that I was letting myself do a little. 222-227*

She seems to point to the ambivalence of this relationship. She struggles to make sense of it. He was a father figure, the father she missed, but she is having a sexual relationship with this father figure. She seems to look for an explanation for this relationship. Despite sexual harassment, his pressing sexual demands, groping her, blackmail, she insists she needed him and that he was helping her financially, and in return she continued with this abusive relationship. Marie identifies that she had sought a partner that was 'like' a father. The inner conflict and pressure from Paul draw her to this relationship as seen in these last two extracts. Perhaps the familiarity for this thirty-year relationship gave her security.

#### **Extract 17**

*Marie: So it's hard, I've always been lonely and loneliness is a burden. And I have always been in search of an impossible love with a man and older men have always attracted her. So I think I'm still looking for 'my Father'. That's where I am now. 56-60*

Marie is reliving past trauma in her couple relationships. She confronts the quest for a father by the violence of her stepfather that she suffered as a child. This pain from her childhood seems to remain with her as an adult and in her search for a partner and an "impossible love with a man".

#### **Extract 18**

*Najat: And the day he got his French nationality papers, in fact, he came home; he argued and hit my Mother so hard she almost died; she had to go to hospital because of her injuries. My Mother worked at the hospital. To tell you the truth, he was just there to get his papers and after that my Mother understood. There you go. And after that, their relationship was over. 84-88*



Najat describes one of her mother's partners and the father of one of her brothers. This story was told to her by her mother. Growing up, she learns her own father left her mother when Najaf was two months old. The violence was of such force that her mother ended up in hospital. Najat recounts this story in a matter-of-fact way without emotion. This father figure, originally from Tunisia, had used her mother to secure French nationality. So he based the relationship on this goal. Najat understands that this father figure only sought a material advantage from her mother. This is a scarring memory and an example of male violence, exploitation and abuse of men using women is something that Najat comes back to during the interviews.

### **Extract 19**

*Najat: I don't like talking about my Father very much, but as far as my relationship with men is concerned, it's true that I've always been hard on men and those who could have been good for me and kind to me, and those who were hardworking and had everything going for them, I couldn't stand them in fact. Line 37-41*

Najat makes the link between her father “*I don't like taking about my Father very much*” and the men she has had relationships with throughout her life. She seems to reject men who could be “*good and kind*” to her and is hard with men. This seems to highlight the distrust she places in men. She adds that she could not stand men who were good and kind, hardworking and had things going for them. Her experience of her mother's relationships was disappointing. They caused her mother physical pain, abandonment, and rejection.

### **Extract 20**

*Najat: It was my Mother who told me that this was the only way that one day my Father would contact me. I would meet him thanks to them (Godparents) and that happened ten years later. So, one day when I was at home, he just showed up like that. It was a Tuesday; I remember the first day of the Christmas holidays; I was ten years old. She said to me: “you're*

*going to meet someone today”, my Godmother said. I remember: “Tuesday, someone will come” to my God-Father’s garage because he owned a garage. He owned a garage, the DUPONT garage in PARIS and so, it was the first day of the holidays, and then, here he comes with my half-sister. Oh yes, you know that my Father has a lot of children all over the place. I also got to meet my half-sister who is the same age as my older sister. It was her birthday. She was 17 years old; she was with her boyfriend. They came together. There was my father, and I met his lady friend. Today, I don’t have any contact with any of them. He has children from all over.*

Najat’s account of this first meeting with her father she told with excitement. She recalls details such as it was a Tuesday on the first day of the school vacation. *“You’re going to meet someone today”, my Godmother said. I remember: “Tuesday, someone will come”.* The someone turned out to be a group of people, her father, his partner, her half-sister and her boyfriend. Najat’s godparents were close friends of her father and this link is apparently what led to this meeting. This explanation seems to be a part justification of why her mother had asked this couple to raise Najat. Her godfather’s garage apparently symbolises success for Najat. There seems to be joy and disappointment in this meeting. At last she can meet her father and she discovers a half-sister the same age as her sister. This information seems to suggest that her father had a relationship with another woman at the same time as he was with Najat’s mother. This surprise on the first day of the Christmas holidays was also the birthday of this newly discovered half-sister. The seventeen-year-old half-sister also appears with her boyfriend at this family reunion. Twice Najat insists that her father has many children all over the place. She has since cut-off all contact with her half-sister and father.

## **Extract 21**

*Najat: Now, I don’t want to go into details, but I understood that the things that were said were true when he went to prison. I was 13 when I went to visit him for a few days in town of Tours. In fact, it wasn’t his house, it was a friend’s house, and this friend had a daughter and apparently my Father had been accused of sexual aggression with this girl who was seventeen.*

*WB: seventeen years old?*

*Najat: As far as I know he was defending himself, but when I last saw my Father when I was twenty there were several things that I realised the accusations were true.*

*WB: With this girl?*

*Najat: Yes. It also confirmed some of his behaviour towards me, but I don't want to talk about it. There you go. 1213-1228*

*Najat: He was a crook; he was a thief and then he got into a lot of trouble and my Mother didn't want to follow him. Anyway, I was thirteen when I saw him again when I went to his house for a few days to get to know him a little better. He had reconnected with me. He told me that he never wanted us. (Pause) He said it in a matter of fact way. He then added but since you're here why not take the time to get to know one another? 27-33*

In describing these details, Najat seems resigned to the situation. “*There you go*”. Her father had had ambiguous behaviour towards her she now sees as being inappropriate. Initially, her father had defended his accusation of sexual aggression with the seventeen-year-old adolescent, but subsequently she substantiated the accusations. The rhythm of her speech slowed down as she then explained being told by her Father that he did not want her. There was a pause, and it seemed difficult for her.

## **Extract 22**

*Najat: I found myself in Holland, locked-up by I don't know who and raped. There were two men. After five days they were transferring me to another place to be locked up and used for prostitution. They said this is normal in Holland, it's normal. Girls disappear every day, it's normal. This is something I normally don't talk about. 395-400*

This event coming early in the first interview seems to show Najat's desperate need to be understood and heard. It is something she would not normally share; she says. She met a man who she had seen a few times and who seemed to be a principled man, religious; he prayed regularly each day. Following an argument with her partner, she says she naively accepted

this man's invitation to go to Belgium to visit his family. Instead, a man she trusted led her into a prostitution ring in Holland. This reinforced once again her distrust of men who exploited and abused her. Her distrust of men is based in her life history.

### **Summary of this sub-theme :1**

This first sub-theme shows how the participants, understand the violence around father figures, these men who are very present by their absence continue to affect these women. In thinking about the suffering and pain they endured seems to give a part understanding into their repeated violence with their partners. This initial sub-theme is also an introduction to the remaining sub-themes by providing the first part an intertwined whole.

### **Sub-theme 2: Relations with violent mother figures and their violence**

The second sub-theme, 'Relationship with Mother figures and their violence', reflects how the violence they lived with from either their Mother, biological, step or adopted, also affected their lives. As girls, the relationship with this 'Mother' figure is also important as a model for them. Blaming Mother seemed to be difficult for some of them. This following extract is from the second one hour interview that took place a week after the first interview

#### **Extract 23**

*WB: How have you been since last week?*

*Marie: It disturbed me a little bit.*

*WB: How do you mean?*

*Marie: Well, it brought up memories, painful memories...(Pause)1034-1038*

*Well in relation to my childhood, in relation to my Mother I just don't get along with her, even now. On the phone, it doesn't work. I can communicate with my son but with my Mother it's impossible. It's impossible. (crying). 1041-1045*

Marie reveals the pain of her relationship with her mother immediately. This account came at the beginning of the second interview. As she speaks her emotion is palpable. Tears welling up and she cries. Marie's childhood memories of her relationship with her mother trigger pain. Communication, explaining and being heard with her mother, seems impossible for Marie. She feels she can communicate with her teenage son, but not with her mother. She also says she doesn't get along with her mother. Marie recounts that the relationship with her mother has always been difficult "even now".

#### **Extract 24**

*Marie: I was too close to my Mother. There was too strong a bond of fusion with my Mother. 1261*

*So it's sad because I think I did a little bit of the same thing with my son because he doesn't know his Father. When I became pregnant, I was thirty-three. He left me because he didn't want to have a child and so I was pregnant alone. I had my son alone and I also suffered because of a man I was close too. I've never been married. I'm still a young woman. I'm still a Miss not a Mrs. Concerning his Father I have always told him the truth. I told him about his Father, compared to my Mother who has never revealed anything about my Father. It was during an argument with my Stepfather, I was nineteen, that she announced that my Father was not my biological Father. This man had been spanking me since I was little, often for nothing, and I have never felt real Fatherly love from him. My Mother raised me on her own and that was really hard for her. I also have a sister who is fourteen years older than me and she is the biological daughter of my Stepfather. I always felt that she had privileges that I didn't. She was loved. I've always felt, especially when I was an adolescent, that I was a liability, a millstone. I always felt there was something that didn't function properly. It wasn't smooth. Not normal. Since my adolescence, I've never felt good about myself. I feel unloved. My Mother's love I've never really felt it. I don't even call her Mum; I call her Kiki. 35-53.*

Marie emphasises that she is not like her mother. She has told her son about his biological father. She describes the bonding she experienced with her mother as being too strong, too

close, suggesting there was not space for their separate identities. She links her way of behaving with her son is sometimes similar to that of her mother, *“it’s sad because I think I did a little of the same thing with my son because he doesn’t know his Father.”* She adds, *“I had my son alone, and I also suffered because of a man I was close too”*. Being too close seems to mean love and therefore being more distance is breaking that love. Although he knows the name of his father, he does not ‘know’ him. Curiously, she also compares her mother to herself. *“My Mother raised me on her own and that was hard for her.”* It is not a denial of the stepfather, but that her mother raised her without her biological father. It also seems important to her she never marries, and no one wanted to marry her, highlighting the fact, she says she is still a ‘Miss’ (Mademoiselle) rather than Mrs (Madame).

Marie shows that she does not call her mother mum, but Kiki.

The word Kiki in French first appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, ironically used regarding an unexpected and rapid romantic adventure “Kiki” is also “my penis” and colloquially referred to a lover or husband. (It is also a slang word for the throat or neck. Children commonly use it to describe the penis, a little like Willy in English).

Marie’s narrative also shows that she revealed the truth during an argument. Her older sister left home at eighteen to get married. There seems to be confusion because in the first interview Marie explains how her sister left the family home as quickly as she could by marrying at eighteen. Marie was four years old. Marie also describes how her half-sister had privileges that she didn’t. Her stepfather and mother loved her sister, unlike her.

## **Extract 25**

**Marie explains she had a brief relationship with her mother’s lover. Her mother does not know about this.**

*Marie: I didn’t try to find out more (about her biological Father) because every time I ask my Mother about my real Father, she says ‘It’s none of your business and she gets angry. It’s none of your business, it’s my life, its private’ or she starts crying. She starts crying and says, ‘I’ll tell you later’. 653-657*

*It was illegal to have an abortion at the time of my birth. When she became pregnant, as far as I can understand my Mother said my real Father told her ‘Listen, divorce, leave your husband and come and live with me’ but she refused. The little information I know is that his*

*first name was Joseph, he had Italian family roots, and in addition to that he was in the French riot police. That's all she would tell me. This is the man that my Mother rejected. She didn't want a divorce. Apparently, he tried to strangle her. He was involved in an armed hold-up. He ended up in prison and killed himself in prison from what my Mother said. That's everything I know about my real Father. 106-115*

It seems like a love story that Marie recounts. Her mother in love with this man of Italian origin who asks her to divorce. She refuses. He ends up committing suicide. Marie then speaks about her mother considering an abortion, but that was illegal at the time. Marie then mentions the father of her son who asks her to abort, but she refuses. Her mother seems to hold on to the information about her Italian lover and becomes very emotional when she speaks about the subject. This memory seems painful for her mother with anger and tears as responses to Marie's questions.

#### **Extract 26**

*Marie: I know she (Mother) had a lover, she called him GP because he worked in a decorating shop and his name was Raymond. I was sixteen at the time. I remember him and I was actually jealous of my mother and this man. Once, I tried to seduce him. in fact, I was still a virgin at sixteen. And, while my mother was in town shopping, I quickly nipped out to see him and we actually flirted. We didn't have sexual intercourse. 1837-1843*

*Yeah, he kissed me, he stroked me. I felt like I was taking my mother's place, actually, knowing it was her lover, that's not good, right? 1846-1848*

*It was the hormones that were actually working on me. (laughs).1851*

It is nearly at the end of the second interview that Marie talks about this brief relationship. This revelation came just after she had spoken about being fusional with her mother. “*I felt like I was taking my mother's place, actually, knowing it was her lover*”. Marie appears to understand this incident as linked to a physical need linked to her hormones more than a psychological impulse. She recounted this scene with a smile and at the end laughs about it as if minimising the event. There was no sexual intercourse. She uses a term that is biological

rather than saying we didn't make love. She says she tried to seduce him. Does that mean that she did not succeed? Does seduction only include sexual intercourse? She was jealous of her mother and her lover. It is not clear what she was jealous of and why it caused her to try visit this man and try and seduce him. It seems there was competition with mother.

#### **Extract 27**

*Marie: This feeling, (of not wanting to be a girl as a child) I think, comes from my mother because she already had a daughter, my sister Laurence, and when my Mother was pregnant, I think she was hoping to have a boy. She gave birth to a girl so she must have been disappointed or something like that.*

*Afterwards, my mother was normal with me, like a good mother, but there has always been an ambiguous feeling with her and even now. 348-353*

*I was in high school and in fact I was a scapegoat, what I mean is, the others laughed at me because I always dressed like a boy. Actually, I'm a tomboy. In fact, I always dressed in trousers with sweaters, loose fitting clothes to hide my chest. 291-294*

Marie explains that she thinks her mother wanted a boy and that this disappointment explains her difficulty with her sexuality until her late adolescence. She appears to be looking to understand the suffering she felt during her childhood concerning her mother and her stepfather. She also clearly blames her mother for this feeling. The ambiguous feelings to her mother are also clear when she says she was a 'good' mother who was 'normal' but there was always an unclear feeling between her and her mother.

Marie recalls dressing like a boy at school. Trying to hide her sexuality with baggy clothes. This strategy led to the other children mocking her because of her appearance. She describes herself as a scapegoat. She explains in monotone with little emotion. She says as a teenager she was happier being like a boy than a girl. The tension was more physically violent in Najat's home.

#### **Extract 28**



*Najat: My God. They had a fight together. I'll remember it all my life. My Godmother threw my Mother out. She threw her bag out the door, like a dog, and then she closed the door I was standing there in the hallway crying. 1458-1461*

The trauma of this fight between the two mother figures in her life marked the six-year-old Najat. Children who witness domestic violence often remember the details. The shock and confusion. She loved both women and yet they were here arguing over her. The argument was triggered by Najat's godmother who took Najat's mother to court in an attempt to adopt her to officially adopt her goddaughter. Her 'adopted' mother had thrown her biological mother out. This scene also showed Najat that women can be physically violent.

#### **Extract 29**

*Najat: One day, when I was about five or six, my sister asked me "Who do you prefer? Auntie or Mommy?" She saw I was hesitating; I was thinking before answering. I was in fact maybe seven years old. So then my sister got mad at me 'Why don't you answer? I was caught between two worlds. It was complicated for me. They were fighting, my godmother and mother. They were fighting against me in a way. Who would be the best for me? I was in the middle of both of them and it wasn't easy. 227-234*

As already mentioned, making a choice between her two mothers is impossible. The anger from her sister indicating that she hoped Najat would make the choice of her mother. As she says I was caught up between two worlds. Two worlds, two women who didn't understand each other. She says that they were fighting 'against' her rather than for her. Being in the middle. She had been raised by her godmother while maintaining contact with her mother and brothers and sister. When the choice is difficult the answer for her two mothers was violence.

#### **Extract 30**

*Najat: In fact, I was raised more or less by my godmother. I went to school. As soon as I left the maternity ward after I was born, I was handed over to my godmother. 141-144*

*WB: There were no other children, they only had the son? They had an only child, right?*

*Najat: Uh, yes, but actually, her son was from a previous marriage. When she re-married with my Godfather, they couldn't have any children. 192-202*

*Yes, my Godmother had a preference for me. She wanted me. I don't know why? Sometimes my Brother would come to their house, for holidays or weekends but as we were always fighting, we were like cat and dog, even though we were very close. As soon as we started fighting my Godmother would always defend me. My Brother started to hate her. He didn't want to come over anymore. And that suited her too. 262-268*

These extracts capture the complicated family history for Najat. She received all the attention that she was seeking from her godmother. She became the replacement child. Her godmother had had a twenty-year-old son who was killed in a road traffic accident before Najat was born. Najat seems to indicate that she enjoyed the situation but was nevertheless still attached to her biological family. She adds that despite the fights with her brother she was very close to him. I wonder whether the fact her godmother always took her side in arguments and fights could have led her to believe that she was in some ways all powerful as a little girl. It apparently led to her brother no longer wanting to come over for holidays and weekends. Again, she is pulled between having been given away just after her birth by her Mother and of maintaining a contact with her family.

### **Extract 31**

*Najat: My Godmother died when I was thirteen. She had a twenty-year-old son who died in a car accident and that's why she tried to adopt me and take me away from my Mother. She went to the courts, she wanted to adopt me. I was raised for more than half that time by my godmother. 243-246*

Najat's account is delivered with little emotion. Her godmother died. There is the link with the death of her son. And then an explanation of why she tried to adopt her.

