



“The professional saved the woman”

The experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of intimate partner abuse

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ABSTRACT

Context:

Historically considered to be a private issue, the organisational impact of Intimate Partner Abuse (IP Abuse) and the potential role that work plays in the lives of those living with abuse has begun to attract increasing attention. Literature which engages with the interaction between work and Intimate Partner Abuse crosses a range of disciplines; it is, however, notably absent within the Organisational Management literature and has tended to be atheoretical in nature. Beginning from the premise that work potentially offers a social setting capable of supporting the three needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence identified via self-determination theory (SDT), this research explores the experience of work for women living with the effects of IP Abuse and begins to bridge the existing gap.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven women living with the effects of IP Abuse to understand their experiences of work before and after disclosure; and their experiences of and aspirations for workplace support. Interview transcripts were interpreted via Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with the women's accounts set against the context of existing literature, prevailing attitudes towards abuse survivors and the researcher's own reflections of this highly emotive research area.

Key Findings:

The research identified a number of key themes and explores women's experiences of work, disclosure and support in the context of: issues of shame, blame and the stigma of abuse, the existence of multiple roles including a workplace persona, interactions with co-workers, personal autonomy and impact, the journey towards becoming a survivor of abuse, post-traumatic growth and the prevailing support model for those who disclose abuse.

For women living with IP Abuse, work is experienced as a social setting capable of supporting the three needs (identified by SDT); by allowing women the opportunity to exercise autonomy over their workplace interactions, experience a sense of professional belonging and be recognised as capable, reliable individuals. Contrary to existing findings, the women reported that workplace disclosure has the potential to undermine the three needs and lead to negative workplace consequences. Workplace responses to disclosure were varied, and largely influenced by management and co-worker attitudes towards abuse survivors rather than informed by workplace policy.

The research gives insights into the lived experience of work against the backdrop of prevailing attitudes towards abuse survivors and identifies IP Abuse as a liminal experience. It identifies some potential issues with the prevailing model of workplace support for abuse survivors and highlights the primary role of organisational culture in supporting employees dealing with traumatic life events.

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I am of course extremely thankful to all the family and friends who have supported me through my PhD journey. This last 4 years have only been possible because of your love and support.

The two most important people in my PhD journey are not here at its completion. This work was conceived in response to my mum's death in January 2014. I like to think I inherited her work ethic and I hope she would be proud of the work I have produced. My greatest emotional and intellectual support throughout this journey has been my dear friend Alison who passed away shortly before completion of my thesis. I am sad that she will not see the end result, but remain forever grateful for her encouragement and reassurance.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH RATIONALE

1.1.1. Understanding the role and importance of work

One in four women will experience Domestic Abuse at some point in their lifetime (Refuge, 2022). Despite its prevalence however, Domestic Abuse is largely experienced in secret, shrouded as it is in shame, victim blaming and unhelpful, damaging myths (Peters, 2008). Domestic abuse has historically been viewed as a private matter, but more recent exploration of the financial impact has identified the huge commercial and societal costs associated with domestic abuse (López-Sánchez *et al.*, 2019). From a business perspective, recent estimates suggest that domestic abuse costs the UK economy £1.9 billion per annum (GOV.UK, 2018) via sickness, absence and lost productivity (Rothman *et al.*, 2007). Aside from the ethical responsibility to support employee wellbeing, the case for considering domestic abuse as a pressing financial (and therefore business) issue is compelling. In a survey of its members, the Trade Unions Congress (TUC, 2014) identified that despite 86% of the organisations taking part in the research stating that they considered domestic abuse an important workplace issue, only five percent had actually implemented a Workplace Domestic Abuse policy. Swanberg *et al.* (2007) have posited that the lack of organisational will to create support for employees experiencing abuse comes from a lack of awareness of the important role that work can play for survivors of abuse. In an ideal world, by raising awareness as to how valuable the experience of work can be for someone in an abusive relationship, the likelihood of more organisations adopting policies might be increased; echoing the hope of Baird (2020) - that in the face of complex social issues, academia can be a force for change.

1.1.2. Understanding workplace disclosure

A number of theorists including Kumar and Casey (2017) and Rothman *et al.* (2007) report benefits for survivors who disclose at work, and more general exploration of self-disclosure and self-concealment in a work context (e.g., Quinn *et al.* (2014) and Uysal *et al.* (2009)) also suggests benefits to individuals who disclose their experiences of abuse. The TUC (2014) however, report that of its members who had experienced abuse, only one third had disclosed at work and compartmentalisation of work and home (which necessitates non-disclosure) has been identified as an important coping mechanism for women experiencing abuse (Beecham, 2014). More broadly, Knaak *et al.* (2019) and Petts *et al.* (2021) have identified a reluctance to access personal support at work and a tendency to fear that disclosure of personal issues will be construed as either weakness or a lack of commitment to the organisation. The decision of whether or not to disclose is complex. However, given the reported positive effects of disclosure at work, a clearer understanding of why individuals chose to disclose or not disclose would enhance understanding of this important issue and provide organisations with the opportunity to create a work environment hospitable to disclosure.

1.1.3. Implementing appropriate support

Organisations who do choose to implement a domestic abuse policy, tend to form their policy around the same framework of Recognise, Respond, Refer (e.g., Vodafone (2022); Public Health England (PHE, 2022)) and where sensitively implemented, such policies have the

potential to benefit women who disclose at work. This framework is based on a safeguarding model used to protect a variety of vulnerable individuals (e.g., those at risk of bullying (Organization for Autism Research, 2015), extremism (Lancashire Constabulary, 2022) or child neglect (Hertfordshire Council, 2022) and arguably has a number of shortcomings when applied to professional women. As identified by Yragui *et al.* (2012), a mismatch between support offered and support desired by women experiencing abuse has the potential to both negatively impact wellbeing and further reduce the likelihood of disclosure. Understanding the needs of women who disclose and how organisations can best aid women experiencing abuse therefore would allow organisations to confidently implement genuinely meaningful support.

1.1.4. Terminology

Following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act (GOV.UK, 2021) a formal legal definition of domestic abuse was adopted. Domestic abuse is an umbrella term which includes abusive behaviour within the context of an intimate relationship, between people who have previously been in a relationship or between family members over the age of 16; and as such the term domestic abuse is rather broader than the layman might imagine. The term domestic abuse is sometimes used to refer to abuse within the context of an intimate relationship and sometimes to infer the broader meaning, leading to a lack of clarity and potential difficulties in comparing findings. This research focuses solely on participants who have experienced abuse in the context of an intimate relationship (and not other forms of familial abuse) and as such uses the term intimate partner abuse (or IP Abuse). (Please see Appendix I for further discussion on terminology.)

1.1.5. Research questions and research objectives

This research aims to expand understanding of the role work plays in the lives of women experiencing IP abuse, as well as explore why women might be reluctant to disclose and how workplaces can meaningfully support women who choose to disclose. In order to do this, the research poses the following research question:

- *What is the experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of intimate partner abuse?*

In answering this question, the research aims to meet the following research objectives:

- *To understand how women living with the effects of IP Abuse experience work*
- *To explore what influences the decision of whether or not to disclose the experience of IP Abuse to co-workers*
- *To understand whether (and how) the experience of work changes following disclosure*
- *To establish how useful and easily accessible workplace support is for women living with the effects of abuse*

1.2. POSITIONALITY

For me, this research fulfills a number of purposes. From an academic perspective, I hope to further the shared understanding of the experience of work for women and in particular for a group of women whose experiences are often left unexplored. From a professional perspective I hoped to develop my research skills and provide insight to HR professionals as

to how they can best support women experiencing abuse. In my role as a Charity Trustee and an advocate for women experiencing abuse, I hope to give women space to tell their stories. Finally, from a personal perspective I hope to make something meaningful out of a traumatic event, provide insights that might help other women and understand more about what work might have meant to my mum, as I cannot ask her myself.

Since 2012, Ingala Smith has been “Counting Dead Women” (Ingala Smith, 2021). Her annual documentation and analysis of the women killed by men in the UK, began as a list of the names of the women killed (under the heading “Counting dead women”), and in collaboration with fellow researchers and Women’s Aid, has subsequently developed into “The Femicide Census”; which the authors describe as “a unique source of comprehensive information about women who have been killed in the UK and the men who have killed them” (Ingala Smith, 2021). Ingala Smith’s list for 2014 includes my mum’s name (Ingala Smith, 2015) and this research was conceived in response to her death. After forty years of domestic abuse, she was murdered on January 20th 2014, and only twenty days into the year, she was already the sixth woman to appear on the list. From an academic perspective I have long been interested in employee motivation and engagement as well as work meaning, but it was only after my mum’s death that I started to consider these concepts in relation to women who have experienced abuse. My mum loved her job. She loved her team and took enormous pride in her work. She was immensely valued as a mentor by her employer and having declined to take on the role of store manager, was instead often called on to coach new store managers in her role as assistant manager. Being the assistant manager of a department store in a busy market town, she was well known in the local community and often recognised in the street. She retired very reluctantly, changing her mind several times about retirement as her final day of employment approached and - as soon as she retired - immediately started work in a voluntary role at the local hospital (where she had been treated for breast cancer a few years previously). At the time, I took her reluctance to leave employment as a desire to stay occupied and stave of the potential boredom of retirement, but after her death I began to ask myself whether there might have been other reasons; other functions that work performed for her, which led me to this research.

Given my personal interest in this area, my experience of growing up in an abusive home and my work as a Trustee of a Domestic Abuse charity, I am well aware that I bring a lot with me to this piece of work. Rather than seeing this as a problem, I choose to see this as a blessing. What might be considered as bias or “baggage” by others provides insight, perspective, a deep level of understanding and a level of access to participants that might not otherwise be possible. I felt privileged to be privy to the deeply personal and at times harrowing accounts the women gave of their experiences and understood their ability to pivot from a horrifying account of a violent encounter to a joke at the perpetrator’s expense that made us both laugh riotously – because I sometimes also recount my experiences in this way.

As much as I value the experience I bring with me to this research, I am well aware of the need to be reflexive and use the experiences and insights I have as a starting point, recognising them as personal, subjective and potentially subject to change. Throughout the research I have consciously tried to be mindful of my pre-existing knowledge and views and

how these might impact the decisions I have made and the actions I have taken with regard to formulating and carrying out the research. I have also become aware of how my interactions both with the women and the literature might impact my own interpretations of personal experiences and perspectives and have reflected back on previous experiences in the light of women's transcripts. Some of these insights are shared within the body of the research.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This chapter has begun to outline the relevance of the study of IP Abuse in a work context, explain the personal context of the research and provide some clarification around terminology.

Moving on, Chapter 2 will detail findings to date and current thought with regard to IP Abuse and work, taking in a wide range of disciplines and themes including trauma and shame – all of which help to locate the experience of work as a survivor of IP Abuse. The Chapter continues by identifying current models and guidance available to employers who wish to implement policies to support women who disclose at work and discusses how widespread such policies are as well as introducing the strengths and weaknesses of the prevalent model. Having identified key issues in relation to work and abuse, the chapter goes on to identify the gaps in current thinking that the research will bridge, and concludes by introducing the research question, research objectives and theoretical lens which will be used to frame the research.

Chapter 3 introduces the research methods used throughout the thesis. Focusing on the lived experience of work for women living with the effects of IP Abuse, this research is located in an interpretivist paradigm and reflects a relativist ontology and subjective epistemology, recognising – as it does - the very subjective nature of individual experience. The detailing of research methods identifies Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2022) as the ideal approach to explore the lived experience of work and describes the importance of ongoing recognition and examination of forestructures and personal emotional responses that inform both the choice of subject matter and the subsequent methodology and interpretation of participants accounts. This chapter continues by describing the method used to identify eligible participants, procedures put in place to safeguard them and the process of data analysis conducted within the IPA methodology. Attention is also given to the structure and content of participant interviews and the important issue of rapport building given the very emotive and sensitive nature of the issues under discussion. Given the sensitive nature of the research, ethics and the wellbeing of the participants has been an important element of the research process; and the safeguards put in place to protect both participant and researcher wellbeing are described in this chapter. Finally, it would be impossible to discuss research methods in this thesis without addressing the important issue of insider status, which is also discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4 the results of the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the participants' transcripts are presented. To both reflect the idiographic focus of IPA and preserve the voices of the women and the deeply personal nature of the experiences they shared, these findings are presented by participant in the form of crafted narratives (using Crowther *et al.*'s

methodology (Crowther *et al.*, 2017). In the interest of confidentiality, participants' names have not been used throughout the research. However, given the highly personal nature of the research and the women's openness and honesty throughout the research process it felt important to reflect the identity of the woman when presenting her account of work. In order to do this, I wanted to name the participants rather than refer to them by number, but choosing a random name felt too haphazard and to me felt little better than assigning a transcript number. Chapter 4 also details the process of selecting names to represent each woman and the key role that work played in her life.

Following the presentation of the women's accounts of their experiences of work, Chapter 5 draws on existing literature, personal insights and forestructures to illuminate the women's accounts of work and draw appropriate insights. The discussion chapter is structured around a series of shared themes identified during analysis of the data, providing a multi-faceted interpretation of the experience of work and the role that work might play in the lives of women living with the effects of IP Abuse.

Chapter 6 summarises the work carried out in order to undertake the research, provides an overview of the research findings, provides a response to the research question and considers potential implications for practice in terms of supporting survivors in the workplace. This final chapter summarises where the findings of this research either support or challenge existing findings; and considers the impact of COVID-19 both on the research itself and on how organisations approach their responsibilities associated with IP Abuse going forward. The chapter closes with some suggestions for future research directions.

1.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced the research rationale, researcher positionality and the structure of the thesis, in order to set the context for the review of current literature which follows in the next chapter.

IP Abuse is increasingly being recognised as a workplace issue, with a number of organisations including the Trade Unions Congress, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD - the professional body for HR professionals) and Public Health England all providing input into the conversation around the role of organisations in relation to IP Abuse. Despite this growing awareness, workplace policies designed to support survivors are few and far between, with Swanberg *et al.* (2007) surmising that the current lack of workplace support stems from a lack of understanding as to the important role work plays in the lives of survivors - a gap this research is intended to reduce.

From a personal perspective, this research fulfils a number of purposes, from contributing to the collective knowledge around the experience of work for women living with the effects of abuse, to a more personal aim of attempting to create something positive from the aftermath of a traumatic event. I am well aware of the knowledge, experience and pre-existing ideas I bring to this research, but rather than view these as "baggage" (as some might describe them), I choose to see these forestructures as useful contextualising insight. With this in mind, I have been extremely mindful at all stages of the research process of my personal

insights and experiences and have at all times tried to use these to expand rather than limit the research, viewing them as a starting point to further interpretation.

This research is structured around Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a methodology and commences with a review of current literature and the formulation of the research question and objectives, followed by an overview of the methodology implemented, a discussion of the women's experiences set against the backdrop of existing thought and closes with conclusions and suggestions for further research.

In order to contextualise the collection of data and its subsequent analysis, the following chapter explores current literature in relation to the purpose, role and meaning of work, existing findings with regard to work and IP Abuse and current thought in connection with the workplace support and disclosure.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE REVIEW

To enable a comprehensive understanding of the lived experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of IP Abuse, it is important to consider what is already known. On reviewing the literature, it became apparent that investigations cross a range of disciplines including social work, nursing, gender studies and occupational health psychology and that literature stemming from the perspective of organisational management and HRM is notably lacking (Deen *et al.*, 2022).

2.1.1 Search Method

To find relevant literature a number of research portals and databases were used including EBSCO, JSTOR, Pro Quest, Pub Med – accessed via the University’s online library search. Additionally, research portals such as Google Scholar, Ethos (British Library), Research Gate were also used to find additional material. Databases were queried using the following keywords: “Domestic abuse/violence” and “work/organi*ation*/employment”, “Intimate Partner abuse/violence” and “work/organi*ation*/employment”, “work meaning/role/function”.

Reading of the initial literature revealed a complex picture where living with IP abuse is fraught with complexity and abuse survivors negotiate trauma, stigma and shame in their daily lives both inside and outside work. As such further investigation of the relationship between abuse and work necessitated exploration of a number of related areas including shame theory, personal responsibility, the accessing of workplace support and the relationship between work and trauma. This gave rise to additional search terms such as “work and trauma”, “disclosure and stigma/shame”, “workplace/employer support”, “work and disclosure”.

The searches resulted in a final list of 93 works which helped to give a broad overview of the areas of work role and function, the intersection of IP Abuse and work, and the current state of support for individuals disclosing abuse at work. These included books, journal articles, conference proceedings, research reports and practitioner based material largely from the period 2000 to 2023 (80 out of 93 articles) with a small number falling outside this range.

2.1.2 Overview of the Review

The review which follows explore a range of issues which help to understand current thought and situate IP abuse in a work context, the chapter continues by summarising shortcomings identified through exploration of the literature and how these shortcomings might be rectified by this research. The chapter closes by identifying the research questions and objectives the research will address and the theoretical lens which will be used to frame the research.

The discussion that follows also highlights the current prevalence of quantitative (and in particular financial) perspectives within existing literature, the existence of stereotypical views on abuse victims and an exploration of the home and work domains. Issues of

workplace disclosure including associated benefits and barriers are also discussed, followed by analysis of the prevailing model of support for women who disclose abuse and the potential problems this presents.

2.2 WORK

2.2.1 The role and Function of work

Conceptualisations of work are historically and culturally context driven, having developed from the concept of work as imposed drudgery (Yeoman, 2014) to work and career as a consumable commodity associated with lifestyle and identity (Chertkovskaya *et al.*, 2017). Common to the range of definitions of work, however, is the sense that work is understood as an activity driven by purpose, and that it plays a central role as a source of an individual's livelihood. As a result of this, most contemporary discussions describe work as an activity for which one receives a financial reward of some kind (thus tending to exclude voluntary work or work involved in the maintenance of the home or caring for dependents).

The focus on work as a source of livelihood suggests that money is the primary reason for working, but work is often about more than money. Arvey *et al.*'s 2004 investigation into the behaviour of lottery winners identified that the assurance of ongoing financial security through a substantial lottery win, does not necessarily lead winners to give up work (Arvey *et al.*, 2004). When interviewed with regard to their intentions post win, many participants interviewed stated that they intended to remain in employment despite their altered financial status. (These findings were supported by comparative findings across multiple studies - including the Meaning of Work International Research Team (MOWIRT, 1987) - as identified by Harpaz and Fu (2002)). Since theorists such as Maslow and Herzberg first identified the range of human needs that can be met via work, a variety of frameworks (including those proposed by Mor-Barak (1995); Kraska and Wilmoth (1991) and Deci and Ryan (1985)) have been developed to explore the many and complex reasons for which people work and the potential meanings that work could hold; extending well beyond the satisfaction of material needs into more complex emotional and psychological terrain. This ability of work to satisfy multiple human needs identifies that although for the majority of employees the primary role of work is to earn money, the reasons for which people work and the potential meaning that work holds is much more complex.

Work such as that undertaken by the Meaning in Work International Research Team (MOWIRT, 1987) has identified a broad range of potential issues which relate to the meaning of work. Described, among other things, as an impressive work, a "statistician's delight" (Fineman, 1991, p166) and the starting point for all meaning in work scholars (Puplampu, 2009), the Meaning of Work International Research Team's initial analysis, which comprised of a longitudinal survey comparing 8 countries, MOWIRT, 1987) is considered to be iconic. The team's work – first published in 1987 – began with the intention of measuring attitudes towards work, providing data to observe differences and similarities in attitudes across geography, whilst also providing a baseline against which to track changes in attitudes towards work over time. Whilst having been undertaken to measure attitudes, the dimensions constructed by the team and the subsequent data collected tells us much about the experience of work. The team's research explores work centrality, societal attitudes towards work, issues of workplace identity, job satisfaction, and work outcomes including money, achievement and social interaction. As such it is well placed to provide a starting

point for a rounded discussion of the role work plays in the lives of participants and indeed in their experience of work.

Despite the esteem in which the team's work is held, there has been robust criticism of the data collection methods used and the conceptualisation of meaning of work (or lack thereof) central to the team's analysis. As critiques of the MOWIRT clearly show, the discussion of the meaning of meaning quickly becomes tied up in philosophical knots and whereas the MOWIRT was initially intended to give an insight into the experience of and attitudes towards work, its greatest critics express their frustration that is not more philosophical and phenomenological in nature – something this piece of work never claimed to be and aims it never set out to achieve. While on the one hand praising the thoroughness and dedication of the research team Fineman - in outlining his "anxieties" (Fineman, 1991, p166) relating to the MOWIRT's work - pinpoints the fundamental issue with the team's work in that it attempts to use quantitative tools to describe what is a fundamentally qualitative concept. From this perspective, while being a solid foundation from which to start, the MOWIRT is at its core a set of measures and while providing context as to the many and varied meanings that work might hold for individuals, it gives a limited insight into how these meanings might come about, how they might be constructed and what experiences might lie at their heart.

2.2.2 Trauma and the (changing) role of work

In their discussion of grief, loss and trauma and their impact on the workplace Thomson and Lund (2009) identify the potential for trauma to fundamentally change the function and role of work. Thomson and Lund identify a number of unfortunate life experiences which can give rise to psychological (and in some cases also physical) trauma; bereavement, bullying and harassment, aggression and violence, sexual abuse, crime, terrorism and terminal illness. Although their exploration of trauma and the role of the workplace in supporting those experiencing loss and trauma does not explicitly identify IP Abuse as a source of trauma, for many women the experience of IP Abuse encompasses aspects of many of the sources of trauma identified in their work. Written by US authors in the wake of the events of 9/11, Thomson and Lund return frequently to terrorism as a source of trauma both in terms of PTSD for those who directly experienced the events and in terms of the ongoing fear and psychological unease associated with the potential for further terrorist incidents.

The impacts of trauma are potentially long term and wide ranging. When understanding psychological trauma in the context of an injury, Thomson and Lund challenge us to consider what has been injured, concluding that psychological trauma constitutes a wound to one's identity. Herman (1997) further expands this discussion by describing the wide-ranging impact of both trauma in terms of shattering our self-image, but also in terms of questioning our place in the world with regard to our relationships to others and potentially undermining the beliefs we previously held about ourselves, our place in the world and the very order of things. Though often still referred to in common parlance, the concept of the stages of grief model attributed to Kübler-Ross (1973) has long since fallen out of favour in academic and professional discussions of grief and how best to support those who have experienced loss or trauma. (Though in Kübler-Ross's defence, her model was created to describe those coming to terms with their own terminal illness rather than as a catch-all tool to describe the experience of loss in general – as it has tended to be applied.) Rather than the ultimate goal of Acceptance, more recent discussions of trauma and loss identify the potential for trauma to be a transformational experience. Lattanzi-Licht and Doka (2003) describe the reordering

of priorities that is characteristic of trauma, and although they go on to suggest that work might become less important as a result of trauma, for some individuals the experience of trauma leads to an entirely new role for work, becoming central in the creation of a new identity exemplified by a change in career such as the dramatic increase in applications for Firefighting roles in New York following the events of 9/11 (Shea *et al.*, 2021), and the increase in applications to teach in the UK during the COVID 19 pandemic (Martin, 2021). As Schiraldi (2009) puts it, following a traumatic experience an individual is never quite the same again, but rather than dwelling on the past, the transformative experience of trauma presents the opportunity for rediscovery, reinvention and post traumatic growth. Viewing the experience of work from the perspective of IP Abuse as trauma, opens up the possibility of examining a new relationship with work through and following recovery from abuse; and this research aims to uncover such changes in personal context and associated potential changes in work meanings.

2.2.3 The lived experience of work

The idea that despite being financially comfortable an individual might still choose to work and the sense of taking on an objectively more meaningful work role as a reaction to trauma, point to more complex motives for work and career choice. As such it is impossible to explore the experience of work without also considering the fundamental role of work in our lives and therefore the meaning of work and from where and how such meaning might be derived. In his description of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a methodological tool, Smith (2019) describes the inextricable link between human experience and meaning. His description of humans as essentially sense-making creatures underlines his assertion that the only way to truly understand the meaning of a phenomenon is to understand the lived experience of that phenomenon, and by extension – it is impossible to fully appreciate lived experience without considering the meanings attributed to that experience by those who live it. Meaning has been identified as highly context driven and subject to change, for example organisational psychologists suggest that the experience of work and workplace is heavily influenced by both career and life stage (Lopez and Ramos, 2017) and Glavas (2012) proposes that employees in their “middle-ages” (Glavas, 2012, p20) may desire greater meaning in work as a result of their life stage. Despite such findings, existing research relating to work meaning falls back on a generic experience of meaning which has been criticised as being limited to specific groups (particularly middle and senior management) who are financially secure (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). Focusing on this group leaves the experience of work meaning unexplored for significant sections of the workforce, including those underrepresented in management (for example GEM employees (Roper, 2019), female employees (Gavett and Perry, 2019) and employees who on average earn lower salaries (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). Rosso *et al.* additionally note the dearth of work meaning literature exploring the role of the family in the experience of work meaning (though Brief and Nord’s work exploring the connection between home and work domains is a notable exception here (Brief and Nord, 1990)). While not able to bridge all the existing gaps in the current understanding of the experience of work meaning, by examining the experiences of an underrepresented group, this research adds to the collective understanding of work meaning and the lived experience of work.

2.3 WORK AND IP ABUSE

2.3.1 IP Abuse and money

One of the reasons suggested as to why women stay in abusive relationships is because they lack the financial resources to leave; with researchers such as Showalter (2016) identifying work - and in particular employment security - as instrumental in enabling women to leave abusive relationships. In common with Showalter's research, to date much of the literature relating to the intersection of work and domestic abuse has centred on finances; either emulating work such as Swanberg *et al.*'s (2007) relating to the impact of domestic abuse on women's ability to maintain employment or following the example of López-Sánchez *et al.* (2019) in exploring the costs of domestic abuse to employers and the economy at large. Given the huge financial impact of abuse, both from a business perspective and to wider society, it is perhaps understandable that research relating to the intersection between work and domestic abuse thus far has tended towards the quantitative and more specifically the financial.

Both Rothman *et al.* (2007) and Swanberg *et al.* (2007) have established a relationship between career stability and the ability to leave an abusive relationship, Storer *et al.* (2021) identified financial dependence as a barrier which prevents women from leaving abusive relationships and a range of studies have shown that as a woman's financial stability increases, her risk of experiencing intimate partner abuse decreases (Lloyd, 1997; Raphael, 2000). Work has the potential to mean financial security, the financial resources to flee, or at the very least the ability to fund day to day necessities, to allow a woman to care for herself and her children and women who disclose at work are more likely to remain in employment (Rothman *et al.*, 2007), increasing their chance of establishing or maintaining financially stable and benefitting from any emotional or practical support available.

There is a certain logic then behind the assumption that it is purely the financial element of career stability (via the creation of economic stability) that nurtures the conditions conducive to leaving an abusive relationship. This logic however is questionable and helps to perpetuate the damaging myth that domestic abuse only affects certain kinds of women and women in certain socio-economic brackets. Organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG, 2019) have identified that women in lower income brackets are more at risk than women in higher brackets, however researchers such as Kumar and Casey (2017) stress that abuse is experienced across all socio-economic strata and while income level plays an important role, abuse is not driven by income (or lack thereof) alone. Beecham (2009) states this explicitly when he draws the distinction between financial independence and power within abusive relationships, stressing that financial independence in and of itself is not the key to leaving a relationship. The expansion of the definition of domestic abuse to include financial abuse and the existence of charities such as Surviving Economic Abuse (set up to support women who have experienced economic abuse – SEA (2023)) underline the fact that having access to finances does not automatically equip a woman with the resources to leave a relationship – although it of course has the potential to reduce some of the barriers.

2.3.2 How work benefits survivors

Existing research relating to the intersection of work and survivors of abuse has tended to explore work from a particular perspective, for example Beecham's 2009 exploration of work as a coping mechanism (viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, with power relationships very much at its core (Beecham, 2009)) or Showalter's (quantitative) findings (2016) relating to women's ability to maintain employment while experiencing abuse. Although such findings have done much to expand awareness of the varied potential role of work, the methods used and the methodologies adopted have not had an understanding of the lived experience as the central premise. Thus, although research relating to the relationship between work and IP Abuse is diverse, it has not thus far provided insight into the lived experience of work and the meaning derived from this for women living with abuse.

Rothman *et al.*'s exploration of how work can help women experiencing abuse, identified a diverse role for work, describing a number of sources of work meaning broadly aligning with Rosso *et al.*'s findings regarding the sources of work meaning more broadly (Rosso *et al.*, 2010; Rothman *et al.*, 2007). (With Rothman *et al.* identifying roles for physical, social and financial wellbeing as well as enhanced self-esteem; and Rosso identifying the self, others, attributes of the workplace and the spiritual life as important sources of meaning). Starting from the premise that financial security, physical distance from the abuser and enhancements to self-esteem provided by the completion of work activities would enable women to build the financial, emotional and practical resources needed to leave an abusive relationship; the research investigated the potential benefits of work from the perspective of women experiencing intimate partner abuse. The work explicitly explored the role of work as a potential means to escape abuse, and women's experience of work was investigated via a series of semi structured interviews. The analysis confirmed both the potential for work to enable women to build the resources needed to leave an abusive relationship, and a series of 6 concurrent sources of meaning – financial security, physical safety, enhanced self-esteem, emotional respite, social connectedness and purpose.

Beecham's (2014) analysis of the experience of work for women experiencing abuse also identified a number of meanings for work. Work was identified as a place to exhibit emotions or personality traits which cannot be exhibited at home (such as disagreement or assertiveness), a place of emotional and physical sanctuary, a source of purpose, a source of practical and emotional resources and a potential defence against isolation (a tactic used by abusers). Beecham's main focus was on the exploration of work as a potential coping mechanism for women experiencing abuse and via a series of semi structured interviews identified important roles for compartmentalisation, work commute and work symbols and gateways.

As identified by researchers such as Beecham (2014) and Rothman *et al.* (2007), for many women experiencing intimate partner abuse, work can be a place of safety and a sanctuary from an abusive home environment, however, this is not always the case. Women experiencing intimate partner abuse experience unwanted contact and abuse from the perpetrator during their hours of work, with their abuser bringing the abuse outside the home (Swanberg *et al.*, 2007). Eighty percent of women who experience intimate partner abuse report that the abuse impacted their ability to work effectively, either due to actual interruption, distraction at work, lateness or illness (TUC, 2014) and the very existence of a

Work/School abuse scale specifically designed to measure the effects of abusers on women's attempts to continue working/studying speaks to the scope of this issue (Riger *et al.*, 2000). Given the potential for workplaces to provide respite and sanctuary to victims of abuse (Rothman *et al.*, 2007), it is perhaps not surprising that some abusers might wish to encroach on what would otherwise be a safe space.

From the perspective of work as a source of positive meaning, work can provide mechanisms to enable women to cope with or escape from abuse, however work has the potential to hold simultaneously positive and negative meanings which may be conflicting or contradictory. As Yeoman (2014) identifies, in industrialised societies work "occupies a peculiarly ambivalent position", (p235) in that it has the potential to provide for self-actualisation whilst at the same time being enforced and potentially burdensome. For women experiencing intimate partner abuse, work has the potential to occupy that same "peculiarly ambivalent" space, in that it offers the freedom to express an alternate identity (Beecham, 2014) and achieve financial independence (Swanberg *et al.*, 2007), but also has the potential to create excessive, potentially damaging psychological compartmentalisation (Beecham, 2014; Spitzer *et al.*, 2006) and can increase the risk of financial abuse (Showalter, 2016).

2.3.3 The domains of home and work

In her 1997 book 'The Time Bind', Hochschild challenges the widely held view that home is a place of rest and respite from a workplace characterised as imposed drudgery, and presents the possibility that for some (often for women), the domains of work and home are reversed (Hochschild, 1997). Work becomes a respite from the underappreciated labour of childcare and housework, and provides an opportunity to forge friendships and find solidarity. For women experiencing intimate partner abuse, work has the potential to take on the role of an escape and safe haven from home life, a place to explore meaningful interaction and have one's talents recognised and appreciated (Beecham, 2014).