### **Extract 32**

*Najat: You don't know if I'm coming home, I don't come home. You don't know who I am with, you don't know what I'm doing, you don't know if I'm coming home, what I'm doing with my life, that's it and then, so, she answers me, for all these years, I trusted you. That's where I blame her because Mom, you don't trust a thirteen-year-old girl who thinks she knows everything. You don't trust her. This is a thirteen-year-old child, she doesn't know what she's doing and especially when you haven't explained the facts of life too her. 1672-1679*

At the age of thirteen Najat returned home following the death of her godmother. Her mother was working and so she could do whatever she liked when she liked. Looking back, she now realises the danger she was in. The criticism is of her mother. The mother answers that she trusted her daughter. Najat realise that a thirteen-year-old does not have the experience of life to be safe. It is one of the rare times that she openly blames her mother. She recounts this situation with her voice becoming raised, becoming angry. She seems to raise the question if she is wanted and loved. “*You don't know if I'm coming home, I don't come home. You don't know who I am with, you don't know what I'm doing, you don't know if I'm coming home, what I'm doing with my life*”. She switches between talking about her mother to addressing her words to her mother as if she is there. Saida experienced a rupture with her mother at the age of twelve.

### **Extract 33**

*Saida: And then, at the age of 12, I go to residential care. 23*

*Well, actually my mother went back to work, she met my stepfather and that's where I got a little out of control about it because I didn't want her to start a new life, all that.*

*W: For what reason?*

*C: I don't know, I didn't want to. I just wanted to stay with her and that's it. 64-70*

When talking about her mother Saida is sad. Her voice is so soft it is almost difficult to hear her. The rupture created by her mother's new partner and the death of her father seems to suggest that Saida's wish to have her mother for herself was not possible. She minimises the situation, *"I got a little out of control "*. Her mother back at work, and the catalyst for her violence the refusal that her mother starts a new life. At the age of twelve until sixteen Saida cut-off all communication with her mother and stepfather from the time she was placed in residential care. In my notes I wrote down 'abandoned, loss?'. Her father dying and the changes in her mother's life *"I just wanted to stay with her and that's it"*.

#### **Extract 34**

*Saida: No, she doesn't hit, she gets angry, she screams. She doesn't become violent like that but... she's calmer, she's more... she's a Mother, she doesn't hit my stepfather but... She is violent in what she says sometimes....580-583*

Saida gives examples of her mother's violence. She describes screaming and anger but that it does not translate into physical violence. It suggests that for Saida that her mother is not really violent. Interestingly she thinks and hesitates when she says, *"she's calmer, she's more... she's a mother"*. It would seem the status of motherhood removes the possibility of violence. Although her mother does not hit her stepfather, she is violent in the things she says. It seems as if she is protecting her mother from being described as violent.

#### **Extract 35**

*Saida: I had a beautiful childhood. I remember the good memories; I went to summer camp....45-46*

*Things went downhill when she (Mother) didn't listen to me when I told her not to re-start her life again, I wasn't listening to her, that's all. 751-753*

*I went to a residential care home and I quickly sank into petty crime and then I went to a young offender's institution home and all that, justice and everything and that's it.*

*W: So what happened next in your life?*

*C: Well, not much except that sometimes I ended up in police custody, sometimes they (her parents) came to get me.*

*W: Okay. What did you do?*

*C: Theft, little bullshit.*

*W: Okay. And so, drugs, alcohol.*

*C: And yes, I started using drugs. And then my real problem started, I think.*

*W: And what did you take?*

*C: At first, it was just shit (cannabis). All those years, it was shit.*

*W: Okay, and what happened?*

*C: Well, after that, I was stealing to get some. I was doing something stupid to get it. I even stole my mother once.*

*W: Until about what age?*

*C: What? Well, after that, I went to prison when I was a minor.*

*W: Oh yes, right. At what age?*

*C: 16 years old. 74-99*

Saida's spiral into delinquency, petty crime and drugs she says is her mother's fault because she would not listen to her twelve-year-old daughter and stop her relationship with her new boyfriend. Saida also refused to listen to her mother. At twelve she seems to be suffering so much from the changes in her home life and unable to communicate about them that she went into a sort of shut down. Refusing contact and communication with her parents until she is taken into residential care. There is a sense of heaviness when she says she 'sank' into petty crime. Notice her use of the word justice and everything. Does she see it as just or unjust? She spent a few weeks in a juvenile prison as a minor and also had a number of suspended sentences. Her run-ins with the police were frequent and 'sometimes' her parents would come and other times no. What was she trying to say with this behaviour? She talks about theft and underlines "*I even stole my Mother once*". She seemed angry when she spoke about this incident. Suggesting that it was an even graver offence than simple theft. Perhaps suggesting that stealing from her mother was like taking a part of her mother.

### **Extract 36**

*Saida: Yeah, then it was the police custody and all that and my mother cut off, little by little bit the bridges between us and everything 915-916*  
*I needed her (her Mother), I was in pain, I was in pain. 950*

Saida explains that over time following the intervention of the police her Mother started to distance herself from her daughter, perhaps suggesting her suffering as a Mother. Saida's use of a bridge is interesting because it is a way of getting over obstacles, but the bridge could contain a toll and so using the bridge will depend upon whether price to pay. I wondered about if she felt she was being abandoned by her mother. She became so unlovable by her acts that even her mother would abandon her confirming that she was a bad mother. As she said in a previous extract "*She's a mother*" and mothers aren't violent. At sixteen Saida was sent to prison. She then clearly says that she needed her mother. It seems to be a call for help. She repeats twice that she was in pain. She seemed lost and sad as she said these words. Perhaps the drugs she started taking eased the pain for the duration of their effect. Once the effect wore off the reality was always there.

### **Summary of sub-theme**

This second theme is woven with the first sub-theme. The parental couple and their representation to their children and in particular the representations for these three women leads to the introduction of the third sub-theme and their relationships with their families and helping us understand how these three themes come together as part of the explanation of how these three women understand their violence in a couple relationship.

### **Sub-theme 3: Relationships with violent families and violence**

#### **Extract 37**

*Well, she (Mother) felt trapped in a way. Well, she didn't actually have a social life and since she was abandoned by my stepfather, she met men because he cheated on her. At work, he had a secretary and she told me that it was his mistress. And so, my mom, she was affected*

*by that and so, as a result, she cheated on him and that's why she met my biological father with whom she had an extramarital relationship and so I, well, that's why I'm here. 1225-1231*

*Because he abandoned her, so she needed, as a woman, to be loved, I think. 1235-1236*

*Yes, they never divorced. I don't know why. Even now, they are together, they fight regularly. It's all the time, fighting.*

Her family memories are of fights between her stepfather and mother. Although they never divorce, she appears to try and understand the cause of this tension. Marie shares her understanding of her mother who 'trapped' and without a 'social life'. She implies her stepfather abandoned her mother sexually following his relations with other women, notably his secretary. She recounts how her mother was affected by this and it was this event that led her to have affairs herself. Marie's biological father was met in this way and as Marie says in a matter of fact way "*that's why I'm here.*" Marie justifies her mother's behaviour because "*as a woman, to be loved,*" and she had been 'abandoned' and she had no "*social life*" and "*she felt trapped.*" I wondered if Marie was talking about herself or her mother. Her mother after all was still with her stepfather. She had never divorced. The couple were regularly fighting. Interestingly there is no reflection about her stepfather. Why did he have these affairs, with his secretary and other women? Why did they stay together as both their children had now left home? Marie uses the word cheated twice in referring to her parent's sexual behaviour. He cheated on her, she cheated on him. She seems to be saying that the behaviour is justified. Nevertheless, this parental couple have always fought and continue fighting toady. Marie says she doesn't know why? This way of relating is the couple model Marie grew up with. A 'successful' couple fight continuously and have affairs. As she says, "*Even now, they are together*".

### **Extract 38**

*WB: So they are always fighting?*

*Marie: I know because my son told me on the phone. He recently said: "You know, Grandma and Grandpa, they fight a lot". That's it, it's even quite violent because my*

*Father, the other day, a month ago, shook my Mother. He said to me, "Grandpa shook Grandma." Again, at their ages! Until their last breath, that's how they'll work. There, my Sister was smart, she left right away. I wasn't smart, I stayed in this hell, in this negative atmosphere. 1243-1249*

Marie's speech is more animated. The physical violence that she witnessed as a child is still present and now being transmitted to her son. The couple are now in their early eighties and that shocked their grandson "*Again, at their ages!*" . She sees the atmosphere as "negative" and like "hell". Admiring her elder sister who at eighteen got married and left. She criticises herself for not having done the same thing. Perhaps regret that she stayed at home as a young woman. Her account suggests that her parents 'work' like that, "*Until their last breath*".

### **Extract 39**

*Marie:*

*WB: Okay. And Mom had brothers and sisters? 862-897*

*Marie: Oh, yes. Oh, my God, many brothers and sisters (laughs). She had two sisters and three brothers, but one of them died.*

*WB: So that makes six children?*

*Marie: Yes.*

*WB: And on Roger's side?*

*Marie: I saw my Grandparents when I was a child. He had a sister, that's all.*

*WB: So, the grandparents on the father's side, you didn't have any contact?*

*Marie: I was a little girl.*

*WB: And on Mom's side?*

*Marie: I don't remember. I know I must have seen them, but only a little.*

*WB: All these children, your mother's brothers and sisters, it makes one big family.*

*Marie: Yeah. No contact, none. My mother... I don't know. I have cousins....*

*WB: Of course, I imagine. Maybe they're all in a relationship.*

*Marie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, it's not a normal family, I think, huh?!*

*WB: I don't know what is normal?*



*Marie: I don't know. I don't know what to say right now.*

*WB: No memory of the big family. It was mom, Roger and your sister, Laurence who was much, much older. 14 years older. When you were 4 years old, she left so you have no memory... You were almost like an only child at one point.*

*Marie: Yes.*

*WB: Were you close to your mother?*

*Marie: Yes, close to my Mother.862-897*

Do larger family units threaten Marie's family? Marie has a large extended family that she does not know. It would seem that the small family unit was what her parents wanted and excluded the extensive family. Marie questions whether or not her family unit is 'normal'. In French society the extended family is often important, as a resource and for the transmission of values etc. In Marie's case despite having a large extended family there is no contact. She was relaxed and laughed when she described her Mother's family. She remembers the numbers but no other memory. Her tone changed during her account. As I started enquiring about the detail concerning her larger family there to be a void. As can be seen in the above dialogue towards the end Marie is lost for words. She seems bothered that she cannot explain why there is no contact with her uncles and aunts and cousins. At one stage she stopped herself from saying something about her mother, "*Yeah. No contact, none. My mother...(pause)*". She has no recall if she has seen them or not. Marie's description of the rupture with her larger family highlights the small nuclear family in which she lives and her as a single mother. Her sister moved away, married and had a child. Again, there is little contact. She does not seem to be able to say why there is no contact except that it is not a 'normal' family.

#### **Extract 40**

*Najat : And, anyway, they wouldn't have had time because my Grandfather, he went to jail at that time for murder, anyway!*

*WB: Your grandfather.*

*Najat: My Grandfather who raped my mother.*

*WB: Oh, I didn't know that. All right.*

*Najat: And my first aunt who died too. My Grandmother, with her children, they were in Algeria, in a small room, all together. There was an uncle too. Finally, they arrived in France, in France, it was fashion, smoking, alcohol, I don't know. So, my Aunt, the eldest above my Mother, she was 14 years old. My Grandfather, he put a glass of wine on the table, cigarettes and says - now you smoke or drink or you'll be beaten. He forced her. So, she became an alcoholic and he did the same thing to my Grandmother. 1555-1569*

*Najat: So, my Grandmother took advantage of the fact that he was in prison to divorce and she no longer saw him, so yes, she suffered a lot. A understand a lot of the things she did. She lived through the Algerian war; it marked her so much. When she found an empty tube of toothpaste in a dustbin, for example, she would open it, she would scrape out any remaining toothpaste that was in it. For her, it was like sweets. Really, it was hard. She was deprived of so much that she made sure that we lacked nothing but at the same time she, on the psychological side she wasn't well. 1575-1584*

Najat's description of her family reveals a history of violence. Her maternal grandfather who was sentenced to prison for violence and who had also raped her mother. An aunt who died. She describes the small room in which the family lived including an uncle. She reveals the suffering and difficulties for her family who lived through the civil war in Algeria. This major traumatic event left scars in the family. Her grandmother she says had been affected psychologically, by the deprivation and poverty. The Algerian war started in 1954 and finished in 1962. It was a colonial war that has been compared to the Vietnam war for the USA. Historically France is still coming to terms with this conflict that traumatised the nation. Najat goes on to describe the how her Algerian immigrant family understood France. It was a country of fashion, alcohol, and cigarettes. The alcoholism of her grandmother and aunt is blamed on the grandfather who forced these women to drink or be beaten. The aunt was fourteen and I made a parallel between this event and the kir that Najat's Father bought her when she was fourteen. In her account it appears that her grandmother was a woman of character. Coming from a very poor immigrant family she decided to divorce her husband when he was in prison, "*my Grandmother took advantage of the fact that he was in prison to divorce and she no longer saw him*". Divorce at this time was complicated. In this section Najat describes her grandfather as violent threatening to beat her aunt and her grandmother.

He raped her grandmother and is sentenced for murder. The impact of this family history is important for Najat. She recalls in detail these accounts that explain how some of the women in her family had suffered.

#### **Extract 41**

*Najat: No, actually they were friends of my father and mother's, she knew. She told me years later why she was leaving me so much at home. Because, well, my godmother already lost her son at the age of 20 in a car accident, so my mother had four children. She tried to adopt me even and everything, she went to court. 201-204*

Here Najat speaks about her godparents who were friends of the family and were called godparents although there had been no religious ceremony, they had been named by Najat's mother. To her brothers and sisters, they were uncle and aunty again with no blood ties. Apparently the informal between the adults was that Najat would be looked after them however as time went by the relationship soured and the godparents went to court to adopt Najat. However, they did not succeed in their legal request. Najat understands that she was a replacement child following the death of her godmother's son. I wonder how she must have felt being at the centre of this conflict between her mother and godparents. Her mother explains to her 'years later' her reason for handing her over to their friends. It seems to imply that Najat was asking questions trying to understand.

#### **Extract 42**

*Najat: Ah, I had a very long and difficult adolescence. The problem is, I'm the youngest. My mother raised us on her own. It's not easy with her job as a cleaner at the hospital and changing shifts. So, my older sister played a little bit of the role of mommy too. If we were doing something stupid, she'd be the one to blame. If something went wrong, she was responsible. 275-280*

Najat had a very long and difficult adolescence was difficult and long. Her mother was working full time and it was her elder sister that had the job of raising her when her mother was absent. It would seem that her sister who is four years older than Najat carried a lot of responsibility despite Najat saying her adolescence was long and difficult. She added that her mother raised her on her own, but she doesn't mention her godparents who were also very present for her for more than half of this period. She also seems to say that as the youngest she somehow did not have the same discipline as the others and seems to have no responsibility for her actions. The family have a role in her upbringing. She mentions the absence of her mother.

#### **Extract 43**

*Najat: She was a year and a half old when Hamid first hit me, and she talked about it for a very long time. She remembered it for a very long time, she was traumatised. So, yeah, I used to leave her at my mother's very often because things were starting to get really bad between us and I didn't want her to be in the middle of it all and, on top of that, I was already pregnant with William, my second. 558-563*

Najat's explanation demonstrates how she soon found herself in a violent family situation. Her youngest daughter remembers what happened and Najat says she was traumatised by it. She insists that her daughter talked about it for a long time and remembered it for a long time that suggest it was a violent scene. As the violence escalated, she would prefer to leave her daughter at her mother's house. She goes on to say she didn't want her to be in the middle of it which made me think of Najat being in the middle of fighting between her mother and godmother. I also noted that removing her daughter echoed with her being removed from the family home.

#### **Extract 44**

*Najat: I let Hamid be violent, and it lasted three years, violence with the father of my children. Already, I didn't understand why I let myself be taken in and all those who knew*

*about it said afterwards: "but you, you let yourself be beaten by a man?" they know my character and how I am. Well, yes. Even I don't fully understand with hindsight, I think to myself, but here we are, at last, and in addition knowing that we stay for the children but that in the end, it's not doing them any favours. The day I clicked was when I had the baby in my arms, and he took my Bible and hit me with the baby in my arms with my Bible. So, I said it's over. 806-815*

There is acceptance of Hamid's violence in what Najat is saying "*I let Hamid be violent*". In other violent situations Najat has stabbed men. This time she seems to accept the situation. It lasted for three years. Hamid's status as the father of her children seems to change her position. She says she was 'taken in'. The children and the family have an importance for her. When she realises that her children are being affected by the violence, she decides to end the relationship. Symbolically she is holding a baby and a bible when Hamid hit her again. It's as if the value of family and a sort of 'moral' value were both challenged. Later she mentions "*but here we are, at last*", she has started a family and it is not going as planned. Those who know her well were surprised she let a man beat her. She was known as a woman who would stand up for herself.

#### **Extract 45**

*Najat: Actually, no. They were Godparents for my Brother Loïc and me but, in fact, they only cared for me. 237-238*

*Yes, yes, they only cared for me, yeah. 240*

One of the things that is striking in this narrative is that she is the centre of attention for her godparents despite initially also being godparents for her brother.

#### **Extract 46**

*Najat: At one point, I couldn't see my children anymore. I blamed myself for the bad decisions I had made. I wanted to destroy myself, let's say, punish myself. In retrospect,*

*now I know, but before I didn't. I met bad people, I took drugs, I smoked crack, I took heroin, end of story. Well, it didn't last very long because I don't like not being in control, so it didn't last very long. 690-695*

At one-point Najat lost access to her children because of her drug use that had led to child neglect. Being in control is also an important part of how she sees herself. Here she accepts that her decisions led her to this point. She then turns her anger against herself through drugs and wanting to destroy herself or punish herself. Being in control seems to also have been the key to helping her pull through this period of her life.

#### **Extract 47**

*Najat: He's a jerk (Laughs). He's pathetic in fact, my Mother told me why they got married. Actually, I don't know if they were married. I don't remember if they were married. She said that the first man to offer her a bouquet of flowers, that would be the man she would marry, and it was him, that's it. 94-98*

Najat gives an example of how her mother chose one of her partners. Najat mocks this man, she laughs as she describes him as a “jerk” and “pathetic”. The romantic gesture of offering flowers as a gift was the gauge that her mother used in selecting this man. No other criteria apparently were considered.