Beecham's descriptions of compartmentalisation align with Brief and Nord's descriptions of segmentation - where the home and work domain are experienced as 2 completely distinct spheres (Brief and Nord, 1990). Brief and Nord identified that such separation of the home and work domain can offer benefits to women experiencing intimate partner abuse, however, there are potentially some risks associated with this phenomenon. While segmentation allows women to adopt a workplace persona and temporarily forget the trauma of the home domain, extreme levels of segmentation can create such a strong separation between the two worlds that women actively avoid certain actions, viewed as jeopardising the segmentation in order to maintain the separation. For example, (Beecham, 2014) found that high levels of segmentation can delay disclosure, leaving a woman without workplace support, and prevent a woman from exercising positive traits (such as self-determination) learnt in the workplace within the home domain; both of which result in women staying in the abusive relationship. Additionally, maintaining two such separate identities leads to disassociation which apart from being emotionally exhausting, can be psychologically damaging (Spitzer *et al.*, 2006). Brief and Nord identified 3 potential relationships between the home and work domain: segmentation, compensation and spill-over.

Brief and Nord report that when spill-over from work to home domain is discussed, it tends to be primarily comprised of negative emotions and experience (boredom, stress and

frustration) spilling from the work domain into the home and negatively impacting life outside work. Brief and Nord themselves, however then counter that the spill-over can flow both ways with stresses and strains experienced at home having the potential to influence an individual's work; and furthermore, the possibility that positive emotions and experiences at work can spill-over into the home domain. The financial stability, coping skills and self-esteem built via supportive, stable employment have been identified as a key factor in enabling women to leave abusive relationships (Rothman *et al.*, 2007), a positive manifestation of the spill-over effect. Such discussions of the home/work domain arguably present individuals as passive in terms of the impact of the home domain on the experience of work and vice versa, and later theorists (notably Nippert Eng (1996) and Campbell Clark (2000) - via the concept of boundary theory and border theory respectively) present individuals as active agents, who choose how and when to manage the balance between the 2 domains through a process of either segmentation or integration.

2.3.3.1 Border Theory

Boundary theory was originally established as a means of understanding the sociological implications of individuals performing multiple roles and taking part in multiple distinct categories of activity (Desrochers *et al.*, 2005). It was further developed by Nippert-Eng (1996) who identified the creation and management of boundaries between different social domains – including work and home - as an active, deliberate process. Nippert-Eng's research identified boundary creation and management as highly idiosyncratic and dependent on a number of features including personal preference, occupation and family dynamics. Following on from Nippert-Eng's discussion of boundaries, Campbell Clark developed Border theory. Sharing many of the same basic concepts as boundary theory, border theory focuses solely on the interaction and management of the domains of work and family and excludes analysis of other social domains (Desrochers *et al.*, 2005).

In her discussion of Border Theory (2000) Campbell Clark describes the shift in attitudes over time towards the relationship between the home and work domains, from a pre-industrial era when work and home were inextricably linked and families worked together within the home, through post-industrialisation where work and employment became synonymous with our contemporary experience of work where - largely thanks to technology - the boundaries are increasingly blurred. She continues by describing workers as border-crossers who constantly negotiate boundaries – be they physical or psychological – between the work and home domain.

Instead of the three distinct relationships offered by Brief and Nord (compensation, segmentation and spill-over) both Nippert-Eng and Campbell Clark propose a spectrum of integration in relation to home and work domains with segmentation at one extreme and complete integration of domains at the other. Campbell Clark states that there is a natural tendency to imagine that integration of home and work domains is the ideal, but that in actual fact there is no ideal position of the spectrum of segmentation to integration and Campbell Clark's research identified individuals reporting high levels of satisfaction at multiple points on the spectrum.

In contrast to Boundary Theory – where the degree of contrast between the home and work role heavily influences the strength of the boundary put in place between the 2 domains -

Border Theory proposes that the strength of the border is not influenced by role similarity. Both theories however recognise the very personal nature of boundary or border construction and the active role played by the individual in managing the 2 domains.

2.3.4 The role and function of work for women living with the effects of IP Abuse – The current position

Research regarding the intersection of IP Abuse and work crosses a range of disciplines from which organisational management scholars are notably lacking. In their interdisciplinary review of the literature, (Deen *et al.*, 2022) note that the literature is wide ranging in both its theoretical perspective and its emphasis; however, across the literature there are some key similarities. Research to date is very US-centric (with Europe woefully under-represented), largely quantitative (more than two thirds of the papers reviewed used quantitative methods) and focuses largely on antecedents of and theoretical framing of abuse rather than work. This leaves the experience of work, the role played by work (beyond the financial) and perceptions of work for abuse survivors under-explored. More recent focus on employee wellbeing and the increased profile of domestic abuse during COVID-19 paves the way for exploration of work and IP abuse that bridges this gap and deviates from the quantitative and financial focus thus far.

Existing research has tended to explore work from a particular perspective, for example (Beecham, 2009) exploration of work as a coping mechanism (viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, with power relationships very much at its core) or Showalter's (quantitative) findings (2016) relating to women's ability to maintain employment while experiencing abuse. Although such findings have done much to expand awareness of the varied potential role of work, the methods used and the methodologies adopted have not had an understanding of the lived experience as the central premise. Thus, although research relating to both the existence and construction of work meaning, and the relationship between work and IP Abuse is diverse, it has not thus far provided insight into the lived experience of work and the meaning derived from this for women living with abuse.

Within the literature, the role of segmentation of home and work domains is of particular interest in relation to women living with the effects of IP Abuse. Identified as a benefit to women experiencing abuse and recognised as a valued coping mechanism (Beecham, 2014), segmentation goes hand in hand with the decision not to disclose abuse and requires some degree of self-concealment. Self-concealment has been linked (by Quinn *et al.* (2014) via a composite measure of wellbeing and by Uysal *et al.* (2009) using self-determination theory) as damaging to wellbeing however, raising the question of whether segmentation is helpful to women experiencing abuse or not. This leaves space in the literature for a more detailed understanding of the role of segmentation and its interaction with wellbeing for women living with the effects of abuse.

2.4 WORKPLACE DISCLOSURE AND SUPPORT

2.4.1 Benefits of Disclosure and the strain of non-disclosure

A range of studies have shown that as a woman's financial stability increases, her risk of experiencing intimate partner abuse decreases (Lloyd, 1997); (Raphael, 2000). Work has the potential to mean financial security, the financial resources to flee, or at the very least the

ability to fund day to day necessities, to allow a woman to care for herself and her children. According to (Rothman *et al.*, 2007) women who disclose at work are more likely to remain in employment, increasing their chance of establishing or maintaining financial stability and benefitting from any emotional or practical support available and Kumar and Casey (2017) also identify disclosure as beneficial to abuse survivors. More broadly, research conducted by Uysal *et al.* (2009) identifies the psychological impact of self-concealment, arguing that disclosure enhances emotional wellbeing. Uysal *et al.*'s findings on the value of disclosure at work were confirmed by Quinn *et al.*'s research which identified a link between disclosure and wellbeing

For individuals struggling with difficult life events maintaining a positive, professional demeanour in the workplace, out of step with their sense of self shares many of the characteristic of emotion work (as described by Hochschild (1983)). Hochschild's description of emotion work relates specifically to those engaged in the caring professions – for example nursing or social work – where in the course of their workplace interactions, individuals might be required to suppress their own emotions in favour of a more socially expected or therapeutically appropriate response. Findings such as those detailed by Uysal *et al.* (2009) and Quinn *et al.* (2014) have some parallels with the experience described within the emotion work literature (Delgado *et al.*, 2017; Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2017). For working women living with the effects of IP Abuse (or indeed individuals experiencing any kind of trauma) who chose not to disclose to co-workers, self-concealment and the associated emotional dissonance are an inevitable element of the experience of work. Such self-concealment exposes individuals to the negative effects associated with emotion work (and particularly with emotional dissonance) as identified by Hofmann and Stockburger-Sauer (2017), who noted that emotion work can lead to increased levels of stress and lower levels of employee wellbeing.

In their member wide survey of intimate partner abuse and its impact on work, the TUC (2014) report that less than one third of intimate partner abuse survivors disclose at work and of these two thirds received no workplace support of any kind. Respondents also reported that often managers or colleagues were aware of abuse (despite no disclosure on the woman's part) but offered no support. The discrepancy between the benefits of disclosure and actual rates of disclosure (as evidenced by the TUC (2014)) raises the question of what might be preventing women from disclosing abuse. Despite the potential reluctance to disclose, there is evidence that women who choose to disclose find the resulting (formal and informal) support to be helpful, with the likelihood of disclosure influenced by the existence of workplace support (in any form) and the prevailing organisational attitude towards intimate partner abuse (Swanberg, *et al.*, 2007). The following sections identify some of the potential barriers to disclosure including stigma, blame, issues surrounding work/life balance, awareness of abuse and organisational culture.

2.4.2 Stigmatised identities

Ashforth *et al.* (2008) provide a useful definition of identity, describing it as “a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question “who am I?”” (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008, p327). This definition helpfully introduces the concept of context,

recognising that identity is an evolving and context-driven concept, rather than relatively stable and immutable as argued by the essentialists (Oyserman *et al.*, 2012).

Cooley laid the foundations for the conceptualisation of identity as socially constructed rather than derived from an internal sense of self when he described humans as “living in the minds of others” (Cooley, 1902, p207). To Cooley’s mind our sense of self is comprised of three elements, firstly how we imagine others see us, secondly how we imagine they feel about us or what they think about us based on that image, and thirdly how we feel about that judgement; with Cooley suggesting that this reflection will result in an emotion somewhere along a scale from pride to shame. Thus, in Cooley’s description our beliefs about ourselves and our sense of self is derived from how we believe others see us. Cooley describes this phenomenon as the looking glass self, although his conception of sense of self does not derive from how we see ourselves in the mirror, but what we believe that others see. This arguably leads us to control what others see, or what we tell them, revealing only the parts of ourselves that might evoke “pride” rather than “shame”.

The concept of shame and how it interacts with identity was explored by Quinn *et al.* (2014) in their exploration of the effects of anticipated stigma for individuals with concealable stigmatised identities (CSI). Quinn *et al.* investigated 5 groups of people with what they referred to as concealable stigmatised identities – experiences and identities associated with social devaluation which can either be disclosed or hidden. Their analysis explored outcomes for 5 groups of people and included those with a history of mental illness or substance abuse and those with experience of domestic abuse, sexual assault or childhood abuse. The focus of the research was on identifying the impact of 5 dimensions associated with the CSI, and the resulting psychological distress (a composite of anxiety and depression). The dimensions were anticipated stigma, internalised stigma, centrality, salience and outness. Internalised stigma relates to the degree to which the individual believes people will distance themselves if their CSI is disclosed and internalised stigma describes the degree to which individuals themselves believe the stereotypes associated with the CSI and as a result of this wish to distance themselves from their stigmatised identity. Quinn *et al.* define centrality as the degree to which the individual is defined by the CSI and salience as how frequently the individual thinks about their stigmatised identity (either positively or negatively). The last element - outness – refers to the extent to which other people are currently aware of the individual’s CSI.

Anticipated stigma is strongly related to increased risk of psychological distress and such anticipation of a negative response may prevent people from seeking much needed professional help. The levels of anticipated stigma were similar for the domestic abuse group as for the other CSIs and showed high levels of uncertainty with regard to how disclosure might be received. The research noted that not all members of the CSI groups internalised the stigma associated with their identity, but the levels amongst the domestic violence group were higher in relation to other groups. Higher levels of both anticipated stigma and internalised stigma are related to higher levels of distress.

Some people view their CSI as a small part of their identity, whereas for others they are overwhelmed by it leading to high levels of centrality. Higher levels of centrality in relation

to CSIs are associated to higher levels of distress. Previous identity research (notably research by Leach *et al.* (2008) on racial identity), has found that identity centrality can be a great source of strength and solidarity in the context of shared experience and the support of similar others. Quinn *et al.* however found that the secretive nature of the CSI negates this potentially positive aspect of Centrality.

In Quinn *et al.*'s research, more outness was associated with lower levels of distress, suggesting that disclosing experiences of IP Abuse (or other elements of a CSI) will benefit survivors. It is important to note firstly that the above-mentioned research uses the term "domestic violence" rather than intimate partner abuse or violence, and as such one cannot be clear whether the group was constituted of survivors who experienced abuse within the context of an intimate relationship or within a wider familial relationship. Secondly, the level of outness (or disclosure) is not restricted to the workplace. Disclosing to friends, family or professional services may result in a different outcome to disclosing in a work context.

One group within the research exhibited some interesting results. Individuals with a history of substance abuse showed high levels of anticipated stigma, high levels of internalised stigma, but also higher levels of outness and lower levels of centrality and thus lower levels of distress. Quinn *et al.* describe this pattern as commensurate with the most widely used model of addiction treatment – the 12 steps (AA, 2022). Characterised by a focus on outness – via meetings, sponsorship and making amends with friends and family - whilst also reframing addiction as a disease rather than a character flaw; this approach suggests that although this group recognise and accept stigma, some of the sense of shame that might be felt by other groups is somewhat diminished. For women experiencing IP Abuse, feelings of shame and embarrassment are prevalent with many women feeling that they are to blame for the abuse in some way (Reich *et al.*, 2015). Voices such as Ingala Smith ((2021) – compiler of the Femicide Census) are critical of the terminology used when describing abuse against women for the notable lack of a perpetrator in the description and use the term "men's violence against woman" to firmly put the perpetrator in the frame – characterising IP Abuse as something which abuser perpetrate rather than a disembodied action that happens to women, or worse still that a woman brings on herself. The results of Quinn *et al.*'s research suggest the possibility of stigma and distaste for what someone has experienced without shame for the individual who experienced it and a reframing of IP Abuse – and its survivors – in a manner comparable to the reframing of addiction and recovering addicts would benefit survivors enormously.

2.4.3 Blame

Closely related to the stigma described in Quinn *et al.*'s research, is the concept of blame, including self-blame. Thapar-Björkert and Morgan's 2010 research exploring perceptions of blame and responsibility in relation to IP Abuse, identified that among Victim Support volunteers (who have chosen to work with victims of crime and received specific victim focussed training) perceptions that women who experience abuse are at least partly to blame persist. When questioned directly about their beliefs around blame, they echo the training they have received and acknowledge that only the perpetrator is ever to blame, never the victim. However, in further conversation – during semi structured interviews – the volunteers

went on to comment that “some women don’t know when to shut up” (p41) or “they put themselves in the situation” (p41). Thapar-Björkert and Morgan see this as proof of superficial willingness to believe that women are not to blame, but a more deeply held personal belief that actually they are. Sadly, these findings are not isolated and Persson *et al.* (2018) identified similar views among medical professionals and Fleckinger (2020) among social workers. When even those who have entered the caring professions believe that women are to blame for their own abuse, it is difficult to imagine that the general population will be any more sympathetic. Peters (2008) identified a number of myths around IP Abuse which he described as generally false stereotypes relating to survivors that are nevertheless widely held. These myths minimise or justify abuse and Peters identified that the more firmly an individual accepts the myths of abuse, the more likely they are to blame a victim. Peters identified the following myths: women bring abuse on themselves as a result of unappealing personality traits or behaviour, there is always a reason (or excuse) for the perpetrator’s behaviour and domestic abuse is not serious or widespread. Research conducted by Yamawaki *et al.* (2012) confirmed the existence of myths relating to IP abuse and the link between myth acceptance and blame attributed to victims, and Policastro and Payne’s findings (2013) identify not only the degree to which others blame abuse survivors, but that survivors also blame themselves.

The concept of blaming a woman’s character traits or behaviour for abuse that she experiences can be linked to the just world hypothesis Lerner (1980). According to Lerner, people have a deep-seated need to believe that the world is just and fair. When confronted with a situation that contradicts this deeply held belief an individual either takes action to attempt to redress the balance and restore justice, or adopts a defence mechanism. One such defence mechanisms is to blame the victim. If the victim somehow brought their suffering on themselves either through their behaviour or some innate character flaw, then their suffering can be justified and one can explain away a terrible event and thus continue to believe that the world is otherwise a just place. In common with Peters (2008) and Yamawaki *et al.*’s (2012) findings that higher levels of IP Abuse myth acceptance leads to greater blame for abuse survivors, several studies have identified a link between belief in a just world and victim blaming (Komarómy and Janós, 2019).

2.4.4 The role of Organisational Culture

A range of theorists have identified a number of factors which influence how individuals relate to each other in the workplace; including personality (Biggio and Cortese, 2013), organisational culture (Körner *et al.*, 2015) and national culture (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2020). Many aspects of organisational culture including organisational structure, leadership style and the level of formality within the organisation all influence how information is shared and how individuals interact.

In their book “Riding the waves of culture”, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner identified a range of dimensions along which national cultures tend to differ. In terms of the workplace relationships that women living with the effects of abuse might choose to develop, the dimensions of specific/diffuse and neutral/emotional might be the most easily applicable. Within the seven dimensions model, the UK is identified as a specific and emotionally neutral

culture; that is individuals tend to keep their home and work domains separate and the expression of emotions in the workplace is not generally considered appropriate or professional. Similarly, the GLOBE study (House *et al.*, 2004) identified the UK as low in Humane Orientation, defined by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) as care, concern and benevolence towards others. These elements of culture provide potential barriers to the development of close relationships and by association, the disclosure of abuse for survivors. Although on the surface this categorisation of the prevailing national culture and its impact on workplace interactions might not seem surprising, it does jar slightly with Sturdy and Grey's (2003) assertions as to the ubiquity of workplace friendship and the blurring of boundaries between the private and the personal as described by Campell Clark (2000). Similarly the rise in recognition of mental health as a workplace issue, the growing emphasis placed on work/life balance and the further blurring between home and work as a result of changes to working practices in the wake of COVID-19, creates a mismatch between the desire (or at least the appearance of a desire) for a gentler organisational experience and the reality of working life, in line with House *et al.*'s explorations of the gap between values and experience (House *et al.*, 2004). Cultural theorists such as Trompenaars and Hampden Turner are mindful of the potential for organisational culture to override national culture in terms of workplace behaviour and warn against the dangers of being blinded by assumptions (admittedly based on evidence), and while providing a very useful starting point, the dimensions and associated categorisation are there to aid understanding and offer guidance and support rather than pigeonhole individuals, or worse still, entire nations.

2.4.5 Personal responsibility for work/life balance

Having organisational policies in place to support staff does not guarantee that employees will receive the support they need as there is sometimes reluctance to access support. Despite the existence of widespread policies relating to parental leave for both mothers and fathers, Petts *et al.* (2021) identified that many eligible parents do not take advantage of the leave available to them. Surveys of more than 1,700 eligible participants identified reluctance to access full leave entitlements for fear of being seen as not fully committed to the organisation, with parents sacrificing employer sanctioned time at home for fear of how their absence would be interpreted by both colleagues and management (this provides a particular challenge to mothers, who Petts *et al.* identify are already perceived as less committed than both non-mothers and fathers). Petts *et al.*'s analysis shows that the mere existence of policies does not help workers to manage the challenges of work versus home, but rather appropriate policies need to be supported by a culture where accessing support is acceptable and does not result in a penalty – perceived or otherwise. Knaak *et al.* (2019) used interviews to explore attitudes towards accessing mental health support among police officers and – in line with Petts *et al.*'s analysis – identified the key role of organisational culture and prevailing attitudes in the decision to access workplace support. Knaak *et al.* interviewed serving police officers across a number of law enforcement organisations to understand attitudes and experiences of disclosure relating to mental health issues. Despite high rates of trauma and mental health related issues, officers reported a deeply held reluctance to disclose based on perceptions that disclosing mental health challenges would lead to discrimination and the belief that disclosure would be equated with personal and professional failure. This

reluctance to access available support which stems from organisational culture, is further compounded by a prevailing societal ideology of individualism and the belief that success at work is a matter of personal responsibility (Clouston, 2014), leaving those who are struggling to manage very much alone.

The concept of work/life balance and the provision of supportive policies has become increasingly important in recent years. Clouston argues that neoliberalist economic principles have created a performance led work culture where employees are expected to do more, faster, with less; inevitably leading to higher organisational expectations and ever more challenging targets. Petts *et al.* (2021) describe “the ideal worker” who is able to meet these increasingly challenging organisational targets whilst relying on their own internal resources to manage the inevitable stress, arguing that many organisations create policies working on the assumption that their employees are “ideal” and – due to their inexhaustible devotion to the organisation – will not access any token support available.

2.4.6 The prevalent support model - The three Rs model

While doing considerable work to create more support for those experiencing abuse and creating the office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the recently passed Domestic Abuse Act (GOV.UK, 2021) falls short of requiring organisations to support those experiencing abuse. Responsibilities around supporting and safeguarding survivors of abuse in the workplace fall within broader legal requirements relating to both Health and Safety and Safeguarding as a whole. What support (if any) organisations choose to provide beyond satisfying these legal requirements is entirely at the organisation’s discretion.

Despite the lack of legal obligations, some organisations have made considerable efforts to create frameworks and mechanisms to support employees, and both charitable and profit focussed organisations able to provide workplace training and consultancy services to employers seeking to support survivors, have emerged in recent years. Some high profile organisations who have chosen to respond proactively to increasing awareness of IP Abuse and its potential to impact the workplace, have created frameworks for supporting survivors centred on the Recognise – Respond – Refer model. This model is widely used both in a geographical context (appearing in guidance from the UK (NCVO: National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2022), US (University of Wisconsin, 2022) and Australia (Queensland Government, 2022) for example) and in terms of the nature of referral under consideration (including in relation to bullying (Organization for Autism Research, 2015), extremism (Lancashire Constabulary, 2022), child neglect (Hertfordshire Council, 2022) or domestic abuse (PHE, 2018). The model is so widely used that it has become inextricably linked with the concept of safeguarding as a whole and it is very difficult to ascertain the precise origins of the model. Leant credibility through its widespread geographical and sector associated use, the reliability of the model has been further cemented by its absorption into the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2022) counselling skills competence framework.

The three Rs model relies on third parties recognising when an individual needs support and subsequently responding to this and referring to appropriate specialist services. It is very easy to see that in the case of a child or a vulnerable adult external support may be needed to

recognise abuse and protection or support proactively sought on their behalf, where the individual themselves - either due to age or lack of capacity - may not be able to recognise the abuse. However, in the case of a women with no additional needs living with domestic abuse, the idea that she requires another to intervene on her behalf becomes problematic. In particular someone who is living with coercive control is not best served by another stepping in to take control of her life when she is perfectly capable of doing this herself. Yragui *et al.*'s investigations into the mismatch between support offered and support desired by women experiencing abuse confirms this conflict, going on to discuss the potential negative impacts on wellbeing of well-intentioned but ill-conceived support (Yragui *et al.*, 2012). A further complication and a potential criticism of the model is the proposed behaviours that it is suggested could be indicative of IP Abuse. The supplementary notes to one model (Vodafone, 2022) include potential indicators as nervousness and anxiety, lateness or absence, or conversely increased hours spent at work, changes in work quality, changes in choice of clothes. While all of these changes could be attributable to the experience of IP Abuse, such changes in behaviour could also perfectly reasonably be attributed to a whole range of other issues including family problems, caring for elderly parents, bereavement or menopause to name but a few. While well intentioned, the three R's model is arguably overly simplistic in nature and inappropriate for women already robbed of agency and dignity. Although the central concept may be flawed, some organisations (notably Vodafone and Lloyds (PHE, 2022)) have created frameworks based on an expanded version of the model which include practical support including flexible working and financial support to enable women to maintain their employment and this speaks to a meaningful commitment to support survivors of abuse and to provide them with practical and pragmatic support.

Workplace responses to IP Abuse vary widely. The TUC identify that 86% of member organisations believe they have a duty of care to survivors of domestic abuse, while only five percent have a policy in place. While the vast majority of organisations have thus far not chosen to acknowledge the very real impact that abuse can have on the workplace both from a human and a financial perspective, some organisations commit to support survivors. There is a risk however that some organisations make a token effort to create domestic abuse policies with no corresponding cultural support to put the policy into action. With the notable exception of the TUC guidance (which takes an arguably radical feminist view of domestic abuse (TUC, 2020)), the policies identified above (and domestic abuse policies more broadly) include a recommendation relating to fostering an inclusive culture. The focus of the recommendations however is around creating a robust policy and providing training on recognising the signs of abuse (some of which are questionable), with organisational culture considered as peripheral to a well-designed policy. Though workplace policies in relation to supporting workers with their mental health and supporting fathers (in particular) to take parental leave are now widespread, there is sometimes a reluctance to take advantage of the support available out of fear of how one will be perceived in terms of commitment to work (in the case of parental leave (Petts *et al.*, 2021)) or emotional stability (in the case of mental health support (Knaak *et al.*, 2019)). In such cases the level of comfort that employees have in accessing available support (while heavily influenced by personal attitudes) is largely governed by prevailing organisational culture (Petts *et al.*, 2021) and associated stigma.

2.4.7 Disclosure and Support – The current position

The TUC (2104) reports low levels of workplace disclosure of IP Abuse. This is despite theorists identifying disclosure as a valuable mechanism for women experiencing abuse (Kumar and Casey, 2017) and as instrumental in maximising wellbeing (Quinn *et al.*, 2014; Uysal *et al.*, 2009). Disclosure at work has also been linked to employment stability (Rothman *et al.*, 2007) and by association, with financial stability and the ability to leave an abusive relationship (Lloyd, 1997; Raphael, 2000). As a source of emotion work (as identified by Hochschild (1983)), the act of non-disclosure also potentially gives rise to emotional strain and cognitive dissonance (as described by Delgado *et al.* (2017) and Hofmann and Stockburger-Sauer (2017)). Given the benefits of disclosure - it is at first glance - difficult to understand why disclosure rate might be so low; however, there are a number of potential barriers to disclosure which could explain the discrepancy.

As identified by Quinn *et al.* (2014) there is stigma attached to being a survivor of IP abuse as well as a number of widespread and unhelpful myths associated with myths (Peters, 2008). The widespread nature of the abuse myths identified by Peters leads to many apportioning blame to abuse survivors (Yamawaki *et al.*, 2012) and survivors to ultimately blame themselves for the abuse they experience (Policastro and Payne, 2013). The stigma of abuse both external and internal (Quinn *et al.*, 2014), leaves survivors reluctant to disclose or access any workplace support that might ultimately be available. This reluctance to disclose reflects Knaak *et al.*'s (2019) and Petts *et al.*'s (2021) findings that many employees are reluctant to access workplace support of other kinds out of fear of being perceived as weak or unprofessional. Petts *et al.* (2021) identified the phenomenon of the ideal worker who is able to manage the challenges of work and home without support, and many seemingly aspire to be exactly this kind of individual. Clouston (2014) argues that this reluctance to seek help and instead assume responsibility for the management of ever increasing home and work demands stems from neo-liberalist perceptions of the modern workplace.

Issues relating to organisational culture can also impact the likelihood of workplace disclosure. The UK is identified by Trompenaars and Hampden (2020) as a national culture which is both specific and emotionally neutral. Coupled with the GLOBE study's findings that the UK scores low on Humane Orientation (House *et al.*, 2004), the general culturally expected position within the workplace might be that individuals keep their home and work lives separate, portray a professional, emotionally controlled demeanour while at work and that workplaces – while meeting their statutory obligations – do not expend excess resources on the creation of policies relating to care, concern and benevolence towards others (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2004).

In addition to a number of barriers to disclosure, the ability to benefit from workplace support is also hindered by a lack of workplaces adopting formal policies (TUC, 2014). Where organisations do adopt policies these are generally formed around the three R's model widely used within safeguarding.

2.5 SHORTCOMINGS IDENTIFIED

Analysis of the literature surrounding the experience of work and the potential roles that it might play for women living with the effects of IP Abuse is diverse and has furthered the

collective understanding of this important issue. Despite the strides that have been made, the preceding analysis has identified a number of shortcomings which this research aims to address.

2.5.1 Understanding of the lived experience of work and work meaning

With more and more people working longer and more intensively (Ng and Feldman, 2008) the role of work is increasingly important in the lives of many people, and conceptualisations of work are intertwined with ideas of purpose, meaning and the fulfilment of human needs (Ulrich and Ulrich, 2010). Given the central nature of work it is unsurprising that many researchers have embarked on detailed examination of the nature of work meaning and the centrality of work (e.g., MOWIRT, 1987; Kuchinke *et al.*, 2009); Rosso *et al.*, 2010). These investigations have revealed much about the nature of work however, they have tended to investigate work from a quantitative perspective leaving the lived experience of work largely unexamined. Additionally, in their discussion of the many and varied roles that work might play from the perspective of work meaning, Rosso *et al.* (2010) described meaning as a highly personal, context driven construct, and lamented the disappointing lack of diversity and contextual factors reflected in current work – describing most existing research of work meaning as static in nature and restricted to a limited professional group (middle and senior managers).

2.5.2 Appreciation of the (non-financial) role of work to women living with abuse

Domestic abuse has been identified as an issue of great importance in a work context, not least from a financial perspective. Costing the UK economy an estimated £1.9bn per annum (GOV.UK, 2018) and impacting workplace productivity and effectiveness (Rothman *et al.*, 2007), abuse is a workplace issue and the TUC have identified that the vast majority of employers consider workplace support for abuse survivors a key issue. With this in mind, researchers are increasingly investigating the overlaps between work and abuse. To date the majority of this research has tended to be quantitative in nature, for example - exploring the financial cost of abuse (López-Sanchez, 2019) or the link between financial stability and escape from abuse (Lloyd, 1997); (Raphael, 2000); additionally, Deen *et al.*, 2022, note that the majority of research exploring abuse and work has originated from outside the UK. Research thus far, though furthering our understanding of abuse and work, neglects some key issues.

As identified by Beecham, the assumption that financial stability can be equated to financial power within a relationship is simplistic. The recently passed Domestic Abuse Act (GOV.UK, 2021) expands our understanding of IP Abuse to include coercive control and financial abuse. Research such as Swanberg *et al.* (2007) equates employment stability with financial stability, but as identified by the classical motivational theorists (and many more besides) work is about more than money. The tendency of current research to assume that it is the financial independence afforded by employment stability that leads women to exit abusive relationships may be failing to identify the non-financial resources that work has the potential to provide, and therefore the role of employment stability beyond the creation of financial resources. Swanberg *et al.* have posited that the lack of appetite currently evident to implement workplace policies to support women experiencing abuse is driven by a lack of understanding of the importance of work to such women, surmising that with a greater

appreciation of the value of work to abuse survivors, there might be more inclination to provide support.

2.5.3 Qualitative exploration of issues surrounding workplace disclosure and support

Research such as that conducted by both Swanberg *et al.* (2007) and Kumar and Casey (2017), has identified disclosure at work as beneficial to survivors of IP Abuse, similarly both Uysal *et al.* (2009) and Quinn *et al.* (2014) identify the link between disclosure and wellbeing. In addition to this, researchers focussed on emotion work (Delgado *et al.*, 2017; Hofmann and Stockburger-Sauer; 2017) identify the emotional strain and associated negative impact of non-disclosure on wellbeing. In stark contrast to these findings however, the TUC identified that of its members who had experienced abuse, only one third disclosed at work. This begs the question of why – when disclosure is so helpful – do survivors choose not to disclose in the workplace? Apparently, the existence of workplace policies is not sufficient to encourage the workplace disclosure of personal issue or the accessing of available support. Work such as that undertaken by Petts *et al.* (2021) (in relation to the uptake of parental leave) and Knaak *et al.* (2019) (in relation to uptake of mental health support) suggests an important role for organisational culture and perceptions of stigma in terms of disclosure. As noted by Yragui *et al.* (2012), the challenge of encouraging disclosure is potentially further compounded by disparity between available support and the support which women actually would like to receive. Yragui *et al.*'s investigation of this mismatch was quantitative, and given the risk both of low rates of disclosure and mismatch between support desired and support available; a qualitative investigation of the experience of disclosure and accessing support would add much needed understanding to this important yet neglected area.

2.6 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A review of the limitations of the current literature highlights three key areas to which this research will contribute:

- Exploration of the experience of work for women living with the effects of abuse
- A more nuanced appreciation of how work can benefit survivors
- Better understanding of the barriers to workplace disclosure

Having taken the above limitations into account, the following research questions and research objectives have been identified:

2.6.1 Research Question

- *What is the experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of intimate partner abuse?*

2.6.2 Objectives of the Research

- *To understand how women living with the effects of IP Abuse experience work*
- *To explore what influences the decision of whether or not to disclose the experience of IP Abuse to co-workers*
- *To understand whether (and how) the experience of work changes following disclosure and*
- *To establish how useful and easily accessible workplace support is for women living with the effects of abuse*

2.6.3 Lived experience of work and work meaning

Smith (2109) – in his articulation of Interpretative phenomenological analysis – identifies the inextricable relationship between meaning and human experience, and uncovering the experience of work from an interpretative phenomenological perspective, would provide much needed insight into the lived experience of work. Understanding the experience of IP Abuse in a work context (particularly where the experience of work both with and without disclosure could be explored) would help to bridge this gap by giving insight into the experience of meaning of work as a dynamic, flexible phenomenon subject to change as personal context changes. Additionally, by exploring the experience of a group of women from a range of cultural backgrounds in a variety of professional settings this research adds diversity to our understanding of work meaning as a context driven phenomenon.