#### **Extract 48**

*Najat: I am 35 years old, I have five children, and they are also suffering. How did I get myself into this situation? I did a lot of work on myself and I now say to myself...recently I spent three days where I saw one of Brothers and he said to me: Do you realize that you have a problem? This sentence, it went around in my head. We had conversations and I then said to myself: “Why do I put myself in these situations? How can I avoid these situations? How?*

*How? In the end, I did a lot of work on myself and my life and I realised that all this was not normal. 1717-1727*

*I was also mad at my Brothers. I was always trying to get their attention when I was growing up so I did a lot of crap. I had a long and difficult adolescence. I did a lot of things, but I was trying to get attention because I thought no one was interested in me. No one wondered what I was doing, with whom, and I finally discover twenty years later that in fact they wanted to protect me, and it was my mother who wouldn't let them. And today, she continues to say, "but I trusted you". But you don't trust a thirteen-year-old child. I made mistakes, and fortunately at least I agree with my children's dads on parenting. They're not going to go out even if it's a sleepover with a girlfriend or whatever if I don't know who they are with and where they are. 1681-1691*

This extract captures Najat's thinking about her current situation. She seems to be trying to understand her violence. Her anger is sparked by not being understood and not heard, "No one wondered what I was doing, with whom, and I finally discover twenty years later that in fact they wanted to protect me and it was my mother who wouldn't let them." Her mother intervened and stopped her brothers from trying to protect their little sister. She also seems to have understood that despite her various attention seeking tactics they apparently did not succeed. She says she wants a different education for her children. She says she, "did a lot of work on myself and my life and I realised that all this was not normal." She repeated that she has done a lot of work on herself. She seemed very determined. She says she suffered in her family unit growing up. Now the challenge for this mother of five is real. Her children have been witnesses to very violent scenes with her partners as well as their mother being separated from them and the custody for the moment with the fathers.

#### **Extract 49**

*Saida: I have contact on my mom's side and on my dad's side, I haven't heard from his family. 472-473*

*After his death, there were stories, and my mother cut off contact with them. 495-496*  
*Well, actually, with my father's and mother's family, they don't get along, with each other, so I think she's (Mother) cut off the links and that's it. 1220-1221*  
*Yes, she must have suffered when he died, I know she's torn, I know. 1139*  
*I used to go with my father's family to see him in hospital, and they would come and get me. 1145*  
*Dad was suffering yes. He couldn't talk, he was too weak, too ill, white skin. I have memories like that, I could see he wasn't well. Through a child's eyes, you don't see it as it is. 1156-1158*  
*I thought that he would get better because the hospital for me was where people were healed so I thought he would get better. 1161-1163*  
*I'm curious about my Dad's family, but they left me all this time. When I needed them there was no one there? 514-515*  
*Well, things went wrong when they got divorced, they were no longer living together...1090-1091*

### **Extract 50**

Saida talks about her family. Up until her father's death from cancer, she was in contact with them, *"I used to go with my Father's family to see him in hospital, and they would come and get me."* When the contact between Saida and her father's family was stopped she understands it was her mother's decision because *"they don't get along, with each other, so I think she's (Mother) cut off the links and that's it."* Saida's father had just died and now his family are no longer in contact with his twelve-year-old daughter. In very soft voice she describes her mother's suffering saying she knows that she was torn. Her new partner and her former partner who died. At the time it seems that Saida did not understand, but now as an adult she has another point of view. *"Through a child's eyes, you don't see it as it is."* She is referring to her father's illness but also perhaps to herself now. She finishes though saying when she needed her father's family, they were not present. Nevertheless, she still insists things started going wrong following the divorce when she was ten years

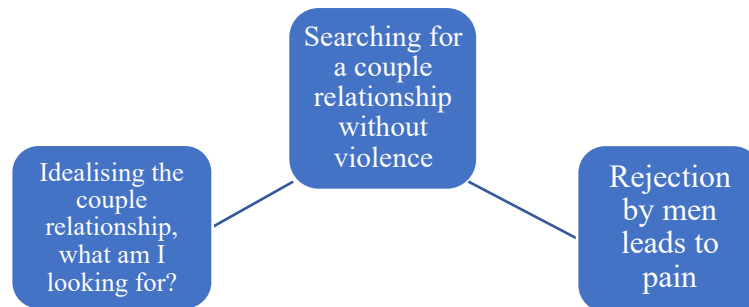


old. The same year her half-sister was also born. Her confidence in the health professionals who would heal her father in the hospital came as a blow. She thought he would get better, but he died. It suggests that she did not fully understand what was happening.

### **Summary of sub-theme 3: Relationships with families and Violence**

The theme shows the women's childhood traumatic and violent experiences in families that influence their intimate relationships. Rage and violence have become embodied. Sometimes they recognise this and sometimes they do not. Hence their accounts that are complicated and confused as they attempt to understand.

## **SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 2: SEARCHING FOR A COUPLE RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT VIOLENCE**



**Figure 3: Super-ordinate theme 2**

This second superordinate theme attempts to understand the partners that the participants choose and subsequently are violent with once they have formed a couple. There are two sub-themes. The first considers the idealising of the couple relationship asking, what am I looking for? The second sub theme follows on with rejection by men and violence.

### **Sub-theme 4: Idealising the couple relationship. What am I looking for?**

#### **Extract 51**

1. *WB: How old was he?*
2. *Marie: ninety-one years old. I knew him when I was 19.*
3. *WB: Oh yes, right.*
4. *Marie: I was nineteen years old.*
5. *WB: What about him, sixty-one years old?*

6. *Marie: Yes. but he wasn't, I'm telling you, he wasn't his age. He looked younger; you know. He was younger, athletic; we played sports together. It was good, we even had some pleasant times together.*

7. *WB: What were the things that attracted you to this man?*

8. *Marie: Well, actually, he was listening to me. I confided in him a lot and I confided like no one else.*

9. *WB: Did he have other relationships? He had an affair with you, but he had other women. Marie: Yes, he had other women, yes. He married several times, several children with different women, yes. It's hard to talk about all this! 255-283.*

*Marie: Yes, it's true that as he (Paul) got older he had trouble getting erections, and he took herbs and things to help him get hard. It's true he was very focused on sex 255-257*

*Umm - listen. I explained to him that I had lunch with my ex. Simon. Paul knew that I had a relationship that made me suffer. The thing that made me suffer even more was Simon's sister, who I think was practicing magic on me. The evil eye, black magic, and all that. 570-573*

They maintained their relationship until they had a violent argument, and Paul died from his injuries. It was an open relationship with both of them seeing other partners. Marie never lived with him. Paul seems to have been jealous. She has only lived with one of her partners for a few months when she was in her early twenties, but it didn't work out and she went back home to her mother. She has fond memories of Paul. In this part of the interview her tone changed suddenly. She moved from a gentle and softly spoken voice to a raised aggressive voice when she said, "*It's hard to talk about all this!*". She seemed to try to understand her violence as she talks about the sister of her ex-boyfriend, Simon, who she claims practised black magic on her.

## **Extract 52**

*Marie: In fact, it was ambiguous. It was unclear the situation; it was unhealthy. 1179-1180*

*Well, I have a problem myself; I have this trouble, like my Mother. 910-911*

*I love my son. I sometimes take him in my arms, kiss him, all that, but I'm not...917-918.*

*There's a discomfort or something like that, maybe. I don't know. I don't know. No, I love him, but....921-922*

*I'm already angry because I didn't give him a father and I know the pain of not having a father.925-926*

Marie explains why showing physical affection is difficult to her. There appears to be a lot of repetition in her behaviour. She is like her mother not showing affection. She has also given birth to a child with no contact from the father. The relationship with Paul was not clear. She describes their thirty-year relationship as unclear, unhealthy and ambiguous. In expressing her anger, Marie projects the pain she feels about not knowing her father to her son's situation of a father who does not want to know him. She seems uncomfortable with showing her son affection, *"There's a discomfort or something like that, maybe. I don't know. I don't know. No, I love him, but...."*. Her mother did not show physical affection either to Marie or to her stepfather. She understands her difficulty in showing affection as coming from her mother. *"Well, I have a problem myself, I have this trouble, like my Mother."*

### **Extract 53**

*Marie: And I have always been in search of an impossible love with a man and I have always been attracted to older men than me. So, I think I'm still looking for "my Father". That's where I am now.57-60*

In this extract Marie describes how she wants to live a couple relationship. She searches for an 'impossible' love, because she is not looking for a lover, but her Father. She understands her failure in this quest for a partner by her attraction to older men. She is constantly pulled between love for a man and her attraction to older men.

### **Extract 54**

*Marie: My relationship with Fred lasted two years, but my parents always interfered with my love relationships. They thought Fred was not good enough because he didn't work hard enough, because he was a little lazy. He also stole things from shops. My Mother always interfered in my love life, so she made me lose my first love. Then I met Victor. She got in the way with that relationship too, but Victor was quite a character. They went out with each other for six months, but it didn't work out and then I went back to my parents' house. 401-408*

Her account of her first boyfriends includes the interference from her parents and in particular her mother. Fred and Victor were both five years older than her.

#### **Extract 55**

*Marie: And what happened? Actually, he (Victor) was sterile, but I didn't know that. And I met the father of my son, David. After two months with David, I got pregnant because I wasn't taking the pill, no contraception, because I thought I was the one who was sterile and, in fact, it turns out it was Victor. And so, in the meantime, when the Father of my son let me down, I fell in love with my doctor. My complicated relationships. (laughs), they're complicated. 472-479*

Marie saw Victor for nine years. They never lived together. She then met David. Their relationship lasted six months. During this time Marie discovered she was pregnant. In her account she says that she thought she was sterile. She laughs about her different relationships. Her complicated relationships also raise the question about her choices of partner.

#### **Extract 56**

*Marie: And then, after Vincent, I fell in love with a man 20 years older than me; it was my doctor, my former doctor, who did acupuncture, Jean-Claude, his name was. I say, formerly because he died of intestinal cancer, that's why. 414-417*

Throughout her different relationships she has always been in a relationship as an adult. Paul had been a constant partner for over thirty years. Marie then recounts what happened with her next boyfriend.

#### **Extract 57**

*Marie: And then I met Bertrand, the last boyfriend with whom I had a relationship for eight years and, then he left me. Bertrand left me in August 2018, and I couldn't handle the break-up. 489-491*

*It hurts to talk about my background. It hurts me. (pause) It hurts me. 1508-1509*

This extract captures the pain and suffering of recalling her relationships and how they touch Marie deeply. Bertrand left her after eight years. She says the rupture was very difficult. She says she had projected. She implies her quest for her couple has yet again eschewed.

#### **Extract 58**

*Marie: I know she (Mother) had a lover, she called him GP because he worked in wallpaper galleries and his name was Raymond and I was sixteen. I remember him and I was actually jealous of my mother and this man. Once, I tried to seduce him. In fact, at sixteen years old, I was still a virgin. And, while my mother was out in town shopping, I quickly went to see him, and we flirted. There had been no sexual intercourse. 1837-1843*

*Yeah, he kissed me; he stroked me. I felt like I was taking my mother's place knowing it was her lover, that's not good, right? 1846-1848*

*It was the hormones that were actually working on me. (laughs).1851*

She smiles as she recalls how she seduced her mother's lover at sixteen. Marie did not know at this point that her father was her stepfather. Her smile and laughter suggest the pleasure she had in this brief relationship. Crossing a forbidden line of secretly being with him.

It is nearly at the end of the second interview that Marie talks about this brief relationship. This revelation came just after she had spoken about being fusional with her mother. "I felt

*like I was taking my mother's place, actually, knowing it was her lover". Marie appears to understand this incident as linked to a physical need linked to her hormones more than a psychological impulse. She recounted this scene with a smile and at the end laughs about it as if minimising the event. There was no sexual intercourse. She uses a term that is biological rather than saying we didn't make love. She says she tried to seduce him. Does that mean that she did not succeed? Does seduction only include sexual intercourse? She was jealous of her mother and her lover. It is not clear what she was jealous of and why it caused her to try visit this man and try and seduce him. It seems there was competition with mother.*

### **Extract 59**

*Marie: I always hung on to her, I was very jealous, very possessive and it apparently when someone approached my Mother, a man in this case, I would scream and scream. I didn't want anyone near my Mother. That said, there wasn't really any tactile, physical exchange. Not too many hugs, and all that. 900-904*

Here Marie speaks about her reaction to men approaching her mother as a young child. Her mother describes her as a possessive child. Marie adds that her mother was not tactile, and she doesn't remember and cuddles or hugs. I noted perhaps Marie felt her relationship was one way. That it wasn't reciprocal. What made her scream? Being left alone and the idea this man could take her mother away. What impact would this have in the adult Marie for her couple relationships?

### **Extract 60**

*Marie: All the men I've loved, they didn't make me happy, none of them. 1485*  
*Hmm, Fred, it was dramatic because it took me three years to recover. He's the only one I've had three years of mourning for. Oh, yes, Fred hurts. Despite this, I had reconnected with Fred and now I feel that I no longer love him as I did before and neither did, he. He has made a new life for himself. He had children, left his wife and met another woman. 1488-1493*

She states that none of the men she knew made her happy. She later talks about the three years it took her to get over her relationship with Fred. Using the word ‘mourning’ as she likens it to a death. Later she contacts him and realises that she did not have the same feelings for him as she did before.

#### **Extract 61**

*Najat: Yes, but I was very angry with Ahmad because in short, I don't want to go into all the details because it's a very long story, it's complicated, it's a bit boring actually and, I blamed him for things. I left him because, five months pregnant at the time, because it was a misunderstanding that was not discussed until five years later. That I thought he knew about it and in fact that no, all this about a misunderstanding and, therefore, me, in the meantime, what happened was that I left him but as I always had contact with Hamid, anyway I never liked him Ahmad, so Hamid, he followed me, along my pregnancy, we were very, very close. He was the first person to see Myriam when she was born, Ahmad's daughter, at birth, he came to the maternity ward. 501-512*

A misunderstanding between Najat and Ahmad explains her anger with her former partner that resolved five years later. Despite being pregnant with his daughter, she turned to an earlier boyfriend, Hamid. His presence at the birth of her daughter seems to set the scene for an ongoing relationship.

#### **Extract 62**

*Najat: No, but wait, it's complicated there with him because there was Ahmad. Hamid, he was in prison, but we kept in touch. We were still friends; we were still very close. So, Ahmed, I never liked him, but I said: why not, he'll be a wonderful dad and a suitable husband? I was getting to know him. I stayed with him for a while and then, unintentionally; I got pregnant with my first daughter, Myriam. 363-368*

She reluctantly accepts Ahmad because Hamid was in prison. Ahmad was a dutiful husband and father in the couple they formed. She seems to have accepted that she would settle down



with him despite not being attracted to him. She then says that ‘unintentionally’ she became pregnant.

### **Extract 63**

*Najat: Yeah, After Hamid, I didn't believe in love anymore. We fell in love; it was with one look. It was love at first sight; it was such a passionate love, and I suffered so much from it. I thought I couldn't love anyone anymore; I didn't think I could open my heart. That's why I was resigned to my situation. I don't care, I'll stay with him even if I don't love Ahmad. I found qualities in him as a husband and as a father. And then, over time, these qualities eventually disappeared. Finally, there was nothing interesting left. Over time, I realised, through an event that I don't want to talk about, that I could finally love someone else and be happy. 656-665*

Najat describes her relationships, one being of a passionate love affair, the other resignation with a man she didn't love. She then re-discovered this passionate love when she had a relationship with another man.

### **Extract 64**

*Najat: No, I don't blame her (mom) because it was for a good reason when I... Well, at the time, in my childhood, it's true that I was disturbed, that I didn't understand too much, but then, as I grew up, I understand that it was for a good reason so I could meet my father one day, that's all. I have the same mentality, I would not prevent my children, despite the war (arguments and fights) I may have had with their fathers, from knowing their father, having grown up without a father. I'm more like running after their dads and saying - look they're still, your kids have to see you, that's it, don't mix things up. 1656-1663*

In this account, Najat explains how she sees the role of parents. Friends raised her when her mother gave her away as a baby. “it's true that it disturbed me, that I didn't understand too much”. In my notes I jotted down, ‘How did this impact on Najat and her future relationships?’

Maintaining a contact with her biological Father explains the reason given by her mother for giving her away as a baby. She insists on the importance of the father. This has echoes in her couple partnerships. The fathers of her children are all in contact with her children.

#### **Extract 65**

*Najat: I left him when he went to prison, but I wanted to settle down, start a family, settle down. I was tired of having friends around. I didn't care much. It's true that I had a lot of relationships, but I was very aggressive to men, I didn't care. And one day, there was this Ahmad, who is the father of my other children, he is a Moroccan. 354-358*

Hamid went to prison, and she describes leaving him at this moment. Having children and settling down was her aim. She understands that with her different partners she had been aggressive. She mentions twice that she didn't care until she met Ahmad. She set up a home and have two children with him.

#### **Extract 66**

*Saida: I don't know, I miss him. I don't know what I miss. Getting high, smoking drugs or something.*

*Something that attracts me a little when I'm struggling because when I go out, when I decide to leave home, I don't necessarily have a lot of money so sometimes I struggle. 1684-1688*

*Well, I'm looking for a guy who gets respect for all this, who, you know what I mean. Who's a man what, then it's... 255-256*

Talking about her former partner, Saida wants a man who has charisma and commands respect. He can provide security for her. Later on, in the interview she highlights the pleasure of using drugs. Often, she has little money and struggles. It would seem that the drugs help her through those tough moments.

### **Extract 67**

*Saida: Yes, Yusuf. I really loved him. I got pregnant with him and lost him, and he was really the man....1600-1601*

*I was sixteen years old and we stayed together for two years and then the prison separated us. 1604-1605*

*We lived together in a hotel. At the apartment hotel and all that.*

*And I really loved him. I've found him on Facebook, he's in jail and will be out soon. So maybe if we meet again, well, I don't know...1610-1613*

*I don't know; I loved him. He had the same difficulties as me. We actually understood each other. 1622*

*He had difficulties with his parents.1626*

*Yes, they are divorced too. There you go. With his brothers and sisters, they weren't really that close. 1632-1633*

In this extract the brief sentences reflect the difficulty Saida had in talking about her ex-boyfriend. They had similar backgrounds that seemed to bring them together. In her account she mentions that prison separated them after being together from sixteen to eighteen. It was her prison sentence that separated them. She had lost contact with him, “I’ve found him on Facebook, he’s in jail and will be out soon. So maybe if we meet again, well, I don’t know...”. She seems intent on contacting him once he finishes his prison sentence.