2.6.4 Improved understanding of IP Abuse and its relationship to work

By exploring the accounts of individual experiences of work while experiencing abuse, this research offers a more nuanced understanding of the affective impact of abuse in relation to work; and will shed light on survivors' perceptions of work - an area not currently explored by the literature (Deen *et al.*, 2022). This research will contribute to a more holistic understanding of work and its role in helping women to build a range of resources (both financial and non-financial) which in turn enable them to exit abusive relationships. While noting the multi-disciplinary nature of extant research relating to IP Abuse and work, Deen *et al.* (2022) highlight the notable lack of research conducted from an organisational management perspective. By shedding light on some of the HR related aspects of the workplace – for example – workplace policies, organisational culture and management style, this research will give an organisational management and HRM perspective currently missing from the literature.

2.6.5 Understanding the impact of disclosure on the experience of work

Deen *et al.* (2022), note the complexities of disclosure, linking ideas of stigma, shame and fears of negative employment impact to the reluctance to disclose. They note however, that despite fear of negative employment impact, there is thus far no empirical evidence of disclosure having the feared effect (e.g., dismissal or demotion). Having noted the low rates of disclosure, the impact of organisational culture, the mismatch between support desired and support received and the fears attached to disclosure, an interpretative phenomenological investigation of the experience of disclosure and accessing support would add much needed understanding to this neglected area. Whether at work or otherwise, disclosure (and the subsequent experience of support) has been identified as pivotal in the journey of an abuse survivor (Dworkin and Schumacher, 2018), and as such should be a focal point for any organisation wishing to understand how it might both encourage disclosure and best support women who seek assistance.

2.7 SDT AS A THEORETICAL LENS

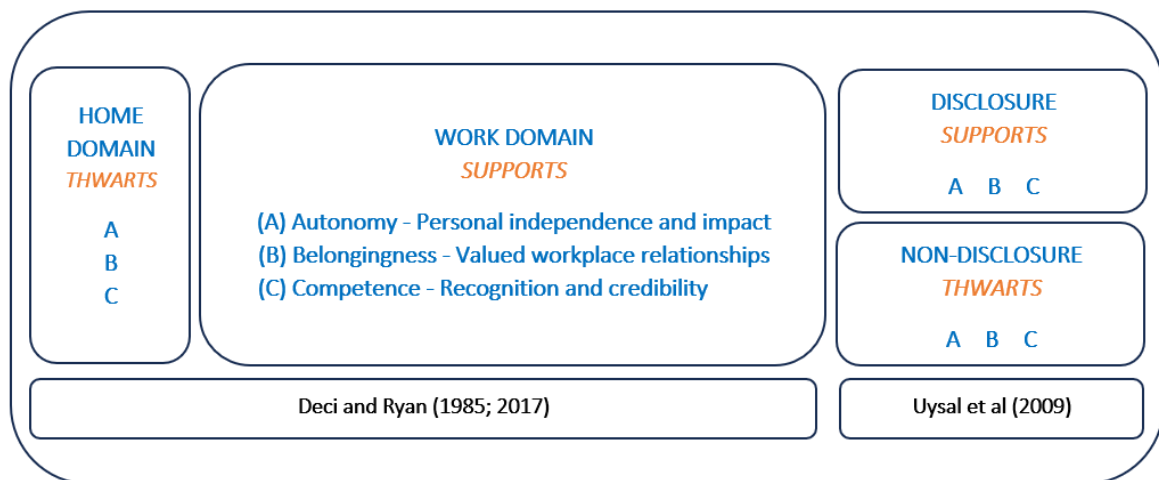
SDT provides a useful lens through which the experience of work can be explored. Developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), self-determination theory (SDT) identifies three inherent human needs; autonomy, relatedness (or belongingness) and competence and states that the fulfilment of all three needs is necessary not just for motivation, but also for optimum

wellbeing. The needs of relatedness are met via respectful interactions, a sense of security and an inclusive environment; and thwarted by excessive competition or criticism. Competence needs relate to being provided with optimum levels of challenge and positive performance feedback and are thwarted by excessive challenge and unnecessarily negative feedback. Autonomy (the degree to which one has control over one's own actions and choices) is enhanced through choice, the provision of logical explanations or rationales and the acknowledgement of feelings and is undermined by threats and imposed goals.

To date, motivational theories have characterised wellbeing as a happy outcome of the process with both individuals and organisations benefiting from employee motivation. Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (SDT) - a relative newcomer to the field of motivation - whilst also based on the satisfaction of inherent needs, takes a slightly different approach. In contrast to other theories of motivation, from the perspective of SDT the fulfilment of basic needs is not just a catalyst for action, but a vital necessity for optimum mental health; with need support - within social settings - identified as central to motivation, wellbeing and performance (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Much of the research relating to SDT has examined need satisfaction in a work setting, but the application of SDT has crossed disciplinary boundaries, appearing in areas as diverse as children's mental health (Stanton *et al.*, 2020) and romantic relationships (Knee *et al.*, 2013). With its focus on social settings (including workplaces, relationships or places of study) as the forum for either the thwarting or supporting of the basic needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence, (Deci and Ryan, 2020) SDT lends itself to the comparison of home and work domains – 2 different social settings experienced on an almost daily basis by the same individual. Under ideal circumstance the home domain is a place of rest and recuperation (Brief and Nord, 1990; Hochschild, 1997), a place to recover from the physically and emotionally draining experience of work; however, for women experiencing abuse the home and work domains are reversed. This reversal of domains creates a situation where for women experiencing abuse, the nature of their personal relationship has the potential to thwart all three needs and work has the opportunity to fulfil them, providing fulfilling co-worker relationships, feelings of accomplishment and a sense of personal control.

In their 2022 review of cross-disciplinary research regarding the intersection between IP Abuse and work, Deen *et al.* noted that in the main, the research to date has been atheoretical in nature and where theories are used, they have been used to frame abuse rather than work. In their suggestions for future scholarship, they note the potential applicability of SDT as a framework, and Uysal *et al.*'s use of the framework in connection with their analysis of self-concealment and disclosure and the resulting impact on the three needs at work, further cements its credibility in the context of this research. As identified by Deci and Ryan, all activities within the organisation have the potential to either support or thwart the three basic needs (Ryan and Deci, 2017), so organisational activities and interactions viewed through this lens can contribute to a deeper understanding of the lived experience of work and how this might influence motivation, wellbeing and performance. This research will therefore explore the experience of work and workplace disclosure from the perspective of work as a potential source of feelings of autonomy, belongingness and competence, and of disclosure as a potential means of furthering these needs.

2.7.1 Figure 1 – SDT as a Theoretical Lens



2.7.2 Application of the lens

In conducting this research, the experience of work is conceptualised as an activity capable of satisfying the three needs identified by SDT. In common with other workers, the women navigate daily crossings between the home and work domain as described by Campbell Clark (2000), however in line with Hochschild’s work, in the case of women living with the effects of domestic abuse, the effect of the home and work domains is assumed to be reversed. The lens proposes that the work domain has the potential to provide a source of support for the needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence in contrast to a home life where these needs are thwarted. In line with Uysal *et al.*’s findings (2009) regarding self-concealment, disclosure is conceptualised as an action capable of supporting the three needs whereas non-disclosure thwarts the needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented a review of current literature broadly divided into three sections: work, the intersection of IP Abuse and work and finally, workplace disclosure and support. Having identified current gaps in understanding, the chapter went on to identify the research question and objectives underpinning the research that follows and the theoretical lens that will be used to contextualise the research.

Work is broadly understood as an activity which is driven by some kind of purpose. While it is often assumed that financial wellbeing is the primary purpose of work, multiple researchers have identified that even with the promise of financial security, many people state that they would still continue to work – pointing to more complex reasons behind the drive to work. This more complex relationship with work has been underscored in recent years by research into the desire to take on more objectively meaningful forms of work in response to shared trauma (such as that undertaken by Shea *et al.* (2021) and Martin (2021)). It seems it is impossible to explore the experience of work without considering the role that work plays in our lives more broadly and its inherent meaning. Work such as that undertaken by the

MOWIRT has provided a springboard for other researchers keen to explore the many and complex meanings that work might hold.

Despite growing interest in the arena of work meaning and its fundamental role in our lives, many explorations of work have been criticised as generic, elitist and potentially ethnocentric and a more diverse and nuanced understanding of the experience of work for a broader range of individuals is needed.

Research relating to the intersection of IP abuse and work is scattered across a range of disciplines but – as identified by Deen et al (2022) - is notably lacking from literature relating to organisational management, additionally current research tends to be quantitative in nature and heavily US focussed. Furthermore, research has tended to be centred more on the framing and understanding of abuse rather than the experience of work itself, leaving space for exploration of the lived experience of work for those living with the effects of abuse.

The experience of work is inextricably linked with the decision of whether or not to disclose abuse to co-workers and as identified by Beecham and others, compartmentalisation of the home and work domains plays an important role for women living with abuse and has been identified as a valued coping mechanism. There are however, potential issues with the use of compartmentalisation and the self-concealment necessitated by such an approach, with both Uysal *et al.* (via SDT) (2009) and Quinn *et al.* (via the concept of CSI) (2014) both suggesting that self-concealment can be damaging to wellbeing. Evidence provided by a number of researchers (including Kumar and Casey, 2017) suggests that disclosure is helpful to women, however disclosure rates are low. The decision of whether or not to disclose is influenced by a number of factors including social stigma (Quinn *et al.*), the existence of widespread myths regarding IP abuse (Peters, 2008) as well as prevailing organisational attitudes towards work-life balance. Given such complexity, a more nuanced understanding of the experience of compartmentalisation and the experiences and decision making processes around disclosure is needed.

Given the current limitations of current knowledge, this research will contribute to collective understanding; by providing an exploration of the experience of work for women living with the effects of abuse (and thus a more nuanced appreciation of how work can benefit survivors) and by contributing towards a better understanding of the barriers to workplace disclosure.

The research poses the question: “What is the experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of IP Abuse?” and proposes SDT as an appropriate lens through which to view the experience of work and workplace disclosure, conceptualising work as an arena capable of supporting the three needs of SDT – Autonomy, Belongingness and Competence.

The next chapter will explore the research philosophy, methodology and methods to be employed in detail and will also begin to introduce researcher reflections which will continue throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays out the methodology which underpins the thesis and introduces the research methods used throughout. The methodology and approach outlined have been identified as the most appropriate to address the research question and research objectives identified:

3.1.1 Research Question

What is the experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of intimate partner abuse?

3.1.2 Objectives of the Research

- *To understand how women living with the effects of IP Abuse experience work*
- *To explore what influences the decision of whether or not to disclose the experience of IP Abuse to co-workers*
- *To understand whether (and how) the experience of work changes following disclosure*
- *To establish how useful and easily accessible workplace support is for women living with the effects of abuse*

In order to answer the research question, a number of women were interviewed via a series of semi structured interviews to investigate their experiences of work. Their experiences and perceptions were explored and interpreted via interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as advocated by Smith *et al.* (2022). This chapter will outline the processes used to identify and approach an appropriate sample of participants, the activities involved in data collection and analysis, and the theoretical approach underpinning the research. The important ethical considerations relating to research in such an emotive and sensitive area will also be considered.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

As an exploration of the experience of work as a singular experience for women living with the effects of IP Abuse, this research aligns itself with the interpretivist paradigm and reflects a subjectivist ontology. Similarly, the recognition of work experience as a subjective and highly personal experience, gives rise to an interpretivist epistemology, recognising that knowledge is always filtered through a lens or lenses (such as gender, social class and/or ethnicity) relevant to the participant's experience of the world and the associated knowledge, experiences, and expectations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In the context of this research, participants experiences, observations and reflections of work are additionally filtered through the lens of their experiences of intimate partner abuse.

3.2.2 Methodological perspective

Situated in an interpretivist paradigm and reflecting a relativist ontology and subjective epistemology, this research takes the view that reality can only be known through the interpretation of human experience, that "human experience is reality" (Levers, 2013) and thus, that the experience of work for women living with the effects of abuse can only be fully appreciated through the detailed accounts of the women themselves. Phenomenology,

introduced as a concept by Husserl and later developed by fellow philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Moran, 2013), provides theoretical context for the examination, interpretation and comprehension of lived human experience. Halling (2008) suggests that we are all phenomenologists of a sort in our everyday lives, in that we listen to the stories of others and reflect on them and how they might impact us. Given this natural propensity towards the phenomenological, all that is really needed is a way of utilising this natural instinct in a robust and systematic way.

A subjective epistemology recognises that knowledge (and the reflection that transforms knowledge into experience) is filtered through the lens of our own attitude, past experience or perceptions. In trying to understand the experience of work, the particular nature of an individual's experience – against the backdrop of their life context - must be considered in order to give a true account. It would seem then, that true understanding of lived experience (rather than generalisations) arises from knowledge and analysis of the particular and to best understand and interpret lived experience requires an approach that is phenomenological in essence, interpretative in nature and particular in outlook. Smith *et al.*'s model of IPA (2022) gives us just such a framework, providing a robust approach to the analysis of individual experiences of work to establish both individual voices and shared experiences, thus creating a holistic understanding of the lived experience of work for women living with the effects of abuse.

3.2.3 A phenomenological approach

Phenomenology has been identified as particularly suitable for studying human experiences with an intensely emotional aspect (Merriam, 2009). With its focus on understanding the subjective experience of work in a highly emotive context, a phenomenological approach is ideally suited to this research. Descriptive phenomenological approaches have favoured the bracketing of pre-existing ideas or knowledge in order to describe the experience of a phenomenon in its purest form. However, prior knowledge or presuppositions, with their ability to guide inquiry, are the starting point for recognising a phenomenon as worthy of study (Koch, 1995) and, can prove both useful and necessary to the implementation of interpretive phenomenology (Geanellos, 2000). As Lindseth and Norburg (2004) ask, how can we discuss the merits of a chair if we have no concept of what makes a chair a chair and why we need them? Despite their obvious value in aiding interpretation, actively embracing forestructures of course begs the question as to what these forestructures might be and how they might prejudice the interpretation process. I was very aware of the influence my experience and knowledge could have at all stages of the research process. My personal experiences and the questions I would like to answer, are the source of this research and I have been very conscious of the need to consider my pre-suppositions and recognise them as merely a starting point for interpretation; and at all times throughout the research process, have consciously sought to exercise openness and reflexivity.

3.2.4 Hermeneutics – The theory of interpretation

Though largely in reference to historical texts, Schleiermacher - as discussed by Smith *et al* (2022) - emphasised the importance of context (historical or otherwise) and that interpretation of any text must be sympathetic to the situation, experiences and perspective

of the writer. In the case of this research, rather than historical context, women's experiences of work are interpreted with reference to broader societal attitudes and myths associated with IP Abuse and what a typical survivor might look like. Consideration of such forestructures - and the resulting concept of bracketing - is generally considered to be a process which takes place (if it takes place at all) prior to analysis of an account. Heidegger (1962) however, notes that it is only through engagement with the account that we become truly aware of our forestructures and the impact that they might have on our interpretation. I found this to be the case during my research journey. As an example, when I began interacting with the women, I became aware of my preconceptions towards disclosure and the resulting tension between authenticity and openness at work. Identifying this existing preconception required the revisiting of my own forestructures and resulted in my reflecting on my own experiences of disclosure and how these have influenced past interactions. For the purposes of faithful interpretation, it is vital to make sense of forestructures in relation to the account, and recognise the account itself as the primary object, and forestructures as a secondary object tasked with aiding our understanding rather than limiting it. With this in mind, a more realistic view of any process of bracketing, recognises it as likely to be cyclical in nature – reflective of the hermeneutic circle and reflective practice in general.

The concept of the hermeneutic circle pervades all aspects of hermeneutic interpretation, and is central to IPA. Forestructures become clear in the light of participant accounts, which are in turn interpreted in the light of forestructures. Individual parts of participant narratives are considered in the context of the narrative as a whole, and the whole in the context of the parts that comprise it. Individual accounts help us to understand and interpret the experiences of the wider dataset, just as the wider dataset provides context for the detail of individual accounts – understanding of the particular aids understanding of the universal. The ripples of the hermeneutic circle are far reaching. In much the same way as individual experience (via historical narrative) cannot be understood without the context of historical and cultural setting and vice versa Dilthey (1976), so the experiences described by the women can only be fully understood in the context of existing attitudes and collective knowledge both within academic literature and the wider social context, which they in turn serve to illuminate. The hermeneutic circle also has the potential to extend to the reader's relationship with the research. Reflection on participants' accounts of work - coloured as they are by prevailing societal attitudes and internalised stigma - and the researcher's interpretation can themselves be viewed in the context of the reader's experiences and forestructures, which provide additional context and understanding to the research, and the potential for the research itself to add colour to the reader's view of the world.

3.2.5 Idiography – Concern with the particular

Husserl's aim to discover the essence of a particular phenomenon and his larger aim to establish the essence of human consciousness itself (Husserl, 1960), speaks to a transcendental focus for phenomenology, encompassing an essential human experience common to all who experience it. The idea of common experience is in line with much research with a psychological slant and certainly characterises research on work meaning to date, which tends towards the identification of a generic experience (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). This nomothetic approach relies on statistics, aggregation, general experiences and general laws

of human behaviour; and as Kastenbaum (quoted by Smith *et al.*, 2022, p25) puts it, "...construct[s] people who never were and never could be." In contrast to this, an idiographic approach focuses on the particular; providing thorough and systematic analysis of a particular phenomenon as experienced and understood by a particular sample of individuals in a particular context; in this case – the experience of work for a small group of women living with the effects of IP Abuse. Such detailed analysis of individual accounts serves to confirm, query or illuminate theoretical conclusions arrived at by nomothetic means, with Warnock concluding that delving into the particular leads to greater understanding of the general. (Warnock, 1987) In the case of the women describing their experiences of work, starkly contrasting experiences of disclosure serve to highlight both the existence and prevalence of negative societal attitudes and myths that prevent those most in need of help from seeking it, and the possibilities that exist once these myths are set aside. Concern with the particular and the conscious bringing into awareness of forestructures and pre-conceptions speaks to an emic rather than etic focus to this research and an interpretative phenomenological approach more generally (Harris, 1976). Throughout the research I became increasingly aware of my own forestructures, but also the experiences I shared with the women and the professional insights I had into the experience of living with the effects of abuse (both as a result of my childhood experiences and ongoing work with the charity). As a result of this, the concept of insider status and its potential benefits (and potential risks) became increasingly apparent. This is further discussed in section 3.8.

3.2.6 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Smith *et al.*'s model of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis provides a robust approach to addressing the research question and the underlying research objectives. This methodology combines the phenomenological, the hermeneutic and the idiographic to provide a structured framework for the interpretation of lived experience, thereby formalising an approach and ability which is innately human – that of seeking to understand the experience of others. Since its creation, the model has been used to explore a variety of human experiences across a broad range of areas including (more recently) the self-care practices of mental health nurses (O'Malley *et al.*, 2023), the journey of mature students into higher education (Saddler and Sundin, 2020) and the lived experience of post traumatic growth following childhood institutional abuse (Sheridan and Carr, 2020).

Analysing and interpreting this experience necessitates the collection of data. Data was collected by means of a series of qualitative interviews with women who have experienced intimate partner abuse to understand their experiences of work. The process of data collection, analysis and interpretation will be documented in the sections that follow.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

3.3.1 Overview

This research employed a purposeful sampling technique aimed at recruiting a small number of participants. The women recruited to the research were service users of a local domestic abuse charity with whom I have established links and were identified by a key contact at the charity. Ultimately seven participants were recruited, interviews conducted lasted for an average of one and a quarter hours, which totalled almost nine hours of recordings.

3.3.2 Characteristics

In terms of characteristics, the only criterion was that participants should be comfortable with the interview being conducted in English. The women who seek support from the charity come from a variety of backgrounds in terms of age, occupation, nationality and ethnicity. These women may live in the area local to the charity or may have relocated since their contact with the organisation. There were no inclusion criteria based on demographics (with the use of remote interviewing – discussed later – also allowing for women outside the local area to be included in the sample.) While some service users do not speak fluent English (in which case the charity makes use of in house language expertise and external translation services), only women who could communicate confidently in English were included in the sample (which included three non-native speakers). Despite concerns raised by Itzhak *et al.* (2017) among others, regarding the communication of emotions in a second language; during the interviews it appeared that the participants using English as a second language were as comfortable expressing themselves – or their emotions – as any of the other participants. Each of the participants had been resident in the UK for a number of years and worked and socialised with English speaking co-workers. Additionally, by accessing the charity's services (counselling in particular) they were already accustomed to discussing highly emotive issues in English.

3.3.3 Inclusion Criteria

Only women who were considered to be emotionally robust were included in the sample. The key contact at the charity retains contact information for all women who have used the charity's services and felt confident that she could identify a group of women who would be appropriate and potentially willing to take part in the research. Following discussion as to the nature of the research and my concerns regarding minimising harm to potential participants, I developed some inclusion criteria - related to participant wellbeing. In doing this I hoped to minimise any potential harm to participants. I did not want to put undue pressure on a woman living in crisis, or retraumatise a woman still coming to terms with her experiences, and for this reason, I proposed that only women who satisfied the following criteria should be approached.

- Women who are no longer in an abusive relationship
- Women who have completed a programme of counselling or attended structured courses or workshops delivered by the charity
- Women who have been identified by the charity's counselling team as being appropriately emotionally and psychologically robust

3.3.4 Approaching Participants

Twenty-three women were initially identified, of which 10 progressed to the stage of a preliminary conversation to explain the research.

The women were approached in the first instance by the key contact to gauge their level of interest and each woman was provided with a summarised Participant Information Sheet giving a brief overview of the research (see Appendix II). At this point all the women expressed interest in the study and gave consent for their contact details to be passed on to

me. It was anticipated that of the original 23 women who expressed interest a much smaller number would actually go on to participate in the research. This proved to be the case, and some women decided not to continue with the research and either did not respond to requests to set up further meetings or explicitly declined to continue. This was unsurprising in a study of this nature, given the extremely personal and sensitive context.

I contacted the women by email, introducing myself, thanking them for their interest, offering additional information (the complete Participant Information Sheet – included in Appendix III) and proposing a preliminary conversation to help them decide whether to take part in the research and ask any question about the research or about me. Six women did not respond to my email, one participant responded that regrettably she would be unable to take part, and the remaining 16 potential participants requested the full Participant Information Sheet (PIS).

Of the women who had requested the full PIS, six did not respond to requests to organise a preliminary conversation and I was able to arrange preliminary conversations with 10 women.

3.3.5 Preliminary Conversations

Ten preliminary conversations took place and following these, seven women were interviewed.

The preliminary conversations took the form of phone calls. Of the ten women with whom preliminary conversations were organised, one woman declined to answer her phone (and did not respond to a voicemail message offering to reschedule the call). This woman did not offer a reason for her decision not to continue; understandably, confidentiality was a huge issue for the women and this may account for her decision. Nine preliminary conversations took place with the remaining women ranging in length from five minutes to 60 minutes.

The preliminary conversations provided an opportunity for potential participants to confirm their understanding of the research aims and methods, ask questions about confidentiality and ask me any questions about myself. As anticipated, confidentiality was a priority for the women and the anonymisation of data was discussed on each call. Some participants asked questions about my experience of IP abuse and my perceptions of survivors. Some of these questions gave me cause for reflection including the question of whether or not I loved my father. The personal information included in the PIS states that I grew up in an abusive home and that my mum passed away a few years ago, and during the preliminary conversations (with an explicit invitation to ask me questions about my motivations regarding the research) I was at times concerned that participants might ask about the manner of my mum's death. Some participants did mention that she had died, but none probed any further. My concerns stemmed from comments made by Beecham (2009), who became aware during his research with IP Abuse survivors, that some women became concerned during interviews about how witnessing abuse as a child had impacted him and became focused on his welfare and not their own. Some women in preliminary conversations also talked about the (at times horrific) abuse they had experienced in terms of it not being "as bad" as someone's else experience, and I was fearful of women making comparisons between their experiences and my mum's.

The preliminary conversations proved extremely useful. I had initially anticipated that the conversations would cover issues of confidentiality, be an opportunity for potential

participants to clarify their understanding of the research and act as an ice breaker prior to interviews. It became clear during these conversations that some potential participants had not familiarised themselves with the details of the participant information sheet (with one woman assuming I was an employee of the charity – a misconception I was quick to correct) and the preliminary conversations did indeed prove useful from this perspective.

The value of rapport in the context of qualitative interviews should not be underestimated, with Weller (2017) equating rapport with interview and therefore data quality. Weller goes on to point out the challenges associated with building rapport in the case of remote interviews and others such as Deakin and Wakefield (2013) and Seitz (2016) have suggested pre-interview interaction, such as the exchange of emails or photographs as a way of establishing rapport. The preliminary conversations with participants worked in much the same way. These early conversations proved to be an opportunity to establish rapport and were also very useful in terms of understanding the potential participants communication style, for example a more clipped, brisk conversation style as compared to a more casual style. These initial conversations made it easier to adopt the right conversational style in the subsequent interviews and helped to put participants at ease and establish rapport. Personal information shared in preliminary conversations (e.g., information regarding a new job, a sick relative or the age of a child) also provided conversation openers and the potential to establish areas of common ground, again aiding rapport building in the interview setting. These preliminary conversations were always intended to establish rapport and were not originally intended to form part of the data gathering process. In some cases, women brought up a particular issue during these conversations that I felt might prove interesting to explore. In such cases, I noted these thoughts – for example Nicole’s comments on the double blow of a negative response to disclosure from a female manager; or Vivienne’s quote that “the professional saved the woman”. During the subsequent interviews – which marked the beginning of data gathering – I referred to these comments and asked if we could discuss them further, bringing them into the interview.

Following the preliminary conversations, nine interviews were arranged. One interview was rearranged for a later date (as the participant started a new job), one interview had to be cancelled due to the participant’s personal circumstances and one interview was cancelled due to illness (and the participant did not respond to requests to reschedule). This meant that seven interviews took place.

As identified above, the research takes an idiographic perspective and focusses on the transcripts of the seven interviews completed as a result of contact with the 23 women initially identified by the key contact.

3.3.6 Adjustments

Adjustments had to be made for one participant. The initial inclusion criteria established for the sample, identified that women should not be included if they were still living in an abusive relationship. From an ethical perspective, it seemed inappropriate to ask anything additional of a woman already living in crisis, whose energies and capacity should be focussed on her own wellbeing and the wellbeing of her children. I therefore made the decision to focus on women’s retrospective accounts, and included the criterion relating to relationship status.

On completing the preliminary phone calls however, it became apparent that one potential participant was still living with the abuser. Initial discussion with the participant revealed that she was very keen to take part in the research, describing it as a way of “giving back” following the support she had received from the charity. She also had positive experience of disclosure at work (an experience revealed to be somewhat unusual during preliminary phone calls with other women) and had a unique position among participants with regard to citizenship and residence. She was also confident in her support structure and personal safety with regard to issues of confidentiality, practical and emotional support. Given her desire to take part and her apparent emotional stability (she was identified by the charity as emotionally robust and our conversations and subsequent communication suggested this was the case), I was keen to include her in the sample, but aware of the ethical issues associated with her inclusion. I sought advice from my supervisory team and we discussed the ethical and practical implications of her inclusion in the research. Following this discussion, I made the decision to include the woman in the sample, which necessitated some adjustments to the data collection process (highlighted in the reflection in section 3.3.6).

The decision to exclude women still in an abusive relationship, was made with the best of intentions, and with the welfare of participants in mind. On reflection however, it was somewhat naive. Initial discussion with the women revealed that the concept of *no longer being in a relationship* with an abusive partner is incredibly simplistic. Whether physically or psychologically, the abusive partner can remain a huge part of a survivor’s life long after the relationship has ended, an issue which can be further compounded where there are children involved. Whether the woman in question is still in the relationship or not, the abuse could still be present in some manner, be it in the form of financial abuse, stalking, malicious reports to social services or any of the myriad ways in which perpetrators perpetuate the abuse. In addition to this, physical scars, emotional scars and hyper vigilance mean the shadow of abuse is present even when the perpetrator is not. With regard to inclusion, the question then becomes one of personal safety. The ethical focus therefore for the woman discussed above became her physical safety and amendments were made to the data collection process to ensure her safety.

3.3.7 Participant welfare

By limiting potential candidates to a pool of ex-service users selected by the charity, the risk of causing harm to potential participants was reduced. The sample, although artificially constructed, was identified as emotionally robust and more likely to experience the benefits rather than the potential risks of participating in a study of this nature. The content of the interviews asked participants to reflect on experiences connected to a traumatic period in their lives and as such had the potential to be a learning experience for participants. Many ex-service users connected with the charity choose to set up their own survivor-led support groups and are committed to further development and personal growth. Inviting women identified as eligible by the charity provides another opportunity for the women to reflect on their experiences.

3.3.8 Reflection – Responsibility to the women

Throughout the research I felt a real responsibility to the women and wanted to ensure I was respectful of their time, their privacy and their experiences. In terms of being respectful of their privacy this meant a commitment to confidentiality and gaining informed consent from the women. Of course, this could be said of any research participants, but I was acutely aware of the heightened need for privacy for the women which extended into personal safety. This was really brought to mind in my early communication with the women where – in our early email correspondence – Judith gave me her phone number noting that; “...it is safe to leave a message...” alluding to the idea that there was a time when it was not. At the time of the interviews Antonia was still living with her husband and it was important that her husband remained unaware of her involvement in the research. At first I was very nervous at the prospect of Antonia’s inclusion in the research, but she very much wanted to take part. My first instinct – in an attempt to protect her – was to exclude her from the research, but part of being respectful towards the women means respecting their choices, so instead of excluding Antonia I looked for ways to include her whilst doing my best to keep her safe. Where the other interviews were carried out remotely, I met with Antonia in person at a local meeting venue booked under my name where Antonia was signed in as my guest ensuring there was no record of her being there. The interview was organised at a time when Antonia’s husband would be at work and all communication with Antonia – with the exception of our initial phone conversation, which took place while she was at her place of work – was conducted via email (which Antonia was confident was private).

In terms of being respectful of the women’s time, I was conscious of not wanting to ask too much of the women, but at the same time wanted to be confident of collecting sufficient data of a high enough standard to enable me to answer my research question. There was a real balance to strike between allowing the women to share an experience they wanted to share and remaining on topic with regard to my research question. At times some women shared very personal stories which were not directly relevant to my questioning and I sometimes found it difficult to bring them back onto topic. If someone tells you that they have been raped – as a number of women did - what is an appropriate response? It seems completely inappropriate to steer them back to the question in hand. I also sometimes felt concerned that women might become distressed talking about such personal things, but actually this did not seem to be the case. More than one woman commented that the interview had been easier than she thought it might be, and multiple women offered to help with further research or commented that they were very happy to be contacted for follow up interviews or questions if necessary.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Interviews are well established within the social sciences as a means of collating qualitative data, and have been identified as a reliable method for exploring a participant’s lived experience (Einerson *et al.*, 2021) with the majority of IPA studies using semi-structured interviews as their primary tool for data collection (Smith, 2004). As evidenced by Huntley and Bratt (2023) given the idiographic focus of IPA, the structure of IP interviews may be very loose and consist more of

a set of prompts than an actual structure. This reflected my approach which consisted of a series of prompts (included in Appendix V) supplemented by additional questions and thoughts gleaned from the preliminary conversation relating to each individual.

The interviews were very much tailored to each participant; including elements of the preliminary conversation and in some cases probing issues and experiences unique to each individual. For this reason, a pilot interview was not undertaken, however in many ways the first interview served as a pilot in that it gave a flavour of the data to come, the likely length of interviews and a sense of some of themes that might emerge.

3.4.1 Emotions

Traditional styles and descriptions of interviews conform to what has been described by Ezzy (2010) as a conquest approach to interviews, replete with references to probing and dogged questioning, perceiving the interview as a conquest, where the researcher as the protagonist, extracts the required information from the passive subject. Such an approach centres on the interviewer as a dispassionate observer, focuses on the cognitive and glosses over both the interviewer's and the participant's emotional reaction to the interview content and context. Such emotional distancing can elicit much useful information, but is most likely to be restricted to factual, dispassionate responses described by Wiersma (2006) as public information akin to information shared in a press-release. More nuanced, honest, emotional accounts can only be elicited via a more nuanced, honest approach to interviewing. Kvale (1996) distinguishes between the interviewer as miner or traveller. The miner seeking to unearth pre-existing ideas and hidden treasures via asking the right questions, whereas the interviewer as traveller embarks on a shared journey with the interviewee characterised by the creation of shared meaning and mutual disclosure (Buetow, 2013).