### **Extract 68**

*Saida: Well, there too, trusting in fact, finding someone you can trust. And then finding the same interests with the person in a specific area like before. Finding someone good, who respects me, ... That's it. 1756-1759*

Her answer to deal with her jealousy is to trust her partner. She thinks the key is to find someone who has the same interests as her, someone who respects her, someone who is good.

*Saida: Well, I don't want us to be violent anymore. Now we're adults. Before, I was 16, he was 18. There, we were kids. Now we're grown-ups and I want to do things right now.*  
1775-1777

She understands her violence as being part of her couple relationship. In using “*I don't want us to be violent*”, she shows that she sees it as being reciprocal. She also places it as an act that happened because of her youth. She is now looking to change the situation by doing things ‘right’. She said earlier that she wanted to deal with her jealousy that triggers her violence, when feeling her partner could abandon her. She gave one example where she attacked her partner and the woman he had looked at in the street. Noting that sometimes her violence was so out-of-control people called the police.

#### **Summary of sub-theme 4: Idealising the couple relationship. What am I looking for?**

The three women describe their search for a partner. Their family situations shape their relationships when they describe their past relationships and their own experience of a partner where physical violence was present. Each of them looking for an ideal partner or rather ideal couple that seems to be unreachable. All three have one partner that was more important to them than the others. They have fond memories and have reminisced if it was possible to recreate the couple despite the violence of the past.

#### **Sub-theme 5: Rejection by men - violence**

##### **Extract 69**

*Marie: I felt bad, yes. Well, yes, because it was actually reality, and I didn't accept the reality that I was rejected by the man I actually love. And, in fact, I have been rejected by all men all my life, in fact: by my real father who didn't try to recognise me and maybe who died. I don't even know if it's true that he's dead, or if he killed himself in prison.* 640-644

Marie expresses her feeling of rejection by her last boyfriend. She then links this to a general feeling of rejection by all men. That links to her biological father that she doesn't know and who she sees as being at the origin of her rejection by men.

### **Extract 70**

*Marie: David is an exception because he didn't want to have children. Yet he knows he has a son. I told him and when I had the baby and everything he still said "no". He wanted me to have an abortion and when I had the baby, I told him - I have a son. He didn't want to know anything. He said he (his son) could come to see me when he's eighteen and say, "I am your son", I'll tell him, I could never consider you as my son because I never loved your mother. He's talking about me. He never loved me. He told me. If my son comes to see him, he will say, "No, no, you're not my son, you. I never loved your Mother. 450-463*

*WB: How do you feel when you hear that?*

*Marie: Well, pain, already, for me, that he never loved me but pain for my son because he is still his son. 450-463*

The rejection of her son and also of herself is very painful. Their relationship lasted six months. It ended when she announced she was pregnant. Marie was hoping through the birth of her son that David would continue a relationship with his son.

### **Extract 71**

*Marie: It's weird because I only have male friends in general, even when I was a teenager. I've always been close to boys, not to women 991-992*

*I have very few female friends. Honestly, none. Female acquaintances, but not girlfriends. Yeah, women, even at work, they're not clear... They always make trouble. It's better with men. 995-997*

There seems to be a rejection of allowing women to get close to her. Her experience is that with women it leads to problems and trouble because women are not clear. She describes this as weird. It a paradox that Marie prefers male company and yet says men have rejected her all her life.

## Extract 72

*Najat: No, he left me the next day. In fact, I wasn't even mad at him. I was angry at myself for being an asshole, in fact, for being so naïve at the time. That's it, my life has been like that. I taught myself what life was about. 312-314*

Najat also recounts the rejection of men in her life. Starting with the first man she had sexual intercourse at fourteen. She states she was angry with herself for being naïve and stupid. She added that all her life she has relived this situation.

## Extract 73

*Najat: Naïve, well, not to realize that I was doing something stupid. Actually, I wasn't sure what I was doing. Besides, he made me drink; we smoked pot. Yes, it's completely naïve. I was furious with myself. It was an experience. From then on it got even worse with men. I had even less confidence, and I was violent to them, that's for sure and well, there was my first love. I was 17 when I met the father of two of my children. His name is Hamid. 317-324*

Her past experiences with men gave her less confidence in herself and this led to violent with them. She says, “*Actually, I wasn't sure what I was doing.*” Showing her young age. Things changed when she met Hamid, who she says was her first love. There is a sense of her being used by these men “*he made me drink, we smoked pot. Yes, it's naïve. I was furious with myself.*” She describes the anger in herself that then translated into a reaction against men.

## Extract 74

*Najat: And he insults me, “I will kill you” not to say the words he said to me in front of everyone. I had his submarine (open sandwich) in my hand. I said, “What the hell is wrong with you? He says, “You think I'm an asshole, you think I'm a fag?” He sees me with a bag in my hand. Stay calm. You let me take care of her. You stop at the market and everything. I*

*said, "But what? it was the submarine you asked me to stop and buy at the bakery". He didn't want to know he was angry. What I didn't know, at that moment was that Yasmin, the baby, didn't want her father, actually, she wanted me. I hadn't yet seen that. Not only did he not want to take care of her, but she had to feel it because, as a result, she rejected him. I was the only one who could calm her down. So she was crying and crying. It drove him crazy. So I knew. I did nothing. I would go home; I would get hurt as usual. That's it, and it was my daily life. There, something clicked I decided that I could no longer take it, that's it, and I started taking things in hand and quietly prepare to leave him and my escape. 603-612*

Najat's speaks about the incident that was the catalyst for her to leave the man she loved because of the physical violence she was receiving. She uses the word 'escape' suggesting that he confined her. She also describes the routine as her day-to-day life. It was also an incident that happen in public, "*in front of everyone*". Hamid shouted at her "*I will kill you*" and "*What the hell is wrong with you? He says, "You think I'm an asshole, you think I'm a fag?"*". After this violent outburst, she says, would follow physical violence "*as usual*" once she got back home. Her partner was so angry he could not hear reason. A double rejection by her partner publicly and at home.

#### **Extract 75**

*Najat: And so, here, one of my friends who came to see me finds themselves disfigured for life. No-one is allowed to even talk to me. I was working in a bar! Most of the customers were men on top of that. So, that's it. There were fights every day. At the association, every night, he would let no one sleep - he would come with me. He was waiting for me to close up. 848-853*

Najat describes the atmosphere at work. She was working in a bar of a betting shop. She met a man who was very jealous and had disfigured one of her male friends. She describes the tension. The arguments and fights with this man.

#### **Extract 76**

*Najat: Three days before the day I stabbed him, a friend of mine came to see me at the bar. And so, he talked with me, he had a drink with me. I'm the one who kept this friend from bringing charges. What did Mehdi do to my friend, he smashed a glass in his face. He had to have twelve stitches. He was scarred for life. It was thanks to me that my friend didn't bring charges against Mehdi. I kept him out of prison. 839-845*

Najat finds herself again in a violent situation. She works illegally, and precariously (not declared to the social security etc). She is in a relationship with a violent man. She seems proud of having prevented her injured friend from bringing charges. She mentions it twice in this passage. She also gives the impression that there is a trap in this situation in which she finds herself. She says she wanted Mehdi to stop seeing her, but she could do nothing.

#### **Extract 77**

*Najat: It's true that I am a bit of a knife fan, because it was convenient to have one on me all the time and so, well, that's it. Since I was fourteen, I carried a knife, but the problem is that one day you end up using it (laughs).896-899*

She explains her fondness for knives since she was fourteen. This coincides with the age that she lost her virginity and where she started going out often for days on end with no questions being asked by her mother. It was shortly after her godmother had died. Najat's laugh did not seem to be nervous, but more of an affirmation.

#### **Extract 78**

*WB: This is the first time you have used a knife against...*

*Najat: No, this is the second time.*

*WB: Second time?*

*Najat: Yeah. The first time I was 20 years old, I had my first apartment all alone in a poor neighbourhood. I showed the men that I wouldn't let myself be intimidated. I was young and pretty and it was a bad neighbourhood, everyone, the men I wouldn't let them take advantage*



*of me. And then, they started following me a little, it's just to show that I can handle it. 901-910*

Najat explains that she has stabbed a man before. She explains that carrying a knife reassured her and according to her enabled her to handle the situations. It put her on an equal footing with the men in the deprived area where she lived. *"I showed the men that I wouldn't let myself be intimidated."*

#### **Extract 79**

*Najat: We use it (a knife) especially when you have a character like mine, I don't let myself be pushed around. The first time I got charged by the police was when I went home, I came downstairs and they (a group of lads) were waiting outside. It was the first time I had my own flat in this poor neighbourhood. I didn't have a knife on me. I went upstairs; I grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed him with it. 1256-1262*

Najat received a suspended prison sentence for this violent act. She tells the story in a matter-of-fact way. With little emotion. She understands it as partly her character *"especially when you have a character like mine, I don't let myself be pushed around."* She also understands it as her environment. The link between this violence and men and her understanding of how she has to fend for herself.

#### **Extract 80**

*Najat: Men don't assume responsibility. Men are like that. I've seen it. For example, my Brother Sofiane's Father, huh, I already told you, the day he got his residence papers, he came home, and he beat up my Mother. She had to be hospitalised he nearly killed her. They divorced. He never wanted to know anything about his son until the day he was maybe fifteen or so. As we lived nearby, he met him. First of all, I was in the supermarket with my mother and she said to me: "You see, that bloke over there, well, he's Sofiane's Father". And so, with time, as we lived nearby, he met his father. He knew he was his father. His father knew it was his son, but he didn't even look at him. He had started a new life, he had other children, he*

*was very happy with his woman. Well, that's it... These men who don't have... A mother doesn't do things like that. Men don't have any problems, even if they move in with a mother with ten children, they don't care, they love them as if they were their own, they love the woman. On the other hand, if they split up they don't take the children with them once they have left her. Whether they're his children or not her children or not men don't care. They start a new life... women don't do that. See what I mean? A mother is a mother. 1633-1651*

Najat's understanding of men seems based on how they function as fathers. Men are unattached to children either their own or others. A man becomes a stepfather but can leave. She sees men of being able to walk away from relationships far more easily than women, "*A mother doesn't do things like that.*" He uses her and then beats up her mother. Her mother rejected by her partner. Her brother's father rejects him before her in the supermarket. Men seem to be able to reject women and children. The violence with her mother's lover was physical. Her brother's Father ignored and rejected his son, a violent act for a fifteen-year-old boy, "*He knew he was his father. His father knew it was his son, but he didn't even look at him.*"

#### **Extract 81**

*Saida: Well, he was always happy, he always took care of me. I was everything to him and he was everything to me; I miss him so much. 417-418*

Saida's memory of her father was that he was always happy, taking care of her. Giving her the security, she needed. She understands that she was everything for her father. A reciprocal feeling. She understands his death as leaving her with a regret and pain that continues today. The impact of this rupture is important in her understanding of how she functions with her partners. His death by an aggressive cancer left her feeling abandoned.

#### **Extract 82**

*Marie: He (Charles) was in love with my Sister. Besides, he always told me that. Because he went to school with my Sister in Paris. They were together. They did their first studies together.*

*WB: Okay. Because your parents lived in Paris?*

*Marie: My parents lived near Paris before moving to Lyons and so he knew my sister well and he was in love with her and I think he used me, because through me he saw my Sister. So, actually, men have always used me, I think. 1635-1643*

Marie remembers being used by a former boyfriend who wanted to see her sister and went out with Marie so he could do this. Her understanding is that men rejected her after they used her.

### **Extract 83**

*WB: Why did he use you, how?*

*Marie: Well, Simon, he's married anyway, he's married.*

*WB: Oh, I didn't know that.*

*Marie: He never wanted a divorce. At first, I thought he was getting a divorce. 1660-1665*

*Marie: And after a year that he knew me, he moved upstairs. And I thought to myself - that's it, that's it, he's moving, he's getting divorced. Well, no. I believed it; I bet everything on him. You know, like a game of poker in a casino, I put all my chips down. 1679-1682*

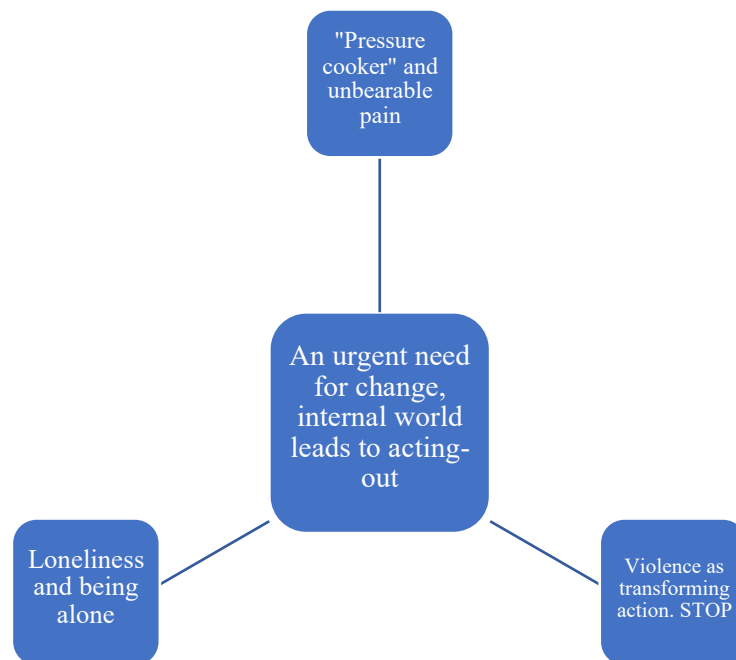
*Marie: That's it, I put everything in, and I lost everything. The proof is, I'm here, now I'm out of my mind. He made me lose my mind. I blame him a little for what happened with the violence. 1685-1687*

Her last boyfriend was also an 'impossible' love as she calls her relationships. Married, he did not want to leave his wife. She saw him for eight years and felt used by him. He told her he no longer wanted to see her and wanted to stop the relationship. She had been hoping that he was the man for her. She blames in part for the argument that ended up between her and Paul. This further rejection to a man leading to violence.

### **Summary of the sub-theme 5: Rejection by men - violence**

The definition of rejection in the Cambridge dictionary is '*the act of not giving someone the love and attention they want and expect.*' The refusal of that love and attention translates by these women into violence. Saida into her attacks on her partner or the other women she perceives as potentially taking her partner from her and depriving her of the love and attention she seeks. Marie feels the pain of the rejection and reacts to the disappointment. And finally, Najat seems to find herself trapped in situations where her response is violence with a knife.

### **SUPER-ORDINATE THEME 3: AN URGENT NEED FOR CHANGE – TRANSFORMATION – THE INTERNAL WORLD LEADS TO ACTING OUT.**



**Figure 4: Superordinate theme 3**

In the final super-ordinate theme, trying to further understand how the women participants understand their violence leads to three sub-themes. One description used by one participant to describe what happened during the violence said it was like a pressure cooker, an unbearable pain. This is the first sub-theme. Loneliness and being alone is the second sub-theme that the women speak about. The final sub-theme is violence as a transforming action within a situation - a way of saying Stop.

#### **Sub-theme 6: ‘Pressure cooker’ and unbearable pain**

##### **Extract 84**

*Marie: After a while, I tired of it in my head, something happened, that's it, all my hatred, all my violence that came out that day on this man, that's it. 229-230*

Marie seems to show a build-up. She describes it as something happening and the culmination of her pain led to the violence that happened between them. As she explains it's a build-up that leads to a crack and then it explodes into violence.

#### **Extract 85**

*Marie: That's it, it's painful. I take it on myself, I accumulate, I accumulate until the moment I crack. That's how I function, yeah*1151-1153

*That's how I work, that is to say, I accumulate things and after a while, it all explodes, it explodes. That's what happened with this man.* 1156-1158

*I was accumulating, but I never cracked. I think it started as the end of the "cracking". I can't take it anymore. I'm mentally exhausted. In my feelings, in my head, it's a general exhaustion.* 1162-1164

Here Marie explains how she accumulates the pain until she cracks. Being violent happens when she can no longer take the pressure that she has within her. She identifies the pressure as being mentally exhausting. She also adds her emotions and thoughts have taken in too much. In the case of the fight she had with her partner, she retaliated and hit him with an object. She knows that she functions in this way and uses language such as crack, and explodes, to describe what happens.

#### **Extract 86**

*Marie: In any case, not on a person, but I remember that with Victor, once I was in a phone box, I got angry with him and broke the booth. I broke the phone box. I was, I don't know, I must have been twenty-five.* 2052-2055

*I hit the black handset on the keys there with all my might and broke everything.* 2058-2059  
*I know that later on they had to change the entire phone box.*2062

*That was an act of violence, but not on a person.* 2065

*Yeah, it was about my relationship with Victor* 2071

Marie does not recall being violent physically with any other person other than her partner who died following their fight. She does however remember destroying a phone box. She seemed surprised at the extent of the damage she caused. She remembers hitting the handset against the keypad with all her force and broke everything. She then notes that they (the French phone company) had to replace the entire phone box. She says this outburst of anger was in connection with her relationship with a former boyfriend, Victor. It would seem that the accumulation of emotional pain can lead to an explosion that transforms into an acting out of violence.

#### **Extract 87**

*Marie: I don't know anymore. In fact, what I expect from a man is that he loves me and when I see that he doesn't love me as I would like, it irritates me and Paul, he made me too angry there. I couldn't control it. 2074-2077*

When the man does not love her as she would like it irritates her. This irritation can build up and lead to anger that transforms into violence. She says it is a violence that she cannot control. It suggests that it is an emotional reaction, not premeditated.