(Ezzy, 2010) argues that good interviewing stems from the researcher's emotional framing of the interview as either conquest or communion. The sense of interviewing as communion has much in common with Kvale's concept of the interviewer as traveller and is also advocated by Benjamin (1988) who drew on insights gained from sociology, feminist theory and psychoanalysis to develop a more equitable approach to the experience of interview centred on mutual recognition and interdependence between the researcher and the participant. Such an approach to interviewing requires personal reflection on the part of the researcher to uncover their own emotional stance with regard to both participants and the subject matter. Engaging with one's own emotions and preconceptions has much in common with engagement with pre-existing theory in advance of data collection and analysis and reflects the process of active recognition of pre-awareness as advocated by Heidegger. In the same way as theory and pre-awareness need to be revisited as new reflections on collected data emerge, so emotions must also be revisited and re-evaluated as the research unfolds.

The interviews undertaken, centred on very personal experiences and required participants to reflect on a very emotionally difficult period in their life. Petty (2017) describing her interviews with parents regarding neonatal care discusses such interviews in the context of emotional labour – from the perspective of both the interviewer and the interviewee, and in common with Ashton (2014) cites the array of intense emotions including anger and sadness that could be elicited when revisiting past trauma. The women were incredibly generous with

their time and with their willingness to share deeply personal experiences with me in interview. Such insights can only be shared in an emotionally safe space characterised by support, mutual respect and understanding. The participant information sheet shared with participants prior to their giving informed consent set the tone for the interview relationship. The information provided outlined my personal interest and experience of IP Abuse and my ongoing role within the charity, providing the context for my commitment to and understanding of the issues faced by women experiencing abuse. This, coupled with emotional reflection prior to each interview, established what I hope the women experienced as an open, safe and honest context for the interview, allowing participants to experience the interview as communion rather than conquest (Ezzy, 2010).

3.4.2 Retrospective accounts

As noted by Kavas (2022) reliance on retrospective accounts relies on memory of past events rather than detailing current experiences and is potentially subject to recall bias or omission. Kavas however, goes on to note that the pivotal nature of the experiences being recounted reduces the likelihood of omission. Werner and Malterud (2017) describe the decision to rely on retrospective accounts as both ethical and strategic (2017, p46) in that it allows for emotional distance and enabling a more complete, reflective account of an experience to be uncovered.

3.4.3 Creating the interview guide

A general interview guide approach, similar to that advocated by (Gall *et al.*, 2003) was taken, allowing a degree of consistency - with regard to general discussion topics - to be retained, whilst also allowing for the flexibility and informality required to both elicit an individual's unique experience and build rapport (Cresswell, 2009).

Data collection (via interviews) started from the premise that work is an activity capable of fulfilling the three needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence (as identified by Deci and Ryan via SDT (1985, 2000)). A diagram showing the three needs and keywords relating to how these might be fulfilled, was used as an aide memoir during interviews to encourage a rounded discussion of the experience of work (a diagram of this document is included in the Appendix VI). This was supplemented by a number of interview questions (included in Appendix V) used to prompt participant narrative for example: "How did you feel about work?" and "how important did work feel?". In order to gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between the home and work domains, questions designed to highlight issues of the work/home border and its permeability were also included in the discussion, e.g.: "Do you think you were the same person at work and at home?".

Participants were encouraged to bring to interview something which they associate with work (for an example an object or a photograph) or identify a phrase, a poem or draw a picture which describes work to them. This had been intended as a means of approaching the interview creatively and providing an interesting and participant focused way of starting the conversation about work. Only one participant brought an artefact to the interview. Interestingly, it was the participant who was interviewed in person (rather than remotely) who brought an item with her to interview. Participants tended to state that they felt such an item was unnecessary and so had decided not to bring one along.

3.4.4 Interview Structure

A structured approach to interviewing was employed – modelled on Galletta (2003). Perhaps due to a lack of experience with interviewing, particularly in such an emotive context, I felt the need for a structured approach to interviewing participants. Whilst retaining an informal, semi-structured approach with regard to the questions themselves, the security of an overall framework for conducting interviews felt appropriate, and Galletta's three stage interview approach appeared to provide the requisite combination of flexibility and structure. Galletta first used the approach while undertaking a series of semi structured interviews exploring adults' reflections of their experiences of racial desegregation of schools in 1960s Ohio. Her approach combines elements of a narrative interview process with a semi-structured approach intended as an antidote to the shortcomings of the purely narrative interview. This blend of semi structured and narrative interviews has been used by other researchers such as Greene and van Riel (2021) and formed the basis of the interview approach employed in this research.

Galletta's approach comprises of an opening stage - used for initial broad questions to encourage narrative, a middle section - where issues identified in the opening section are further explored to provide additional depth or clarification, and a closing section - providing an opportunity to explore participant experience in the light of relevant theory.

This approach proved very useful in planning participant interviews and I did anticipate adopting this approach during the interview. In practice, the interviews although combining all three of the elements identified by Galletta (participant narrative, probing and links to theory) did not strictly follow a three-stage process, but instead moved between the three elements, producing a very natural, conversational style interview.

Each interview started with a 'pre-interview stage' consisting of some informal conversation, prompted by information gathered during the preliminary conversation. This informal conversation was intended to both reacquaint the participant with me and create an informal environment conducive to conversation. This initial stage was not recorded, and it was only on confirming the participant's comfort with the interview and with the recording, that the transcript commenced.

Once the recording had been started, participant consent was again confirmed (participants were aware this would happen) and participants were asked if they had brought an artefact to interview with them. One participant had, and this started a discussion about the items and why they were important, one participant had not brought an item, but had intended to (but was unable to find it), which prompted conversation about the importance of the missing item. All other participants had not brought an item to interview and the opening stage of the interview began with a prompt for the participant to talk about their experiences of work with a question such as "Can you tell me a little bit about the work you do?" creating a space for participants to speak from their own experience followed up by probes for clarification where necessary. In contrast to a purely narrative interview, the flow of the narrative was supported with probes that guided its direction with the research question in mind. In addition to prompting for more information, as the participants talked, from time to time I checked my aide memoire to identify additional areas of discussion and prompted

appropriately. I did not make this model accessible to participants as I feared this might make the interview seem too technical in nature. I did however share with the participants that I was using a model myself as a map during our conversation. Each interview ended with a closing section, thanking the participants for their time and reiterating the value of their contribution.

3.4.5 Interview environment

The value of creating an appropriate interview environment is emphasised by Cresswell (2009) who stresses the importance of creating an interview environment where participant confidentiality is upheld, and their comfort considered. The initial planning stages of the research focused on face-to-face interviewing, however the restrictions arising from the impact of COVID-19 meant that this was impossible, and my data collection methods had to be amended accordingly.

A number of potential interview locations were initially considered. The option of conducting interviews in participants' homes was quickly discounted, as apart from potentially intruding into a participant's personal sphere, it creates the potential for role conflict – with simultaneous roles as interviewer and guest – for a researcher and creates issues around personal risk and lone working.

I investigated the possibility of hiring local meeting facilities to hold interviews. By creating a neutral location, this removed the dual role of interviewer-guest and any social convention associated with hospitality for the participants. While providing a comfortable, confidential environment, this option however, (which would have placed participants in an unfamiliar space) had the potential to feel less safe for participants than a known environment. From my perspective, constraints with regard to meeting room availability and the cost of securing the facilities increased the potential need (or attractiveness) of conducting multiple interviews in a single day. Given the potentially emotionally demanding nature of the interviews, I discounted the possibility of conducting more than one interview per day, from a wellbeing and self-care perspective.

After careful consideration, and discussion with the key contact at the charity, the decision was made that interviews should take place at the charity's outreach office. The outreach office is a place frequented by service-users both during and after any support received by the charity. Participants would recognise this location as a space associated with support, confidentiality and safety, putting participants at ease. Unfortunately, the restrictions relating to COVID-19 and requirements for social distancing meant this approach became unworkable. Instead, interviews were carried out remotely – via Zoom. This approach had the advantage of being logistically easier to organise and participant interviews were arranged without any requirement for participants to travel. This approach also reflected how support services were provided to women during COVID-19, with counselling sessions and workshops being delivered remotely. Anecdotal evidence from counsellors at the charity suggested that some women felt empowered to be more open in a remote setting than in a traditional face to face session. I did have some concerns that it would be more difficult to build rapport remotely, which was one of the advantages of introducing an informal preliminary conversation with individual participants prior to interview to help develop

familiarity, trust and rapport. Again, this reflected practice within the charity at the time and seemed an appropriate approach.

I was very aware that it was important to establish that although characterised by confidentiality and safety, the interview was not a therapy session and I am not a therapist. The purpose of the research and my role was reiterated during preliminary conversations to underline this important point. Providing personal information in the participant information sheet regarding my personal interest in the subject under review, also set the interview apart from any professional support provided by the charity, where workers take great care not to divulge any personal information to service users and deflect any attempt to be drawn on their own emotional stance.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Seven participant interviews were conducted during October and November 2020 (and transcribed soon after). From the beginning of the data analysis process, I was struck by the raw emotion, honesty and richness of the women's accounts. Interviews (with the exception of one interview) were carried out via Zoom (interviews were organised prior to departmental communications identifying Collaborate as the preferred platform for remote interviewing). Each interview was booked as a ninety minute meeting, with one interview lasting approximately 30 minutes, two interviews lasting approximately one hour, two interviews approximately 90 minutes and the final interview lasting two hours. Interviews were planned as video interviews, however, one participant did not turn on her camera, so the video was recorded as voice only. One interview was conducted face to face and this interview was recorded as an audio transcript. Following completion of the interviews, recordings were uploaded to an online transcription service (HappyScribe.com), which provided a first draft of each interview transcript. Each transcript was then reviewed in conjunction with the audio file and corrections made to ensure the document represented a faithful transcript of the interview. Non-verbal information (for example, [pauses], [laughs]) was also included in the transcript. Once an accurate transcript of each participant's narrative had been produced, the file was downloaded into Word to begin the process of analysis.

The participant still living with the perpetrator was interviewed face to face in order to minimise the risk of the perpetrator becoming aware of her involvement in the research. I was very fortunate to be able to secure a COVID safe meeting space during a period of time when lockdown restrictions were lifted. The booking was made in my name, with no reference to the charity and the participant was recorded only as my guest and not by name at the venue, meaning there was no record of her having attended the interview outside personal email communication in relation to the research, which she was confident was secure.

3.5.1 Data coding

Once an accurate written transcript of each participant's account had been finalised, the process of data interpretation began – as described by Smith *et al.* (2022) – with close reading of the text to identify potential themes (please see Appendix VII for an extract). Transcripts were coded line by line and as the codes were created inductively, initial reading of the text identified a large number of potential themes, and necessitated the use of a large number of

codes to classify the data which subsequently required repeated refinement and consolidation. For example, coding of Nicole’s transcript resulted in the creation of 244 unique codes. Many of these codes were in reality multiple ways of expressing the same idea and the subsequent process of refinement reduced and standardised these codes. An extract of the initial coding of Nicole’s transcript in relation to a single theme is included in Figure 2 below to show the variety of the original codes.

3.5.2 Figure 2 – Extract from initial coding

Line	Original Tag	Code	Theme
29	Humiliation	Shame	Attitudes
41	Shame	Shame	Attitudes
52	Compartmentalisation used against women in court	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
55	Experience of being judged and blamed	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
71	Shame, humiliation, dignity	Shame	Attitudes
76	Humiliation, shame, degradation	Shame	Attitudes
106	Woman punished for abuser’s behaviour	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
118	Victim blaming	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
120	May be treated as victim, may be treated as villain	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
121	Spectrum of reactions	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
122	Believing women	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes
253	Gender of manager	Expectations of female managers	Attitudes
254	Double blow of being sacked by a woman	Expectations of female managers	Attitudes
255	Women in the workplace	Expectations of female managers	Attitudes
256	Gender expectations	Expectations of female managers	Attitudes
307	Not believed	Attitudes towards survivors	Attitudes

The initial coding of the seven transcripts identified eleven shared themes; relationships, attitudes, identity, control and power, the mask, mental health, success and failure, coping, disclosure, support and moving on. On further analysis of the data, comparison of participant accounts and refinement of the codes, this list of themes was subsequently rearranged into a hierarchy of themes and overarching themes, as detailed in Figure 4 - comprising of 6 overarching themes and a total of 45 codes. The original set of 11 themes mapped to the final 6 themes as shown below in Figure 3.

3.5.3 Figure 3 – Mapping of original themes to final themes

Original Theme	Final Theme	
The Mask	The Mask*	*The original theme of Attitudes included 3 codes – Shame, Attitudes towards survivors and gendered expectations of manager response. The first 2 elements were mapped across to the final code The Mask. The theme of gendered expectations of managers was mapped to the final theme of Disclosure and Support.
Attitudes		
Identity	Multiple Roles	
Control and Power	Control	
Success and Failure		
Coping		
Relationships	Interactions	
Mental Health	The journey	
Moving on		
Disclosure	Disclosure and Support	
Support		

These six key areas - shame and blame, the existence of multiple roles, workplace interactions, personal control, IP Abuse as a journey and the women’s experiences of workplace disclosure and support – will be used to explore the women’s experiences in the discussion detailed in Chapter 5. Figure 4 below, shows the final set of 45 codes and how these have been arranged within the overarching framework used to explore the women’s experiences.

3.5.4 Figure 4 – Final shared themes

THE MASK	M1. Stigma	M1.1 Attitudes towards survivors	
	M2. Blame and Shame	M2.1 Self blame M2.2 Embarrassment M2.3 Victim blaming	
	M3. The Mask	M3.1 Hiding Abuse M3.2 Risks of the mask M3.3 Mask of the Abuser	
MULTIPLE ROLES	R1. Identity Management	R1.1 Managing multiple roles	R1.1.1 Mother R1.1.2 Woman R1.1.3 Professional
	R2. Identity	R2.1 Who am I? R2.2 Authenticity	
CONTROL	C1. Impact and Independence	C1.1 Achievement C1.2 Money C1.3 Career progression C1.4 Success and Failure C1.5 Feeling powerful	
	C2. Boundary Management	C2.1 Compartmentalisation C2.2 Displacement C2.3 Physical safety	
INTERACTIONS	I1. Relationship Management	I1.1 Friendship I1.2 Team Relations I1.3 Maintaining distance I1.4 Others I1.5 Work as a proxy relationship	
THE JOURNEY	J1. Readiness to accept support		
	J2. Reflection and Realisation		
	J3. Trauma	J3.1 Mental Health J3.2 Balance J3.3 Recovery	
	J4. Continuing abuse		
	J5. Moving on	J5.1 Running away J5.2 A new role for work J5.3 Back to normal	
DISCLOSURE AND SUPPORT	D1. Support	D1.1 The right support D1.2 The wrong support D1.3 Ideal support D1.4 Support as control D1.5 Cost v Benefit	
	D2. Disclosure	D2.1 Decision to disclose D2.2 Knowledge of abuse D2.3 disruption D2.4 Critical incidents	
		D2.5 Responses to disclosure	D2.5.1 Sympathy D2.5.2 Gender roles

3.6 STORYTELLING

The women's accounts were represented as crafted narratives – using Crowther *et al.*'s model (Crowther *et al.*, 2017). Following analysis of the women's accounts and the identification of shared themes, I revisited the interview recordings. I was fearful of losing the very different personalities and differing experiences in a thematic analysis and was seeking a way of representing the data that allowed the individual voices of the women to truly be heard. On revisiting the interview recordings, I was struck by the narrative arc of the women's accounts that I had begun to lose sight of when immersed in the data. The interviews – though not deliberately narrative in structure – followed a clear narrative arc and described the women's experiences before, during and after disclosure; before during and after the period of realisation that they were in an abusive relationship; and - in the cases of Mona, Judith and Nicole – before, during and after a recovery-related career shift. I really felt the need to preserve this sense of storytelling and personal journey and identified Crowther *et al.*'s (2017) approach of crafted narrative as a useful tool to preserve the women's voices within the analysis. Crowther *et al.* (2017) describe the transformation from a transcript into a story as a process of removing extraneous detail, potential reordering the description of events to create a coherent whole – described in the participant's words – which succinctly reflects the participant's experience. Smith *et al.* (2009) do not explicitly identify crafted narratives as an IPA tool, however they note the “strong intellectual connection” (Smith *et al.*, 2022, p196) between IPA and narrative analysis. With a good degree of flexibility within the methodology there are many examples of both creative data collection and data analysis within IPA; for example (Agarwal and Sandiford's (2021) use of fictionalised dialogue between participants as a form of analysis and Klein and Milner's (2019) use of body mapping (life size outlines of participants bodies traced on paper) as a means of exploring lived experience. I felt the nervousness described by Caelli (2001) at the prospect of crafting participants' words, but in line with Caelli's experiences, on completion of the crafted narratives, I also felt they authentically and honestly reflected the women's experiences.