#### **Extract 88**

*Marie: It blew up quickly. Yeah, but it didn't last three years either. It blew up in not even five minutes, what. 638-639*

*Well, it pissed me off; it hurt me, what. 642*

*Well, I think he didn't want me to see Bertrand again, did he? He wanted me to do what to him? And maybe seeing Bertrand upset him. I don't know. I don't know. I'll never know. 646-648*

*Well, I didn't want to be his slave anymore. In quotation marks. I was tired of that too. That's what happened after that, but, hey. It's true that frankly there... I should never have done that. 658-660*

*It wasn't premeditated, that's it. It turned out that it was that man who was there at the time and I, like a pressure cooker, went after him. There, all my violence came out all of a sudden and there it is. 176-179*

*And so, that day, well, he was nasty when he spoke to me and I couldn't stand it because, in fact, he had been speaking nastily to me for some time; he was bitter. 238-240*

Marie explains the background to her outburst of violence that she describes as “*like a pressure cooker*”. The cause she says was the way Paul had been speaking to her. She does not use Paul’s first name but describes him as that ‘man’. I wonder whether it is her way of taking a distance from what happened. She describes her relationship as being a slave for Paul. She was hurt. “*Pissed me off*”. She thinks her relationship with Bertrand could have made Paul jealous. She understands she should not have been violent with him “*I should never have done that*”, but she adds did not premeditate it.

#### **Extract 89**

*Marie: Paul, it's not the same. He's been annoying me lately because I had to obey him, do what he wanted, and I was tired of it all. 2080-2081*  
*I couldn't control myself, that is, I was out of my mind; I fought hard, until what triggered me to stop was the blood. That is, there was blood on my hands, I dropped the object (removed to avoid identification) and well, the man, he was on the ground there and I saw blood and I panicked; I went to wash my hands, first thing and then, I thought about it because I saw him dead. 201-206*

Marie recounts her violence. Marie seems to have been caught up in the violence. “*I couldn't control myself, I was out of my mind, I fought hard*”. It is as if her internal world has led her to no longer be able to understand and control what is happening. She has lost control and is no longer thinking. She adds that she fought hard as if she had been in battle. She stops when she saw blood on her hands.

#### **Extract 90**

*Marie: My boyfriend left me in August 2018, and I didn't accept the break-up, I didn't accept that he would leave me. I was taking antidepressants, and it was his birthday; it was*



*December 10, 2018. I insisted on seeing him at lunchtime. He said, "All right, okay, we'll eat together." We ate together and, on that day, I drank a little red wine at noon, and I had an appointment at 2:30 a.m. with this man (Paul) to take him to the dentist and when I arrived, I arrived late, so he was not happy. So there were words exchanged and then there was violence and he gave me a slap, my glasses fell on the coffee table, and when they fell, I went to pick them up, well, I took what was at hand that is to say a heavy object. I grabbed it and I hit him until he fell. 184-195*

Marie was told by Bertrand that he did not love her and did not want a relationship with her. She then goes on to describe the fight with Paul that led to her exploding with violence. She had convinced herself that her relationship with Bertrand could restart when he accepted her invitation for lunch on his birthday. She insisted on seeing him. Her sense of disappointment comes through in the narrative. She repeats twice that she couldn't accept the break-up. *"I didn't accept that he would leave me."*

#### **Extract 91**

*Najat: And we had another fight because he was coming back from his parents' house. They had criticised him about something, and that's when he hit me for the first time. There you go. Well, I wanted to leave him, but he cried, he apologised, that's it and then, not long after, that's it, men I think are like that. Before, I didn't understand the women who stayed with an abusive husband, such as my cousin and his wife for fifteen years, everything he did to her. I thought to myself, "But they like it, they like being hit, I didn't understand. Besides, I was very nasty to men, had a strong character. I didn't understand. That's because they like it. Why don't they leave? I didn't understand. I said, well, they stay if they like it. Until the day it happens to you and it's not like I knew him like that. This doesn't happen after years. It happens overnight. Besides, he's the Father of your children and now finally I found myself in the same place as these other women. I didn't understand before. There was a first time and then, for one reason or another, it started to become a habit that he was violent so at first I defended myself. But there are the children in the middle. 534-551*

Najat explains the build-up of violence that she received from her partner. She explains how she never understood women who were victims of intimate partner violence in their couple.

She cites her cousin's wife who has suffered violence for fifteen years. She seems to try to explain what happened. She has been nasty to men and describes herself as having a forceful character. She rapidly is in violent situations with her partner and before her children.

#### **Extract 92**

*Najat: It's abandonment. One thing I can't do in my life is to give up. Right now, recently, I told a person: "Listen - We can fight every day, but what I can't stand is for you to abandon me. 1622-1624*

Being abandoned is something that Najat cannot support. I noted down that I could link this to the fact her Father and Mother abandoned her when she was a baby. She seems to understand abandonment as a giving-up. When she confided this, she seemed intense as if she was sharing a great secret. It highlights the importance that she places on this. Saida also has similar reactions.

#### **Extract 93**

*Saida: Well, we were good; we smoked together; we did everything together. Then, at one point, with drugs, we couldn't stand each other anymore and I was too jealous, so sometimes we would get to the point where we really fought. I remember that with my relationships, it would quickly turn violent, actually. 195-199*

When the couple were fusional things functioned well. She quickly became jealous, and she mentions she could turn violent quickly. Very aggressive fights would start. She adds that it was the same situation in all of her relationships. The tension would mount as she felt the pain that her partner could leave her for another. This was then acted out with violence. She reflects on the violence and is torn between two positions.

#### **Extract 94**

*Saida: For a woman, it's not very beautiful, I shouldn't do that. In retrospect, I see it that way, but at the time they shouldn't insult me or hit me. 293-294*

Saida says a woman should not be violent. “...it’s not very beautiful, I shouldn’t do that.” Justifying retaliation is acceptable if there are insults, or if someone hits her.

#### **Summary of sub-theme 6: Pressure cooker and unbearable pain.**

The violence flares up quickly with each woman. Whilst each context is different, each one appears to suffer the pain of being abandoned, or the threat of being abandoned, with each one having had periods of the build-up of pain. Marie from being abandoned by her father and by her partners and the accumulation of negative remarks from another. Her mother abandoned Najat as a child and suffered intimate partner violence that culminated in her leaving him. With further pain from a partner who would not leave her alone. And Saida who was abandoned by her father when he died and then the rupture with her mother and her father's family. She then continued using violence in her couple relationships because of the fear of being abandoned.

#### **Sub-theme 7: Loneliness/being alone**

##### **Extract 95**

*Marie: I shouldn’t have been born. For me, it’s clear, I don’t have a place here in this world. She (her mother) should have had an abortion, that’s what she told me, because even when I got pregnant and the father of my son left me, she told me: “You have to have an abortion.” I had gynaecological problems and my gynaecologist told me: “My little lady, if you have an abortion at thirty-three years old, you will never have another child”. So, I made the choice, I don’t regret it because my son is my reason for living. 153-161*

She explains that she doesn’t have a place in the world and that it is only her son that gives her a reason for living. If she had had an abortion, she shows that she might not be alive today. She is not living for herself but for her son.

##### **Extract 96**

*Marie: I was jealous and possessive, even with Simon, and I think that's why he left me, because I couldn't stand it when he looked at another woman. Even when his sister called him or even when he went to see his sister alone. It was painful for me. 982-985*

Being on her own or perhaps the threat of being on her own would trigger a reaction of jealousy in Marie. She thinks this may be one reason that Simon left her. She says even with Simon showing that in her relationships this was a similar pattern. Jealousy and possession are other powerful forces.

### **Extract 97**

*Marie: It was fusional. Yeah, it was like he was actually my little Brother. I've never really felt like an adult myself. First of all, compared to my Mother. She still thinks of me as a kid, like a teenager. 688-691*

*That's it all the time. It's been hard in my life, actually. It's not an enjoyable life. I've never been happy. 694-695*

*There was no dad, so I was all alone. It was hard without a man, always without a man. That's it, I started my life without a man, and, in my opinion, I will end my life without a man. 698-700*

*Marie: I have always had a brother/sister relationship with my son. There, I was acting like a kid, like a teenager with him lately. 1420-1422*

*We laughed at the same things, not like a mom. Like I'm his girlfriend or something. It's not....1425-1426*

The loneliness and being alone comes through in this extract. Marie describes her relationship with her son as being fusional. She finds it difficult seeing him as her son and prefers to view him as a little brother. Perhaps a substitute for her when she was a little girl who grew up alone because her elder sister left home when she was eighteen. She also talks about being alone because there was no biological father. She describes that not having a couple relationship is because of this latter fact and she sees the future as being the same “*I will end my life without a man*”. She later describes her relationship with her son “*Like I'm his girlfriend or something.*”

### Extract 98

*Najat: My mother said, "Yes, you're right,". So, I phoned Ahmad. I said, "Look, you know that I don't have feelings for you, I've always been clear, but neither do I want to have a child with someone else, to start a new life. At least I know you. Would you agree to meet me, we can get married, and then that's everything settled? He said, "Wait, I'm thinking. He called me back the same day. He said, "Okay. He left his parents, his job, his home, everything, and he came and joined me (she laughs), and that was it and we had two more children. 635-643*

Najat never spends lengthy periods of time without a partner. She finishes one relationship and starts another one immediately. The fear of loneliness and being alone seems to be present, and this extract illustrates this point.

### Extract 99

*Najat: No one was interested in knowing where I was, who I was with, "Well, tonight I'm not coming home." I said to myself. No one was interested when I came back home. Neither what I had been doing or who I was with. 298-300*

*I had the life of a princess at my Godmother's house, but I was alone. When I was at my mom's house, I was a little neglected because my mom worked, my elder brothers and sisters had their friends, I was alone in my room, a little neglected. 1440-1443*

At fourteen Najat stayed out all night, and she realised that she was on her own and alone. Here she insists that no-one in her family inquired into her whereabouts. No one missed her when she stayed out all night. "No one was interested when I came back home." She remembers being alone at her godmother's, and mother's home. She seems to soften the loneliness at her mother's home by saying twice "a little neglected". In my notes I wondered if she was reluctant to criticise her mother.

### **Extract 100**

*Najat: Actually, when I was pregnant, at one point we had a fight. I wanted to leave when I was with Ahmad. I was pregnant, but I didn't know I was pregnant. I now have a better understanding of why hormones... and I ended up in Holland. 387-392*

Najat had a violent argument with her partner. She left him and accepted the offer of a man she had seen a few times and who she evaluated to be someone kind and good. She accepted his offer to go to his family in Belgium. She instead found herself sequestered in Holland in a brothel with drug dealers. Najat leaves one relationship and immediately has another partner.

### **Extract 101**

*Saida: I don't have too many friends. 995*

*I don't care about friends. 1010*

*Because I couldn't count on anyone. 1013*

*I don't know anymore but I just can't count on them. 1023*

*I can't count on them. 1027*

Saida appears isolated because people let her down in the past. Her loneliness appears when she says she does not care about friends. She insisted three times here that she could not count on friends. This suggests a feeling of being abandoned and being isolated.

### **Extract 102**

*Saida: Yeah, I isolated myself. I don't know... 1319*

*Well, for me, it was good because I had freedom, I did what I wanted and everything and somehow it destroyed me somewhere. 1328-1329*

*I was looking for men, so I think. 1333*

*So I wouldn't be alone 1336*

Isolating herself because of the pain she suffered as a teenager led to being alone and loneliness. She sees her independence as leading to freedom and doing whatever she wanted and “*somehow it destroyed me somewhere*”. Her relationships with men were so she would not be alone.

### **Summary of the sub-theme 7: Loneliness/being alone**

Living alone and experiencing loneliness is different for each woman in this study. Marie expresses that she will never find a partner and will be alone. When she had a partner, her behaviour would lead to disappointment and violence. Saida has a similar story looking for partners so as not to be lonely, but likewise the relationship would end in violence. Najat was almost never alone except as a teenager, and she realised that she was on her own, alone. She insists that being abandoned is something unthinkable.

### **Sub-theme 8: Violence as a transforming action within a situation - a way of saying Stop.**

#### **Extract 103**

*Marie: So, I was doing him a favour, all that. Okay, in return he helped me financially, but frankly, I couldn't take it anymore. At the end, I snapped, I snapped. It's a situation where I snapped and committed this despicable act, but... that I couldn't control. 518-522*

She loses control and snaps with violence when she fights with her partner, and she kills him... She arrived late because she had agreed to accompany him to an appointment. This sparked an argument that ended in Marie acting out with her frustration and pain.

#### **Extract 104**

*Marie: Violence. I think it's an accumulation of things in my life, an accumulation of things that I couldn't control. 526-527*

*Now I understand because it was unbearable from day to day and so, since I was a child, I've been in this place, I was the object of the forbidden fruit. My Stepfather knew I wasn't his daughter and in fact, he always rejected me for that. And my Mother, I think if she could have, she would have had an abortion. 97-102*

The lack of control in her life and the accumulation of pain that became unbearable is Marie's understanding of why she is violent. She traces this back to her childhood, to her stepfather's and mother's rejection of her and finally to her mother's revelation that she would have had an abortion if it was possible.

#### **Extract 105**

*Marie: So, he told me: "I already told you that you were wasting your time with this man", all that, what, he blamed me and then I reacted badly. I took it the wrong way. Then I got angry and then there were words, and shouting and screaming that went away, and then physical violence and then the deadly act (pause) 624-628*

*Well, that's where it is already, verbally and then physically because he grabbed my arm, I pushed him away; he gave me a slap and my glasses, well they don't fit very well, they fell on the coffee table and there; I took the object on the floor and I kept hitting him on the head. 629-632*

Marie seems to relive the moment of the fight with Paul. She explains with force in her voice. Paul blamed her for being responsible for her pursuit of her former boyfriend, Simon told her he did not want to continue the relationship. The sequence as she understands it is, blame, reaction internally, anger, argument, a crescendo of shouting and screaming ending with violence.

#### **Extract 106**

*WB: Another thing, excuse me, I'm going fast because of the time (laughs). You used the word "planter" at the age of 20 and beyond, for which you were punished and then again with*



*Sami, in front of the PMU (betting shop with a bar.) It's interesting. You used the word "planter" (stabbed) and this word is also used when someone "plants" (doesn't show up) an appointment. I was thinking of when you said your father "planted" you when you were born....?*

*Najat: No, it's not in that sense. That's because that's the term we use between us.*

*Me, in my head, it's not that. In my head, it's STOP (she emphasises the word with force), it's just a STOP (Emphasises the word again). Well, the first one was an example because I was alone in a terrible neighbourhood. I was twenty. I was quite young and pretty too. 1703-1713*

Najat understands her violence of stabbing a man as a way to say stop. She started carrying knives at fourteen. From an early age she has used knives. The use of a weapon, the knife, is a powerful way for her to bring an end to a situation that could get out of her control.

#### **Extract 107**

*Najat: I snapped because that day he was waiting for me. I went to close the bar; he was still waiting for me to close and then for me to go out with him. I decided NO (emphasised) that's enough. I've been with him, three, four, maybe five times and I explained to him every time. The next day, I should never have gone with him to try to calm him down, because after that he got used to it and he really believed that I belonged to him. 878-884*

Najat explains the feelings she has when she gets close to a partner and then feels she is no longer free. She seems to look for a partner and then the pressure internally builds up and then she snaps and stabs with a knife when no one listens and hears her.

#### **Extract 108**

*Najat: Well, I'm not violent, I'm someone very polite, very calm, very correct, very loving, affectionate, whatever you want, very religious, but I have a level where I can't stand something taking over me. I'd rather be brought in, shot in the head than be told what to do or made to do something. Once with Hamid, the father of my children, I don't even know how*

*I could let myself accept that for so long, when everyone knew about it , all those who knew me said to me: "You, you let yourself be hit? ». Well, yes, it can happen to anyone. Even I didn't understand. When I look back, I say, "Well, is that me? Well, no, never again. 1278-1287*

It seems that she is at a breaking point “never again”. She seems to separate her violent acts from the rest of her life. She then seems to justify her violence when she says, “*I can't stand something taking over me. I'd rather shoot myself in the head than be told what to do or made to do something.*”. She then says how she surprised herself when she was being beaten by Hamid and how she accepted this situation for such a long time

#### **Extract 109**

*Najat: Now as a mom, I understand a lot of things. I asked my mother for forgiveness for many things, the amount of white hair I gave her, and the endless adolescence and all the things I did to this poor woman. We understand when we are parents how sometimes we can make a terrible choice by believing what we are doing is the right thing, but sometimes it's the children who pay for our mistakes. We can have outbursts of anger, as couples or sometimes unintentionally, but sometimes it affects the children as it can also affect us at work. There you go. On top of that I have my personality too. The word 'no' I didn't know what it meant for fifteen years. I didn't know what authority means and now I can't stand it in any way. 1605-1615*

Here Najat explains how she further understands her violence. She links this to her childhood and adolescence and justifies her position by explaining sometimes it happens and that is part of life. She accepts that it can affect her children and that it can impact on all spheres of life, including the work environment. She adds that her own personality plays a part and that lack of authority in her life. She underlines that even today she cannot stand it if authority confronts her. She explains in a calm, rational voice, and this seems to be her current position.

In this next extract Saida talks about her jealousy and how it can generate violence within her.

### **Extract 110**

*Saida: I'm afraid he'll actually leave me, I'm afraid he'll leave me, I think....356-357*

*I get jealous. 360*

*Well, I've lost it. I don't know what I did exactly, but I lost it. There you go (pauses) 370-371*

*With him and even with the girl, oh yes. 374*

*Well, I had hit her, and I gave her a black eye, I remember. 386*

*I don't know what I did to him anymore. I had to scratch him. 396*

*He fought back. Then I left. 398*

*Because it can escalate and go a long way afterwards 401*

*I left because it can escalate and go a long way. I could do a crazy thing afterwards. I can't see when I get angry. I'm not in control of myself anymore. I could do something I might regret because sometimes I do things I regret, when I'm at the end of my tether. That's all. 405-409*

Saida convinces herself that her partner will leave her, and this generates jealousy and then she says she 'loses it'. The escalation to violence happens quickly. She knows that once she is in a violent state, it can "go a long way. I could do crazy things afterwards." She seems to see it is the only way of reacting when she reaches her breaking point. She sometimes regrets her violence, but not always.

### **Extract 111**

*Saida: Well I smashed the TV in the residential home.661*

*I was upset because someone had said 'no' to me. 667*

*I threw it on the floor.*

*WB: So everyone in the home was affected there was no more TV?*

*Saida: yeah 673-676*

*Well, when I call myself stupid it means that my words and actions can go beyond my thoughts and then I can't control myself, I do something I might regret or things like that.*  
1208-1210

Saida tries to understand her violence. There is an inner anger that she describes when she says she is upset. Her feelings of being 'upset' lead to violent acts. She then gets angry with herself after the violent act and it seems it is a vicious circle where she loses control of her emotions.

### **Extract 112**

*Saida: Sometimes I can't talk, it makes me...(Pause) I try to take it upon myself and when I try to talk about it it doesn't always work...1261-1262*

*Well, sometimes I would have fits of jealousy because I was afraid, he would cheat on me, so sometimes he was too tired. We would shout and scream in the street. It would go too far, and I would insult him, insult his mother, tell him it's over and he was going crazy, he would hit me and I would hit him back. Sometimes the police would separate us, and we'd get back together. We didn't care. 1652-1657*

*Don't let the stuff pile up. And when at some point it blows up and there's no way out or nothing to do, in fact. 1737-1738*

*There are still days when I want to be violent, but I hold back. I hold back; I try. 1745-1746*  
- S

In this part of the interview she says she has difficulties to express her feelings and of being heard and understood by her partner, which can end up in violence. Saida seems to understand and control her violence. She describes how there is a pile-up of tension and pressure and that left neglected can explode and as she says, "*there's no way out or nothing to do in fact*". Her fear of being abandoned by her boyfriend triggered her fear, and that would lead to the violence. The sequence, thoughts of being abandoned, jealousy, arguments, crescendo of the arguments, reciprocal physical violence. She identifies herself as the catalyst because of her fear of her boyfriend leaving her for another woman. The intervention of the police authority had no impact on the situation, she adds. "*Sometimes the police would separate us, and we'd get back together. We didn't care.*"

**Summary of sub-theme 8: Violence as a transforming action within a situation - a way of saying Stop.**

The build-up of pressure described by Marie, Najat and Saida all have points in common. Namely, their childhood experiences of being abandoned and feeling lonely led to an accumulation of unexpressed pain and rage that was later expressed through violence. Communicating if not heard or understood leads to a crescendo of screaming and shouting. Then comes a sudden explosion of violence to transform the internal turmoil into an action. The transformation is urgent, sudden, and often in a state of being ‘out of control’.

The theme demonstrates the way the women’s earlier abusive and traumatic experiences affect their intimate relationships and become manifested in their rage and violence. In trying to make sense of their own experiences, part of their experiences seems to be known to the women, and some of it doesn’t, and their narratives are sometimes fragmented, confused, and muddled. The incoherence of their narratives seems to be linked to their difficulties in re-telling their stories that we see in people who have attachment difficulties, as we often see in adult attachment interviews.

## **CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION**

The women who participated in this research show how their violent behaviour in their partnerships is influenced by their violent and traumatic pasts. This study links their violent parents or parental figures as well as adverse childhood experiences (ACE) within their families to their violence as perpetrators. In this section I build on some of the analytic observations already made by examining their personal stories through the lens of phenomenological theory. I examine how these participants understand their violent behaviour in their couple relationships. I use the double hermeneutic, (Smith, 2009) that is part of the IPA method, that is to say, my understanding of their understanding of their intimate partner violence through the detailed examination of personal lived experience. This research brings original information about three French women who are perpetrators of intimate partner violence and I argue that the rich, in-depth detail adds to the sparse literature concerning female perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

The step-by-step guide presented by Smith et al. (2009) and Eatough and Smith (2008) was adopted in the data analysis design used in this research. I carried out a close line by line analysis of the claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). A 'healthy flexibility' in matters of analytic development in IPA is suggested by Smith et al. (2009).

Two interviews were carried out with each participant. I took this decision because the aim was to get as much rich data as possible. I felt that by listening to the first interview a number of questions would arise and it could be helpful to have a second interview to seek to further understand certain points or to see if there were elements that were missing and that could be put again to the participants. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 52).

### **Transcription**

I produced a verbatim record of each interview in the form of a line-numbered transcript. I transcribed the interviews myself because it was important to get to grips and stay with the content following an iterative and inductive cycle of analysis (Smith, 2007). I took the

transcription from an audio recording. It has been proposed that when transcribing there is part of the transcription that remains with the researcher, transcribing an audio copy of the dialogue to the page, 'It secretes its sense and its full significance becomes [...] amplified' (Wertz, 1985). With IPA, where the concentration is on the participant's interpretation of meaning of their account, the transcript becomes a linguistic written record, that transcription includes every spoken word in the interview from the participant and myself. I then proceeded to translate the transcriptions from the original French into English. Nevertheless, certain items of gestures, emotions, pauses, and insistence for certain words (Smith et al., 2009).

I also submitted fourteen pages of extracts from the participants in French together with its English translation for evaluation to a French couple therapist living in London who confirmed the level of translation was good. See appendix 1: (Letter from Sylvie Deroche).

It is suggested that themes selected by IPA researchers are not chosen simply on the basis of prevalence, but also consider 'articulacy', 'immediacy', and the manner in which themes assist in the explanation of other aspects of the participant's account (Jarman, Smith and Walsh, 1997). When I was surprised, moved, challenged or simply curious by something that one of the participants had said I would look further into the context and search for the meaning.

The identification of the emergent patterns of the themes within the experiential material began with single cases where I looked at convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance and then subsequently across multiple cases (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

There then followed a dialogue between myself as researcher, the coded material, and my experience and understanding as a psychoanalytic couple therapist about how the participants understood their violence, its context that lead to the development of a more an interpretative account (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006; Smith, 2004).

I decided to adopt an attitude of wonder with the data in an attempt to fight against social representations, (Van Manen, 2002) Van. I read and re-read all the data. I decided to dwell with the sections of the data that resonated within me. A 'healthy flexibility' in matters of analytic development in IPA is also suggested by Smith et al. (2009) (p. 79).

A structure started to emerge and develop illustrating the relationships between the themes. The material was organised allowing for analysed data to be traced right through the process from

the initial comments on the transcript through to the initial emergence of themes and superordinate themes into the final structure of themes.

Regular supervision with my two supervisors and other doctoral students, exchanges with the global IPA forum, and colleagues at work helped test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation.

The development of a full narrative was evidenced by a detailed commentary on substantial data extracts that take the reader through this interpretation theme by theme. There is also a reflection on my own perceptions, conceptions and processes that I will go on to discuss (Smith, 2007).

### **1) Reading and re-reading.**

I listened to the recordings again, re-familiarising myself with the interview as a whole, before reading and re-reading the interview transcript. This enabled a re-familiarisation with the voice of the participant; ensuring that they became the focus of the analysis. This process of entering the world of the participant signified an active engagement with the raw data, which continued as the transcript was read and re-read, permitting a detailed acquaintance with the natural flow and rhythm of the interview and the tone of the transcript.

### **2) Initial noting**

With a view to developing the growing familiarity gained during the first phase of analysis, the second stage involved a process of free association, that is, writing down whatever came to mind when reading the text, and underlining parts of the text which appeared important. I then revisited these highlighted sections, recording any initial notes pertaining to its importance in the left-hand margin. These exploratory comments developed from a close analysis of the transcript in which exploratory comments were generated in a number of ways attending to discrete processes evident in the participant's narrative. The descriptive comments focused specifically on the content or the 'subject of talk within the transcript' (Smith et al., 2009). Parts of the text which were highlighted because of a linguistic significance drew attention to how the participant used language to represent both the content and meaning of their experience. Finally, the noting of conceptual comments



made possible a shift in focus towards the participant's overarching understanding of their experience, beginning to move from the particular towards an increasingly all-encompassing account of the meaning making process.

### **3) Emerging themes**

In order to begin the process of identifying and developing emergent themes, I worked predominantly with the initial notes which had been generated, rather than with the transcript itself. Attempting to recognise and connect the patterns evident in the exploratory comments involved a shift in the type of engagement required with the interview transcript. In a manifestation of the hermeneutic circle, the re-organisation of fragmented segments of the data resulted in the 'movement of understanding [...] from the whole to the part' (Gadamer, 1989), in which I sought to create concise statements related to the initial notes, and therefore, to the relevant aspects of the transcript to which the initial note was attached. Statements were intended to demonstrate an adequate grounding in the data as well as indicating an emergence of conceptual abstraction (Smith et al., 2009). Unlike the initial notes, the emergent themes appeared to capture and reflect an understanding of the data.

### **4) Searching for connections across emergent themes**

Using the set of individual themes established within the transcript, the reorganisation process began again. However, this time, the development of mapping how the themes connect together became the task. With the intention of producing an interesting and comprehensive account of the participant's narrative, a number of different methods were undertaken. Clusters of themes were grouped together, and themes which appeared opposing were taken note of. I sought to find a means of drawing the emergent themes together into a structure that embraces all the most significant and engaging aspects of the participant's account, as shown in Figure 4.

### **5) Moving to the next case**

After the end of the engagement with the first transcript, I moved onto the second case and repeated the process of the IPA stages as described in step 1 through to step 4. The systematic nature of the analysis undertaken in this study enabled me to more successfully

bracket themes from the previous case and remain openminded about the individuality of each new transcript. As each new case was examined the previous case seemed to recede.

#### **6) Looking for patterns across cases**

I decided to lay all the themes out across the floor of my office so that I could visualise them all. I took a photo of it and then thought this is a snapshot of these women's lives at a certain moment in time and their understanding of what had happened to them. I looked for the connections across the cases. I looked to see how a theme in one case helped to illuminate a different case. I then looked to see what were the most powerful themes that were fore-fronted. This led to a reconfiguring and relabelling of the themes and superordinate themes.

I then wrote up the report of this analysis with the findings. Three super-ordinate themes emerged together with eight sub-themes that are the results of my understanding in the hermeneutic circle. I was also had a research position described as a hermeneutic of faith (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2008; Josselson, 2004), that invites the researcher to engage in the interpretative activity of examining 'the various messages inherent in an interview text' (Josselson, 2004). Rather than seeking to problematise the participant's narratives, I sought to explore various ways in which to give a 'voice' to the participants.

#### **Impact of early family violence and the sub-theme relationships with families and violence**

Najat recalls witnessing a violent scene between her Mother and her boyfriend that led to her Mother having to be hospitalised from after the violence. Witnessing suffering and pain is violent and leaves emotional scars. On another occasion she remembers her godmother and mother fighting over who would have custody of her. She remembers her Mother being thrown out of her godmother's house. She also talks about the family's immigration from Algeria. They were a poor family that arrives in France with stories about the hardships of the Algerian civil war and the interpersonal violence, rape, and alcohol abuse that ensued. She names her Grandfather as an aggressor and her Mother and This seems to suggest the intergenerational transmission that she received.

Similarly, Marie says she has witnessed intimate partner violence between her Mother and stepfather since she was a small child. She wonders why they stay together because the violence between them can be so intense and has lasted for so many years. The discovery at nineteen years old that her father was in fact her stepfather was a profound shock for her. She learns that her biological Father had committed suicide and it was her Mother's decision to not form relationship with this man, but instead to continue with Marie's stepfather. She also mentions that she comes from a large extended family, however there is no contact with them.

Saida tells the moving story of her parent's separation and divorce when she was ten years old. The same year that her half-sister was born and with whom she had little affinity. Until then Saida was an only child. She describes the rupture with her Father's family two years later when she was twelve years old. It happened shortly after her Father's funeral. She seems unclear over the cause. Again, it seems to have been very difficult for her because they took her to see her dying Father in the hospital. Saida clearly identifies her pain and suffering at this moment as one of the reasons for her violence. She also spoke about the arrival of her stepfather shortly after her parent's separation and her rejection of this man for fear that he would replace her Father. The impact of this early family violence seems to support the findings in studies that link later intimate partner violence with these factors.

Dutton proposes a 'Nested Ecological Model' as the most appropriate way to consider the etiology of intimate partner violence (Dutton, 2006). This model encompasses social and psychological perspectives to provide a comprehensive guide of the potential causes of intimate partner violence from which theories about the function of an individual's behavior can be hypothesized and tested. This model highlights the importance in considering the interaction of various risk factors at four social levels. Importantly, it explains why people in similar social circumstances do not all behave in the same manner, and stresses the importance of individual differences in a complex set of interacting factors.

### **The role of the Father and the sub-theme relationship with father figures and violence**

The Father's role is important in child development and so too is the impact his absence could have upon the infant. Many violent individuals as with Marie, Najat, and Saida, have histories

of absent or emotionally unavailable fathers, or abusive fathers who did not provide any source of love or containment that the child could turn to. The role of the father in separating the child from the dyadic relationship with the mother is also important in the normal development of aggression and superego functioning, deficits in which can predispose to violent behaviour (Yakeley, 2009).

Every participant spoke about ruptures with their Fathers. The first sub-theme, 'Relationship with Father figures and violence', "*I only have terrible memories*", reflects how the violence they lived with from either their Father, biological, step or adopted, had affected their lives. Their preoccupation with this parental figure and returning to him, looking for him, shows how they remained attached to him. The participants often focused on what had happened to them in their childhood, how they had suffered, rather than the violence they had committed later in their own couple relationships.

### **The role of the mother and the sub-theme 2: Relationship with mother figures and violence**

Yakeley explains her view of the relationship with the mother or primary object:

The early relationships with their mothers or primary object are critical to the genesis of violence. Early abuse, trauma and loss can cause pathological attachment relationships in the infant, leading to later difficulties in affect regulation and deficient capacity for representation and mentalization, which predispose to poor modulation of aggression. Violence can be seen as a defensive response to feelings of shame and humiliation, which have their roots in disorders of attachment (Yakeley, 2009).

In other words, as infants and young girls, the relationship of the participants in this study with their 'Mother' figure is also important as a model for them. Yakeley refers to pathological attachment relationships as an indication a relationship that leads to problematic behaviour in children and adults. Blaming Mother seemed to be difficult for some of them despite the suffering and pain they endured. My study reveals that this position is woven with the themes about their father figures and their families. The parental couple and its representation to these women as children helps us to better understand the

use of violence by these women in their adult couple relationships. Each participant talks about their relationships with their mothers and fathers.

Marie speaks of the rejection she felt from her mother from her birth. The difficult relationship between these two women. Learning that the man she thought was her father was her stepfather and her biological father had committed suicide and had spent time in prison for armed robbery. Her mother rejected her biological father. She has no memories of being hugged and kissed by her mother. A behaviour she repeats with her own son. She prefers he calls her by her first name and does not like him calling her Mom. She adds she feels she is more like a sister than a mother to him. In another situation as a young woman she tries to seduce one of her mother's lovers.

Abandoned by her mother at the age of ten, Saida explains she could not accept the separation and divorce of her parents, the arrival of her mother's new partner shortly after and then the death of her father two years after his separation. The tension came to a head with the rupture with her mother and led to Saida being taken into care at the age of twelve. It was also around the same time that her half-sister was born. Saida then cut-off all contacts with her family until she was sixteen and had been sentenced to prison for two months. When Saida was confronted with her first prison sentence she felt the need to contact her mother. She said she felt completely alone.

Najat recalls watching her mother being physically beaten by one of her mother's boyfriends as a young girl, Najat witnessed other physically violent scenes. She recounts how as a three-day old baby her mother gave her away to friends who were without a child and who went on to raise her as their own. This situation became very complicated as Najat's mother stayed in contact with this couple and at one stage they tried to adopt her which led to tension and physical violence. In another scene her godmother threw Najat's mother out of the house and then closed the door on her. Her Mother's family were poor immigrants from Algeria. Family stories of incest, rape and violence had been passed down with her grandfather jailed for rape and murder. She was uncomfortable talking about her father. It transpired in the second interview he had tried to sexually assault her when she

was thirteen. She also mentioned how lonely she felt as a teenager. Doing whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted. Sometimes going off for days without anyone asking where she was or with whom she was staying.

### **Attachment & Mentalization and trauma.**

Marie's, Saida's and Najat's histories resonate with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1977). Bowlby highlighted the importance of subjective "felt security" and went on to describe the "attachment" of an infant to its primary caregiver as a bond developed with "some other differentiated and preferred individual who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser. Bowlby defines attachment behaviour as "any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity with an attachment figure. Repeated interactions with the attachment figure lead to an internalised representation of the self and other which created an "internal working model" (IWM). These IVMs form the template for the self and other in future relationships and are not accessible to conscious awareness and therefore resistant to change (Bowlby, 1980). The adult attachment interview (Main, Goldwyn and Hesse, 1998) provided empirical evidence for different types of IVMs and popularised the categories of security and insecurity. Bowlby's model is an internalised, unconscious, affective-cognitive model of the relationship between self and other, developed through interaction with the primary caregivers and with the aim of maintaining subjective "felt security" (Shmueli, 2013). The interview also shows the narrative style that reveals attachment trauma, through some of the incoherence in the participant's interviews. Attachment types are formed in childhood long before adolescent or adult couple relationships are formed. This would suggest that the internal world and functioning of each adult is already in place in couple relationships. An avoidant female's need for separation could strengthen the anxious male's need for comfort faced with the threat of being abandoned. This in turn feeds the anxious male's need for closeness and could well strengthen the avoidant female's need for separation. These emotional and physical requirements may well be triggers for intimate partner violence. When looking at individuals who have suffered a 'traumatic' event it is, according to trauma literature, a combination of the experience itself and the personality of the

individual involved in the event. For this reason, two people can be involved in the same car crash, and while one brushes himself off and then has lunch, the other develops severe and chronic post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD. The responses to trauma are varied, (Lemma and Levy, 2004). Applying this theory to the women in this study gives a further insight into their violence. I suggest their childhood experiences have had an important impact on how they behave as adults and in intimate partner violence. How the women in my study have reacted to the various traumatic events in their lives is never identical. Attachment theory offers another way of understanding intimate partner violence expressed in their couples.

Recently, attachment theory has been expanded and further developed by Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman (Bateman and Fonagy, 2016). These researchers coined the term "mentalization." Mentalization refers to the ability to reflect upon, and to understand one's state of mind; to have insight into what one is feeling, and why. They explain the concept that internal working models and the defences are used when attunement or, safety is lacking. I would argue emotional safety is lacking in the three participants of my study. Their rage seems to be a complex manifestation of earlier unresolved traumatic events. Many studies have supported the associations between attachment insecurity and intimate partner violence in couples (Lafontaine and Lussier, 2005; Péloquin, Lafontaine and Brassard, 2011). Highly anxious individuals report more relationship conflict, which suggests that much of this conflict is driven by basic insecurities about love and loss. Those who are highly anxious also respond with coercion and negative escalation, which tend to alienate partners (Shaver, 2016; Feeney, 2016)

Fonagy also describes that mentalizing capacity can be 'switched-off' in certain situations as a protective function:

Threat-related activation of the attachment system (e.g., triggered by perceived threat, loss, or harm) may evoke intense arousal and overwhelming negative affect, bringing about the switching off of certain activity including mentalizing. (Fonagy and Campbell, 2016)

## **Personality disorder**

Women who have disturbed early relationships with mothers and other caregivers are at an increased risk of developing difficulties in emotional regulation and relationships, finding the demands of intimacy intolerable. They are in a high-risk group for developing difficulties within intimate relationships and are sometimes classified as having borderline personality disorder (BPD), on the basis of traits such as impulsivity, a deep-seated fear of closeness, alternating with a fear of abandonment (Motz, 2014; Chiesa and Fonagy, 2014)

Research also shows that other personality disorders such as antisocial personality disorder (APD) can manifest an alien self that can be violent. This is the person who cannot relate to herself or others and who has a deep difficulty in understanding either his own mind or that of another. In the following excerpt, (Bateman and Fonagy, 2016) explain how unacceptable aspects of the self, which cannot be mentalized, are projected onto others:

In APD, the alien self is firmly and rigidly located outside – the partner may be seen as mindless and subservient – “women need to be treated like dogs at first. They need firm training, and only gradually can they be let off the lead”: a system is portrayed as only authoritarian and attempting to subjugate through unwarranted attention – ‘the police pick on me, follow me about and think they can dominate me’. These characterizations stabilize the mind of the patient. Doubt and uncertainty are not apparent. Any threat to the schematic representational structure, for example a partner demanding an unacceptable level of independence, police suddenly becoming helpful and friendly, leads to arousal within the attachment system. This triggers an inhibition of mentalizing that in turn leads to anxiety about loss of control of internal states and a threat of the return of the alien self. With an imminent collapse of the self, the need for the other as a vehicle for the alien self becomes overwhelming (Bateman & Fonagy, 2016, p. 34).

Several recent retrospective and prospective studies (Battle *et al.*, 2004; Zanarini, 2000) provide firm evidence linking personality disorders with trauma. The research also confirmed the development of Borderline personality disorder is most consistently associated with multiple forms of adverse childhood experiences, and that other personality disorders are uniquely associated with specific adverse events (Battle *et al.*, 2004). A longitudinal study carried out by the Departments of Psychiatry of Columbia University and New York University School of Medicine, using data from 593 families from the area also confirmed that various personality disorders including Borderline Personality disorder were clearly associated with a lack of parental affection or nurturing together with aversive



parental behaviour including harsh punishment(Johnson *et al.*, 2006). Lyons-Ruth and colleagues at Harvard Medical School and Boston University in a smaller prospective study found that a disrupted maternal communication in infancy coupled with abuse in adolescence is a factor in the aetiology of borderline pathology in young adults (Lyons–Ruth *et al.*, 2005). In further a further follow-up study with adolescents, Crawford and colleagues (2009, p.1025) noted:

Not only were BPD symptoms higher on average among children with early maternal separations, the same symptoms declined at significantly slower rates than those observed in young people without early separations (Crawford *et al.*, 2009)

The researchers define early separations as those that happen before the age of five years old. Winsper and colleagues, (2012), carried out a large prospective study with 6050 mother and child participants. Children aged eleven with Borderline personality symptoms, who suffered adverse experiences such as abuse, neglect, parent hostility and resentment within their families, and who experience maladaptive parenting, including exposure to domestic violence and parent conflict, predicted Borderline personality disorder pathology(Winsper, Zanarini and Wolke, 2012). Several studies suggest that deficits in mentalizing capacities can play a role in the evolution and understanding of personality disorders (Antonsen *et al.*, 2016; Fonagy, Campbell and Bateman, 2016; Nazzaro *et al.*, 2017). Németh (2018), and Richamn & Unoka (2015) demonstrate that impairments and deficits of mental state reasoning were found in individuals with personality disorders and in particular Borderline personality disorder in their systematic reviews (Németh *et al.*, 2018; Richman and Unoka, 2015). There is now substantial recent literature that indicates the central role of childhood adversity in contributing to the development of personality disorders together with other forms of psychopathology.

Mentalization operationalized as reflective functioning is the process by which we make sense of each other and ourselves, implicitly and explicitly, in terms of subjective states and mental processes. It is a profoundly social construct. Given the generality of this definition, most mental disorders will inevitably involve some difficulties with mentalization (Bateman and Fonagy, 2010).

Mentalizing has been suggested to be a psychological mechanism linking early childhood adversity such as loss and trauma to later psychopathology, as it can have a disrupting

impact on internal representations, causing disorganised attachment which is associated with Borderline personality disorder symptoms in later life. This clearly occurs along a developmental path where social adversity in the family context brings about disorganization in the attachment system causing emotional dysregulation, which is a hallmark of Borderline personality disorder (Chiesa and Fonagy, 2014; Linehan, 1987; Steele and Siever, 2010; Cirasola *et al.*, 2017; Fonagy, Campbell and Bateman, 2016).

As a psychodynamic couple therapist, the psychoanalytical approach can contribute to an understanding of the core deficits surrounding identity, object relations (self and other relationships), and emotion dysregulation in terms of personality organisation, motivational processes (e.g., attachment needs), affects, conflict, and defences.

Another consideration is the correlational aspect of the interpretation of this study.

Attachment theory is one of the explanations of the violence. Other factors could also contribute. Personality disorders and environmental situations have also been shown to be factors that add to anxiety that leads to expressions of violence.

### **Children experiencing intimate partner violence**

The accounts given by the participants in this study suggests they were active in the experience of intimate partner violence that they witnessed from a young age. As children the participants were emotionally involved in the scenes witnessing the violence and today recalling it in detail. Telling me about their family history seemed at times very uncomfortable and emotional for them. Researchers continue to further understand the impact that these adverse childhood experiences can have. When the women talk about being lonely and alone, they also perhaps feel safer, but invisible and with no link to others. When children live in violent contexts, they do not stand outside of the intimate partner violence but are within it, and through their relationship with the intimate partners they may be called upon to engage actively in a number of ways by either one of the partners by supporting violence, threats, collusion or protection, (Callaghan *et al.*, 2016).

It is crucial that we move beyond seeing this as an issue between two adults whereby children are ‘witnesses’ and are ‘impacted by’ coercive control and focus on providing a more effective legal and safeguarding framework for children which does not victimise them further through inappropriate professional responses. The impact of domestic violence on children is known to be significant and long reaching, but they are still represented both in professional discourse and before the law as passive, as impacted by the violence, but not really bound by the coercive control that is often an integral part of a violent household (Callaghan et al., 2016, p. 654).

There are various theoretical models of human development that describe the ways children accept and/or imitate behaviour they witness in their parent’s treatment of one another or towards themselves.

The psychoanalytic paradigm suggests that early exposure to the fact of parental violence, rage, sadism or sexual abuse will adversely impact children who witness it, social learning theory, developmental psychology and behavioural schools also predict and demonstrate this finding. There are myriad causal explanations for this major public-health issue (Motz, 2014).

Sometimes the symptoms in children can be understood as problematic aspects of a couple projected into them as Hewison (2018) described in the Doll’s House marriage (Morgan, 2018; Hewison, 2018).

There are many reasons why individuals might suffer from the replacement of love by power, and in the many different ways of managing this in the couple relationship. Deficits or impingements in very early relating between mother and baby is one factor; another is trauma, accidental or deliberate (including sexual abuse); and constitutional factors can also play a part, particularly in their interaction with the environment at the different life stages that our psycho-sexual selves are reworked (Hewison, 2018b, p.162)

I suggest that watching parents fighting and being beaten, physically and psychologically is harrowing and shocking for a child. As Callaghan has pointed out the children who are part of intimate partner violence are not just witnesses. They are participants. With time they can become desensitised and see it as normal, predictable and acceptable, (Motz, 2014).

Children learn from observation and participation especially in their early years from their carers and those who they love and depend. Children's exposure to intimate partner violence cannot be overestimated. They can repeat that which they have seen and known in their childhood.

### **Repetition compulsion**

The intergenerational transmission is central within my findings in this study. The women in this study have all been in several violent and abusive relationships and they talk about them openly (Seamans, Rubin and Stabb, 2007; Dasgupta, 2002). Freud's (1936) concept of repetition compulsion shows that individuals try to surmount earlier traumatic events by recreating these experiences with partners, gaining a sense of control (Motz, 2014; Freud, 1966). Welldon (2011) speaks of 'malignant bonding' a malignant form of attachment caused by early exposure to intimate partner violence that impacts on children and leads to a reproduction of the same type violence in patterns of perverse relationships in adolescence and later adult relationships (Welldon, 2011). Motz (2014) describes the compulsion to find and repeat these toxic liaisons as being like an "unthinking search for familiar destructive relationships" because they feel normal. An example of the transmission of intergenerational violence. Each woman in the study dreams of a couple relationship without violence. Marie who always has relationships where her companions do not want to engage in a formal relationship with her. Najat reacts violently stabbing her partners when they get too close. Saida becomes jealous quickly and lashes out at her boyfriends and any other person she perceives as being involved in her rejection.

Motz (2014) explains that in an intimate partner violence situation the new partner in the relationship can become a past significant other, as in the above-mentioned compulsive repetition. This raises a question about who the aggressor thinks their partner really is at the moment of the violence? Their earlier representations come to the fore and influence their recent choices with the strong possibility that they will then react as they always have done in the past (De Zulueta, 2006; Clulow, 2001)

"I'm like a pressure cooker". This metaphor of the violence in one of the participants shows clearly how she sees the violence as being exceptional and outside of her control. It does

not sit within her. It is her phenomenological experience of the violence. It is as if it is unacceptable for her to notice it as violence. This justification of the pressure cooker is a way of making the violence more acceptable to her. It becomes something exceptional. Something outside of her. Like all the women in this study it is as if they are taken over by the violence, it is not their fault. Each woman has a different violent context, but each one repeats the pain and suffering in their couple relationships. In previous research findings the focus has often been on male perpetrators. Here I show that women can also be perpetrators as are men and for the same reasons, (Desmarais *et al.*, 2012a).

### **Internal rage - external violence. Projective identification and splitting**

Rage and violence seem to have become embodied in the participants in the study. The pain and rage identification with the father and the mother. Sometimes they recognise this and sometimes they do not. Hence their accounts are somewhat complicated and confused as they attempt to understand. Marie describes being ‘out of her mind’, Saida explains how her violence ‘erupts quickly’, and Najat says she ‘snaps’ and then ‘stabs’. The pain and rage identification with the father and the mother.

Projective identification offers an explanation of how these women deal with this rage. Projective identification was identified by Klein (1946) and is a primitive defensive operation that goes together with splitting. It is a primitive form of projection, attributing to others something that cannot be tolerated in oneself. It is characterised by a combination of attributing to somebody else something that they themselves are experiencing, but cannot tolerate, though they are still capable to maintain empathy with what they experience and can’t tolerate. A tendency to induce behaviour in the other of that which they are trying to project onto the other in an effort to control the other person to prevent that which is projected to assault them from the other person. It is a complex mechanism that has projection, empathy with what is projected, induction with attempts to control (Klein, 1946).

Splitting is a psychological mechanism which allows the person to tolerate difficult and overwhelming emotions by seeing someone as either good or bad, idealised or devalued. This makes it easier to manage the emotions that they are feeling, which on the surface seem to be contradictory.

Mervin Glasser also explains why an infant can develop to be violent in their adult relationships. Glasser contextualised fears of annihilation and intimacy within early deprivation and neglect and observed the playing out of this psychopathology in adult life in the forensic patient's manic oscillation between closeness with and distance from others. The core of Glasser's complex is a fear of intimacy, a need to keep the object of sexual desire both close and at bay, and to treat it sadistically. The forensic patient is characterised by thin-skinned narcissism (Rosenfeld, 1987), stemming from the infant experience of the mother (or primary carer) as being potentially overwhelming and destructive. The patient thus has a seemingly unsolvable dilemma. He has a "deep-seated and pervasive longing for an intense and most intimate closeness to another person, amounting to a 'merging', a 'state of oneness', 'a blissful union'" (Glasser, 1979, p.278), and yet he cannot bear the terrifying, suffocating intimacy of what he wants. It has then to be retreated from or destroyed. The forensic patient has inevitable difficulties with how she relates to others. The concept of an equal, reciprocal, relational exchange is a tremendously difficult notion for the patient to deal with. She tends not to be able to think of another as a subject. Others are often not even objects. They are part objects whose presence as a potential relational human being is suffocated by the patient's propensity to privilege her desires and feelings over those of anyone else. We can best understand this as a form of malignant narcissism. Wiegert (1967) describes this as a regressive state involving denial and a distortion of reality, while Keogh (2018) views it as a psychic structure that underlies psychopathy. This involves an obfuscation of the need for relationship and a desire to coerce and control others (Weigert, 1967; Keogh, 2018; Glasser, 1979; Meloy, 1988 1992; Corbett, 2018)

### **Reflexive journal**

I kept a journal to note down my thoughts and reactions from the beginning of this study as providing some potential validity criteria, adding to the audit trail. It enabled the researcher to reflect about the interpretation and the bracketing and providing evidence of transparency. Keeping the journal alongside the stages of IPA, as suggested by (Smith, 2009; Vicary, Young and Hicks, 2017), including the analysis of the data some argue the

quality and validity are dynamic constructs rather than static. This enabled the researcher to have a critical stance regarding the study.

The journal enabled me to exchange with my supervisors during the study. I also spoke with colleagues, psychiatrists, psychotherapists and psychologists.

As a white, middle-class male researcher investigating violent women in their couple relationships I was initially in a strange position as if I had to justify my interest in the women. I worried that they would think me of as misogynist or anti-feminist. As I had experienced female violence in my family I had a personal interest in the area, and was well aware of the capacity of women to act out feelings of rage.

I was aware that there were transferences to myself as a male researcher that echo some of the dynamic difficulties encountered by the interviewees in their private lives. While the role of the researcher is not to respond therapeutically to this possibility, this experience was managed in a contained manner and formed important research material for later analysis. Second, the experiences described by the interviewees evoke counter-transferential responses in me as the researcher. Some of these responses (sometimes referred to as researcher reflexivity) are understood as important research data and for this reason a research diary was kept in which counter-transference responses before and after each interview were recorded. I am also aware that my responses will be shaped, in part, by my experience of living with family conflict and violence when I was a child. In my own family my maternal and paternal grandmothers were very strong women who occasionally used physical violence. This has led me to think about how some women can present as very gentle and kind maternal figures and yet have the capacity to be violent in certain circumstances. Coming to terms with this realisation has been an important part of my learning and development and continue reverberating in this research project.

Najat was the first woman participant I met. Initially she presented as a charming, small, thirty-five-year-old who accepted to take part in the study. At one stage she started explaining how she started carrying knives at 14 and had stabbed men. I took a double take when she spoke about her violence. This young mother of four could stab men. I woke up in the middle of the night after that interview following a dream, I had been stabbed by her. I also wondered why she had chosen knives as her expression of violence. I thought about

her wanting to 'show' the young men in her tough neighbourhood that she could defend herself and would not be pushed around. Was it a penis for her? Was it her way of penetrating or maybe castrating?

All three women, Najat, Marie and Saida brought out my paternal instincts. Their adverse childhood experiences were sad, and I thought frequently that they lacked paternal protection. They had carried out very violent acts. They were not monsters, but women who had suffered.

Listening to the participants, I realised how difficult it was for me as a man to imagine that they were capable of such violence. One had stabbed men; another had hit her partner with a heavy object and the third hit her partner in fights in private and in the street where the police would be called.

I did not expect to find violence linked to their parents. As a father myself, the pain of the absence of their fathers struck me. Their Mothers are also part of their history and their pain. I was also listening to them for other siblings and family members to understand their relationships and if there was also an impact from the family unit. They confirmed this every time.

I wrote that their suffering as children and then as adults was like an echo that kept coming back. In Greek mythology, Echo is a mountain nymph or oread. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book III, relates that Echo offended the goddess Hera by keeping her in conversation, thus preventing her from spying on one of Zeus' amours. To punish Echo, Hera deprived her of speech, except for the ability to repeat the last words of another. Echo's hopeless love for Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image, made her fade away until all that was left of her was her voice. Echo was also a punishment. I wondered if Najat, Marie, and Saida, were being punished as adults from the suffering they endured as children?

Their relationships with me seemed to be that of daughters with their father. I then wondered if they idealised me as a replacement for their absent fathers. Their therapists were present for the interviews spoke to me afterwards and noted that they were all thrilled to be interviewed and were disappointed when the second interview was completed. They asked if I would be going back. I had informed them that there would be no further contact at the end of the interviews.



Saida's explanation of her numbness after the death of her father was very emotional. I felt so sorry for her. She seemed like a little girl who was lost. I also noted that with every participant this feeling came to mind at some stage during one of the two interviews.

When Marie spoke about 'Impossible love' I thought about a desire for someone that has little likelihood of fulfilment. I think the object of impossible love is someone who can appease your desires, but for various reasons is beyond your reach. The obstacles of impossible love can vary.' Marie describes herself as always being "lonely" and that this "loneliness is a burden". She seems to imply she is clinging to an "impossible love" and the resulting burden is the pain of loneliness because she cannot realise her quest.

During the analysis, I noted down many themes that emerged. I felt overwhelmed initially by the sheer size of the data. As time went by and following the stages of IPA, I saw the super-ordinate themes emerged. I felt relieved that the research data was taking shape.

I also noted down that through the duration of the study the three women have been present in my thoughts as I write-up the study. I wonder how they are doing, and I hope that they have been able to move on and find some peace in their lives and that the interviews may have helped them somehow on that path. All of their therapists are women, perhaps taking to a man may have been useful.

## **CHAPTER 6 - LIMITATIONS, VALIDITY AND QUALITY**

The small sample size could be seen as a limitation of this study. The findings are therefore not generalisable because of the limit size. The subjective bias in organising and analysing the data is part of IPA with insistence on researcher reflexivity. However, the IPA method has from its beginnings insisted on small samples including single case studies. The researcher is looking for rich, thick, in-depth information that is missing within quantitative studies.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis studies have been published with samples of one, four, nine, fifteen and more. Recently there has been a trend for some IPA studies to be conducted with a very small number of participants. A distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to a detailed interpretative account of the cases included and many researchers are recognizing that this can only realistically be done on a very small sample – thus in simple terms one is sacrificing breadth for depth. Recently the first author has been arguing the case for the single case study (Smith and Osborn, 2007, p. 56).

IPA like most qualitative research cannot produce repeatable studies because of the interaction involved with participants. It would not be possible to find three women who would have had the same lived experience as the women I interviewed. (Gergen, 1973). IPA posits that we can never fully know the internal world of another person. Smith & Osborn, (2003); Gergen, (1973) argue that the process of phenomenological research alters the behaviour it seeks to study and that the researcher and participant relationship changes the experience.

One researcher, (Giorgi, 2011; Giorgi, 2014; Giorgi, 2004) rejects IPA as a method because it is not scientific and cannot replicate the study as mentioned above. He claims that an objective method of studying people is possible, although he has not yet found the method to achieve this.

IPA has other critics that describe it as an inductive, intuitive method (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2008). IPA is now an accepted model by qualitative researchers.

It provides valuable information that cannot be obtained in the same way with other methods and can add to other quantitative and qualitative research findings (Willig and Stainton Rogers, 2008). Finding a new understanding within the data, it does not test theory but adds to the construction of theory by refuting, supporting or offering fresh information (Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

I have been a member of the global IPA forum where I have exchanged with IPA researchers from around the world, including the founders of IPA Dr Jonathan Smith and Dr Michael Flowers. I could discuss various issues with them, including their understanding of limitation in IPA. In one post Smith says:

One of the concerns I have about this kind of discussion is that it creates the impression that different researchers would inevitably come to radically different conclusions about the same data - as if the difficulty or impossibility of effective bracketing meant that the researcher's imagination became the only ingredient of the analysis.

Assuming that we all accept the double hermeneutic to be a defining feature of IPA, we know that this shouldn't be the case. When comparing two analyses by two different researchers of the same interview, it's only the second part of the double hermeneutic (the researcher trying to make sense of the participant's words) that differs across these analyses. The first part (the participant trying to make sense of their experience) is always the same. If this isn't reflected in some substantial similarities between the two analyses, at least one of the two researchers haven't done a good job.

And even the differences in the second part of the double hermeneutic should be kept in check by a number of safeguards:

- 1.) IPA's idiographic commitment, which should prevent researchers from jumping to cross-case conclusions too fast;
- 2.) the hermeneutic circle, which should protect researchers from losing sight of the whole when analysing a part;
- 3.) the reflective practice to identify and acknowledge researcher pre-knowledge (or try to bracket it, if you want).

If there were not some significant degree of consensus among researchers about the same interview transcript(s), the words of participants would be essentially meaningless.

In any research - regardless of methods - we need to provide evidence to support our claims, otherwise we are just writing an opinion piece. In IPA we need to provide convincing interpretations presented alongside - and grounded in - detailed quotes from interviews. When we are less certain about our interpretations - and/or when we think

that our interpretations may be influenced by our subjectivity - then we should make this clear.

## **Quality**

Smith (2010) has published a systematic review of IPA papers and described some of the general quality indicators that one might look for. He suggests that a 'good' piece of IPA research is likely to demonstrate most of the following features as can be found in my study: Collecting appropriate data, from appropriately selected informants.

Some degree of idiographic focus (attention to the particular) balanced against 'what is shared' within a sample.

An analysis that: transcends the structure of the data collection method (e.g., the schedule for a semi-structured interview) and that focuses on 'how things are understood', rather than on 'what happened' incorporates and balances phenomenological detail (where appropriate) and interpretative work (where appropriate) to develop a psychologically relevant account of the participants' 'engagement-in-the-world'.

Appropriate use of triangulation (can be via methods, perspectives, data, analysts, fieldwork) or audit and/or credibility-checking (can be via respondents, supervisors, peers, parallel sample) to achieve trustworthiness.

Appropriate use of extracts and commentary to achieve transparency (claims should usually be referenced to data; data should not usually be left to 'speak for themselves'; there should be substantive engagement with, and commentary on some longer extracts of data).

Appropriate level of contextual detail – for the extracts, participants, researchers and study.

Attention to process; including both analytic and reflexive components.

Appropriate pitch and engagement with theory (in making sense of the analysis) (Smith, 2011).

## **CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION**

The present study adds to the literature in several ways, including rich in-depth interviews with three French women who were violent in their heterosexual couple relationships.

When I carried out the interviews for this research, I was told that I was the first person to have carried out a study within the agency asking the question about women who were violent in their couple relationship. The understanding of attachment theory and female violence, together with other psychodynamic theories concerning aggression and violence have also added further comprehension to a complex problem. There are certain limitations linked to the qualitative research method. Firstly, this study had three participants who agreed to two interviews each. This raises the question about group size and limits the generalisability of the results. Although there were certain similarities with the participants there were also differences. The participants were recruited through a French national agency that deals with men and women who have been in the French justice system. It is in line with the recommendations of IPA studies, (Smith, 2009). The agency has few women compared to men who they have in treatment as perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Is this group small because of underreporting of female perpetration or because there are simply fewer women offenders than men? I would claim that underreporting and society views of female violence as being less harmful than from a male perspective are facets of this complex issue.

Despite these limitations, results of this study add to the literature by identifying women perpetrators in a relationship with intimate partner violence and the interrelationship between attachment types and partners. Furthermore, the adverse childhood experiences need to be examined with each offender to understand each one as a unique subject for future treatment. A 'one fit for all' type of treatment for intimate partner violence is not suitable. As seen in this study intimate partner violence needs to be looked at from a multi-dimensional framework reflecting the complexity of the aetiology of intimate partner violence, remaining flexible and open to new developments in research, (Yakeley, 2009). Couple therapy will benefit from this research and further qualitative investigation is needed to look at other types of female perpetrated violence in a rich and in-depth way. Future treatment programmes would benefit from including psychodynamic understanding of violence.

Future research would benefit from examining the contexts and motivations surrounding intimate partner violence perpetration. It is important for future research to examine how other aspects of identity, such as race or ethnicity, impact on intimate partner violence perpetration. Although we found more similarities between men and women than differences.

There are different risk markers related individuals that could be addressed by helping professionals to prevent or intervene with perpetrators, such as anger, alcohol and drug use, and negative mental health symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, and post-traumatic stress). My study also examined gender differences regarding the strength of risk markers for physical intimate partner violence perpetration (Spencer, Stith and Cafferky, 2020).

Spencer et al, (2020) carried out a recent meta-analysis examining gender differences regarding the strength of risk markers for physical intimate partner violence perpetration. They call for future research to examine the context and motivations surrounding intimate partner violence perpetration. They found more similarities between men and women than differences. I argue that my findings go towards answering their request.

This study's strength lies in the rich, in-depth detail it affords as the women speak of their history and their backgrounds. The violence flares up quickly with each woman. Whilst each context is different, each one appears to suffer the pain of being abandoned, or the threat of being abandoned, with each one having had periods of the build-up of pain. Marie from being abandoned by her father and by her partners and the accumulation of negative remarks from another. Her Mother abandoned Najat as a child and suffered intimate partner violence that culminated in her leaving him. With further pain from a partner who would not leave her alone. And Saida who was abandoned by her Father when he died and then the rupture with her Mother and her father's family. She then continued using violence in her couple relationships because of the fear of being abandoned. These situations link into the attachment theory explained earlier.

Living alone and experiencing loneliness is different for each woman in this study. This search for being with the other and yet being separate. Marie expresses that she will never find a partner and will be alone. When she had a partner, her behaviour would lead to disappointment and violence. Saida has a similar story looking for partners so as not to be lonely, but likewise the relationship would end in violence. Najat was almost never alone except as a teenager, and she realised that she was on her own, alone. She insists that being abandoned is something unthinkable.

The build-up of pressure described by Marie, Najat and Saida all have points in common. Their childhood experiences of being abandoned and feeling lonely. Communicating if not heard or understood leads to a crescendo of screaming and shouting. Then comes a sudden explosion of violence to transform the internal turmoil into an action. Heard and understood.

When I started this study, I did not comprehend the full extent and the complexity of intimate partner violence. I was influenced by the social representations in western society that see men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims. As my research developed, I discovered that researchers throughout the world found that women could be as violent as men and across all types of violence. In my own family I have witnessed women who have been violent. I have also seen this in my clinical work over the past forty years. With the support of my supervisor, Dr David Hewison, I have been able to further understand my reactions and thoughts in relation to violent women. In clinical meetings with colleagues in the university hospital where I work, I discussed the discoveries I was making that would sometimes raise eyebrows among my colleagues. Talking this through has been a very valuable help. As a researcher trying to keep an open mind and analysing the findings has led me to further understand intimate partner violence.

intimate partner violence is a major public health problem. It is not a man's or woman's problem. The current theory is unsound. A Couple psychotherapy is appropriate in some cases. An evaluation needs to be carried out to assess the suitability for couple therapy. There will be some situations where one of the partners is in danger and needs protection.

However, this cannot be generalised. Prevention needs to be gender inclusive. Caution though is needed. More research is also needed in ethnic groups. Research in this area is still in its infancy. Breaking down the powerful and pervasive stereotypes of intimate partner violence in society can be achieved by continuing research showing substantive evidence that acknowledges the wide range of intimate partner violence perpetrators and victims. The aim is to provide adequate, individual treatment that is adjusted for each person. Hine (2019)

There is a need to further explore intimate partner violence in couples. Psychoanalytical couple psychotherapy can further understanding in intimate partner violence as I have attempted to show in this study. Future research would likely benefit from further development of psychoanalytical couple psychotherapy theory and clinical practice in order to better understand the functioning of violent couples. This could then lead to treatment that may be more appropriate in certain cases. intimate partner violence impacts on victims and perpetrators regardless of gender. Normative beliefs that we have seen were initially in place in our society are starting to change.

Further studies into the other forms of couple violence using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) so that thick data can be collected, involving descriptive comments, conceptual comments-anything that catches the eye and imagination, so that a deeper understanding of intimate partner violence can be realised. It is important for future research to look at how aspects of identity, race and ethnicity, are understood in intimate partner violence.

Research suggests that understanding female intimate partner violence from the woman's subjective world may contribute to the development of more effective treatment (Eatough, Smith and Shaw, 2008). However, much of the literature on the topic has adopted a quantitative approach (Fiebert, 2012), imposing political agendas or preconceived assumptions about men and women, victims and perpetrators, which has proven unhelpful. What appears missing from the literature are women's own narratives about their



experiences of being violent and abusive in their relationships. This qualitative study gives women from this population a voice, so that in turn professionals can gain insight into their experiences and understanding of intimate partner violence, which will enable them to provide more effective treatments.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 Letter from Ms Deroche

# Sylvie Deroche

Counselling & Psychotherapy

Bishop's Stortford, 4th of March 2020

**TO:**

Wayne Bodkin

Dear Mr Bodkin,

I have reviewed 14 pages of excerpts of your translated interviews together with the 14 pages of the French original. I validate their accuracy and completeness in English. As a French citizen born and educated in France, I confirm that the translations precisely reflect the original French transcription. I was also able to 'hear' the voices of each of the women participants in your translations. Obviously, as with any translation different words are sometimes available, but the important thing is to retain the original context and sense in which they were used as you have done.

I confirm that I was originally contacted by Dr David Hewison, your doctoral supervisor, who asked me if I could help with this task. I agreed and then you contacted me and explained your research. The files were sent to me securely. I confirm that they have been deleted by me and are not stored anywhere. No one else has had access to the material.

I am currently working as a couple therapist and a visiting clinician at Tavistock Relationships in London.

Yours faithfully,

Sylvie Deroche

Psychodynamic Couple and Individual Therapist

MA MBACP

## **APPENDIX 2 Participant information sheet & Consent form**



**University of East London**  
CASS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITIES  
Docklands Campus  
University Way  
London E16 2RD  
UK

### **Research Integrity**

The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research; observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks.

The University is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing and as such it is a mandatory requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

### **The Principal Investigator/Director of Studies**

Dr David Hewison  
70 Warren Street  
Bloomsbury  
London W1T 5PB  
UK

### **Student researcher**

Wayne Bodkin

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

### **Project Title**

How do women who are violent in couple relationships understand their violent behaviour?



## **Project description**

The purpose of this research is to try to understand women's experiences of being violent towards their partners. A total of five volunteers will be recruited. A pilot interview, which will be used as part of the study, will be conducted as part of this research with a total of five participants. The pilot interview will be used to test the mixed methodology chosen by the researcher. Only women who are currently supported by professionals will be included in this study and only those who have been assessed as suitable to participate in this research will be approached. Each participant will be interviewed individually twice and asked questions about their relationship, which will be recorded for 60 minutes. The researcher will be accompanied at all times by a staff member. This research is not part of your treatment. If you agree to participate, the written consent of your therapist will be required. Your therapist considers that you can participate and that it may be useful to talk to the researcher about your experience. Nevertheless, if, following your interview, you feel that you would like to discuss the issues raised, your therapist is available for consultation as part of your ongoing therapeutic support and your therapist is available if necessary, over an extended period of time. You can also contact the emergency and post-emergency unit of your local hospital if you wish. These services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## **Confidentiality of the Data**

The researcher will change the names and locations you give so that confidentiality can be maintained. The recordings will be stored on two encrypted USB sticks. They will be kept under lock and key in two separate locations by the researcher. The transcription will be translated and all identities of participants will be masked and any references that could identify them will also be changed to guarantee total anonymity. Once the thesis has been completed the material will be maintained securely and confidentially in accordance with the requirements of UEL. With five volunteers in the study there will be distinct limitations in the level of anonymity that can be afforded. The research findings will be published in a doctoral thesis. They may also be used in other relevant publications including internet sites. Anonymized quotes could be used in the thesis and in other publications linked to this research. The findings may also be used in conferences. Participants' confidentiality will be maintained unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority.



### **Location**

For confidentiality reasons this information is not being disclosed

### **Remuneration**

No payments will be made to the centre or the participants.

### **Disclaimer**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis – after this point it may not be possible.

### **University Research Ethics Committee**

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

**Catherine Hitchens, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB  
1.43  
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD  
(**

For general enquiries about the research please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details at the top of this sheet.



## **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

### **Consent to Participate in a Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants.**

How do women who are violent in couple relationships understand their violent behaviour?

**Researchers**

Dr David Hewison

Wayne Bodkin

Please tick as appropriate:

	YES	NO
I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.		
The interviews will be audio recorded. Do you agree?		
I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential as far as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. <i>(Please see below)</i>		
<p>I understand that maintaining strict confidentiality is subject to the following limitations:</p> <p>Five participants will take part in this study. A pilot interview will be carried out and is part of this study of a total of five participants. The pilot interview will test the mixed methodology chosen by the researcher. All names and references to people and places will be changed to give anonymity. Because the group is small this could nevertheless have implications for confidentiality and anonymity. Participants' confidentiality will be maintained unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority.</p>		

The research findings will be published in a doctoral thesis. They may also be used in other relevant publications and conferences.		
The information may be published in professional online/journals		
This data can be used in my future research.		
It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed.		
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the research without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I understand that my data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis and that after this point it may not be possible.		
I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.		

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Investigator's Name WAYNE BODKIN

.....

Investigator's Signature

.....

Date: .....

### APPENDIX 3 Research, Research Degrees and Ethic Subcommittee (RRDE)



7<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Dear Wayne,

<b>Project Title:</b>	<b>How do women who are violent in couple relationships understand their violent behaviour?</b>
Principal Investigator:	<b>Dr David Hewison</b>
Researcher:	<b>Wayne Bodkin</b>
<b>Reference Number:</b>	<b>RRDE 1718 21</b>

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Subcommittee (RRDE), which was considered by RRDE on **Wednesday 15 November 2017**.

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to RRDE. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents:  
<http://www.uel.ac.uk/wmmedia/schools!graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-toApproved-Ethics-App-150115.doc>

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to RRDE.

#### **Approved Research Site**

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
For the reasons of confidentiality, the site is not revealed	Dr David Hewison

## APPENDIX 4 Approved Documents (RRDE)



The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
RRDE application form	2.0	21 January 2019
Participant Information sheet — English	2.0	21 January 2019
Participant Information sheet — French	2.0	21 January 2019
Consent form - English	2.0	21 January 2019
Consent form - French	2.0	21 January 2019
Untitled Gantt Project	1.0	2 November 2017
Agency letter in French - Confidential	1.0	21 January 2019
Agency letter in English - Confidential	1.0	21 January 2019
Proposed research schedule	1.0	21 January 2019

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice in Research is adhered to.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research study is conducted in compliance with the consent given by the ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

**Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.**

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Fernanda Silva  
Administrative Officer for Research Governance  
Research, Research Degrees and Ethics Subcommittee (RRDE)  
Email: [researchethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@uel.ac.uk)