Crowther *et al.* – taking inspiration from Caelli's work, recognise the tensions associated with the crafting process and note that some scholars may have concerns that re-presenting participants' words in the form of a crafted narrative runs the risk of the researcher exerting too much control over the data. They then go on to note, however - in line with Morse (2015) - that all researchers exert a degree of power over data through their choice of methodologies and the manner of analysis, and that being mindful of that power and of one's perspective and bias is part of the responsibilities of research. In following Crowther *et al.*'s guidelines, emphasis is placed on retaining the participants' own words and repeatedly reflecting on whether the crafted narrative authentically represents the experience as articulated by the participant. I was very mindful of this responsibility to the data and ultimately to the women who participated in this research, and as advised by Crowther *et al.*, revisited the crafted narratives often, to “polish/prune” (Crowther *et al.*, 2017, p13), refine and consider their authenticity.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.7.1 Confidentiality

All interview data was anonymised and participants were assured of confidentiality. Any references which could identify participants were removed from interview transcripts and all data held in compliance with the University's data guidance and requirements and in accordance with GDPR requirements in password protected files.

3.7.2 Eligibility and the right to withdraw

Potential participants were asked to volunteer for the study and no incentive for participation was offered. All participants were given a participant information sheet clearly outlining the nature of the study and their right to withdraw up to 30 days post interview. Only participants from the pool identified by the charity's counselling staff were interviewed. All participants interviewed met the eligibility requirements with the exception of one, for whom adjustments were made to ensure her safety. All participants gave informed consent (a copy of the participant consent form is included in Appendix IV).

3.7.3 Wellbeing

As stated by Corbin and Morse (2003), when conducted sensitively and ethically, qualitative interviews can bring benefits to both researchers and participants and are unlikely to create levels of distress greater than that experienced in everyday life. Every effort was made to ensure participant wellbeing before, during and immediately after the data collection period. Prior to the interview each participant returned a consent form confirming their agreement to be interviewed and acknowledging that they had considered any support needs that might arise as a result of the interview process. Originally it was hoped that interviews would be held at the charity's outreach offices, in which case charity workers would have been available to support any women who might have felt the need for support following interview. Following the changes to interview method and location as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, support networks and self-care were discussed as part of the preliminary conversation, to ensure women had considered how to access support should it be needed. Women cited, remote support available from the charity, peer support, networks of friend and families, GPs and life coaches as potential support networks. Women also discussed other techniques such as yoga and meditation which they relied on in times of emotional stress. In addition to emotional welfare, in the case of the woman still living with the perpetrator, physical welfare in connection with the research was also discussed, leading to the decision to conduct the interview away from her home.

3.8 INSIDER STATUS

Listening to participants recounting potentially traumatic events in their lives, has the potential to be emotional and as with any area of emotion work, there is a risk of vicarious trauma (Pack, 2014). With this in mind I put in place a number of mechanisms to support my own personal wellbeing, making the decision to only conduct one interview on any given day, and establishing a support network of friends and family.

3.8.1 Reflection - Physical and emotional impact

Given the nature of the research, I was prepared for the fact that the research – and the interview process in particular - would be challenging. On reflection, I was prepared for this in a theoretical sense (in that I knew logically that it would affect me) but was not really prepared for the real world impact the research might have.

Prior to all the interviews I felt incredibly nervous, partly out of fear of coming across as inexperienced, but partly because I simply wanted to do my best for the women; making good use of their valuable time and making this as positive an experience as possible for them. Over the period of conducting the interviews I thought I had contracted a virus of some kind as I often felt nauseous and was concerned I was coming down with an illness. It was only when I was physically sick before an interview that I realised my nausea was anxiety related. Once I realised this, I started to take some down time following an interview and whereas I had previously immediately begun transcribing the interviews, after a few interviews I started to leave the transcription until at least the day after the interview.

While the interviews themselves were often quite emotionally intense, with women disclosing details of their abuse and their reactions to it, I did not find the process of transcribing or analysing the interviews stressful or upsetting. My main concern during transcription and analysis was doing justice to the woman's account.

I think that part of the anxiety relating to interviews was associated with some of the memories the interview process had triggered and partly just a sense of nervousness of wanting to do my best for the participants in terms of making good use of their time and making the interview a pleasant experience for them. In response to these feelings, I took a few days away from the research to reflect on my experience of the research.

3.8.2 The benefits and risks of “Insider Status”

My role as a Trustee of the charity and the insight and credibility this brings with it, coupled with my experience of growing up with intimate partner abuse could be seen as granting insider status. This status has certain advantages (and of course disadvantages) in terms of the research.

3.8.3 Access to Participants

I have previously conducted research at the charity (conducting interviews with staff and management) and have gained credibility as a professional and empathetic researcher, sensitive to the wellbeing of participants. This certainly helped in gaining the trust of the key contact who was incredibly supportive in identifying and approaching a potential pool of participants. Staff at the charity are very sensitive to the continuing recovery and ongoing wellbeing of ex-service users and their willingness to facilitate access to participants is greatly appreciated.

3.8.4 Trust

The participant information sheet outlines my reasons for completing the research and includes a reference to the abuse my mum suffered throughout her married life. Although I have not experienced intimate partner abuse, I have experience of growing up in a household

where abuse was the norm, giving me a degree of personal experience and insight. Such insider knowledge can create a sense of solidarity and establish the interviewer as “one of us” rather than a dispassionate observer with an objective interest and helps to establish greater trust and openness in the interview.

I was genuinely touched by the honesty and openness with which the women approached the interview process. Women shared very personal stories of their experiences of work, their experiences outside work and of personal recovery. I feel my personal experience and personal interest was instrumental in creating an environment of trust and interviews ranged from disclosures where participants became emotional to moments where we laughed together. During the closing section of the interviews some women expressed willingness to help with further research in the future, and one participant asked if she could interview me for a project she was working on.

3.8.5 Reflection – Honesty

One of the things I thought about a lot before I interviewed the women, was how to approach the nature of my mum’s death – indeed whether to approach it at all. While asking the women to be honest with me, I disliked the idea of being dishonest with them and felt some discomfort at the idea of withholding this information. At the same time, I was concerned about the impact that this information would have on the women. I did not want the women to focus on me, but rather on themselves nor did I want to upset the women. Sometimes when the women talked about their experiences of abuse they did so in comparison to the experience of other women they had met (for example, in peer support groups) and were almost apologetic if they felt their experiences – as violent and brutal as they might be - were somehow not as horrifying as those of someone else. It is possible the women made an assumption about the circumstances surrounding my mum’s death - they were aware that she had died and that I became a Trustee at the charity and embarked on this research following her death. More than one woman feared that her abuser might kill her, so it is not a huge leap to think that they might have considered this as a possibility. What I absolutely did not want women to do was somehow rank their experience in terms of my mum’s. After careful consideration of how best to approach my conflicting feelings, I decided that if a woman directly asked me about the circumstances of my mum’s death, I would be honest with her, but would not otherwise volunteer this information.

While carrying out his research with survivors of IP Abuse Beecham (2009) – a male researcher interviewing female participants - commented on participants expressing concern for his welfare and ultimately shifting the focus of the discussion onto his experiences rather than theirs, following his disclosure around growing up witnessing abuse. My experience of interviewing the women who participated in my research was that they might ask me questions about my experiences, or that I might draw parallels and we would express mutual empathy and solidarity for each other (and sometimes distain for the abuser). I did not get a sense of the focus shifting to my welfare and couldn’t help but wonder whether the shift of focus described by Beecham related to

the impact of gender dynamics – something which Beecham himself posits in his reflexive commentary.

3.8.6 The risks associated with insider status

While undoubtedly being advantageous in terms of gaining access and building trust, status as an insider also potentially carries risks, both for the interviewer and the interviewee. There is a delicate balance between building rapport and creating a sense of communion in the interview by sharing information, and the wellbeing of participants – which remains paramount. I shared my apprehension regarding participant concerns relating to my welfare (as reported by Beecham (2009) and noted in the reflection above) with the key contact. She believed the benefits of information sharing outweighed the risks and that the identified women were sufficiently robust. The tone of the interviews seemed to confirm this, with two women commenting that the interview had been much easier than they thought (in terms of being emotionally challenging) and two women commented they would have been happier to talk for longer, but had other meetings to attend.

Following my mother's death, in addition to gaining support from my personal support network, I also engaged in a process of recovery via bereavement and trauma counselling. I see the current research as a very positive aspect of continuing on the road towards trauma recovery and am grateful for the opportunity to use my experience to make a positive contribution going forward. I have a strong support network of family and friends and additionally have access to ongoing support from Victim Support as well as access to more formal support should this be necessary.

I am very aware that it is naïve to assume that anyone ever completely recovers from trauma, but those committed to self-development and recovery (such as the women who participated in the research) move on with their lives as best they can and learn to live with their experiences. By volunteering for the study, the women exhibited their commitment to post traumatic growth, an issue very close to my heart.

3.8.7 Reflection - Women's Experiences

One question posed (by those outside the academic community) – including by some who know my history is, “what about the men?”. (This is a question that causes great consternation within the charity, so much so that the question and the underlying assumptions it encapsulates are termed “butwhataboutery...”). I have at times felt quite defensive when asked this question and have felt the need to justify my decision to investigate the experiences of women only – much as workers at the charity have to do on a regular basis. It came as a great relief when listening to the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to hear her describe IP Abuse as a gendered issue and one which disproportionately affects women. I felt the same sense of relief when reading the work of Jessica Taylor (Why women are blamed for everything, (2020) and listening to Alessandra Gribaldo (2021) talk about her analysis of the experiences of Italian women navigating the legal system. Reading about, and hearing others talk about their research - which is exclusively about the experiences of women - in such an unapologetic way gave me confidence in my decision to focus solely on women's experiences.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have identified my intended approach, both theoretical and methodological, with regard to data collection and analysis in order to address the research question and objectives identified. Located in an interpretivist paradigm reflecting a relativist ontology and subjective epistemology, this research adopts a phenomenological methodology. Participants' experiences of work were collected via a series of semi-structured interviews and explored through IPA to understand the lived experiences of work.

In order to Recognise the sensitive nature of participants experiences and out of desire for genuine communication, a more nuanced, honest approach to interviewing was adopted - as advocated by Ezzy (2010). Each interview was preceded by a period of reflection to aid the framing of the interview as an emotionally safe space characterised by communion rather than conquest. I approached text analysis in the same spirit of reflection, ensuring a theme of active reflection runs through interview preparation, text analysis and the interpretive phenomenological methodology as a whole.

My experience as someone who grew up in a home where intimate partner abuse was the norm and my role as Trustee at the charity have certainly helped in terms of gaining access to participants, building trust and rapport with participants and establishing a degree of pre-existing insight and awareness of the phenomenon. The sensitive nature of the research context has the potential to be emotionally challenging for both me and the participants, however I am confident there are safeguards in place to protect all parties.

The interpretative phenomenological methodology adopted with its focus on understanding lived experience, was identified as the most appropriate to investigate the experience of work for women living with the effects of IP Abuse. This methodological perspective supported by the use of semi-structured interviews – and combining elements of a narrative approach – provided the opportunity to explore the role that work plays in the lives of participants. Via discussion of the experience of work, the impact of co-worker and management responses to disclosure and the corresponding support (or otherwise) experienced by the women offers insight into the role of organisational culture for women living with the effects of abuse. Similarly, discussion and comparison of the women's experiences has the potential to cast light on approaches that organisations could use to support women, and as such offer insight for HR professionals into this important issue.

The hermeneutic spirit of the IPA methodology and the resulting interpretation of the women's accounts gives rise to a double hermeneutic. While the interviews themselves represent the women making sense of their own experiences, the subsequent interpretation of these accounts documents my activities to interpret the women's narratives in light of existing literature, societal norms and my own experiences. Layered atop these interpretations of the women's narratives was an additional process of reinterpretation of some of my own experiences (extracts of which are included throughout the thesis as researcher reflections). The final potential ripple of the hermeneutic loop is the potential for the reader themselves to re-evaluate their own experiences or perceptions in light of the women's narratives and associated interpretation and conclusions.

The following chapter introduces the women's accounts of work, which are presented as crafted narratives using the process advocated by Crowther *et al.* (2017). The chapter begins with an overview of the naming conventions used to name the participants and each woman's narrative is preceded by an explanation of her assigned name. The shared themes arising from the women's narratives are then discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4 – PARTICIPANT STORIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the participants experiences by means of crafted narrative and describes the process of choosing the names by which the participants came to be known during the process of analysis.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS

Given the sensitive nature of the study content, participant confidentiality has been a key part of the data collection process. When initially collected and analysed, participant transcripts were numbered (by interview date order) and participants were subsequently referred to by their transcript number. Whilst providing anonymity to participants, this approach did not sit comfortably with the idiographic focus of the study and the deeply personal nature of the reflections shared by the participants. The participants were incredibly generous with their time and incredibly open with me during interviews, sharing deeply personal stories of their lives both at home and at work during the period we discussed. I felt it was really important to name the participants rather than refer to them by number, but choosing a random name felt too haphazard and to me felt little better than assigning a transcript number.

As expected, analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that work held a variety of meanings and played a variety of roles for the women. There were many positive experiences of work, but negative experiences of work were also identified. Among the multiple, often contradictory experiences of work articulated by the women; for each participant there appeared to be a central idea which characterised the key role of work within the life context of that individual. Having identified the existence of a central work role for each woman, I made the decision to name each participant based on this central meaning, thereby allowing the transcript and the discussion of the issues and ideas raised within it to feel meaningfully connected to the participant, whilst maintaining anonymity. For me, this process of naming the participants felt very important, and I spent considerable time choosing a name for each woman which not only reflected the central role of work but was also plausible given their cultural heritage and which, in my mind, suited the character of each woman.

The sections that follow provide summary narratives of the women's experiences of work, using the process for crafting stories (Crowther *et al.*, 2017) outlined in the methodology.

Throughout the process of forming the crafted narratives that follow I was very mindful of the responsibility to authentically reflect the participants experiences. Crowther *et al.* themselves emphasise the need to frequently return to the narratives to "polish/prune" (Crowther *et al.*, 2017, p13) and I often did so. For me the process of authentically reflecting the women's stories also called for re-immersion in the data and I took the opportunity to listen and re-listen to the women's words in an attempt to truly hear their voices. Taking this time to immerse myself in the data helped to ensure the authenticity of the crafted narratives, and ultimately as expressed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) the credibility of the data and its subsequent analysis.

4.3 PARTICIPANT 1 – MITRA

Participant 1 described her colleagues as friends, who bolster her, encourage her and support her development, as well as provide her with emotional support and practical assistance. On the surface, this may not appear to be particularly remarkable, but this sense of real friendship and support at work is in stark contrast to the more superficial, guarded colleague relationships described by some of the other women. For Participant 1, work was very much a place of friendship and connection and she came to be known as Mitra (meaning: friend or ally).

MITRA

Some of my friends - you know co-workers - they would phone me when I was in court and everything... [and when] my ex drove me out of the house, I didn't have clothes... nothing [and] one [of them] brought me clothes [and some other] things...

[Said while describing her colleagues' actions while she was suspended from work]

4.3.1 Mitra's Story

I work with special needs children in a residential family support unit, caring for children and organising activities. There are always ups and downs but I really love my work – the kids, the environment... I love it so much that I've been here on and off for 16 years!

I never told my co-workers what was going on at home, but they found out. Everything was so frustrating at home. My husband told a social worker that I threatened him with a knife - they took my children away and I had to go to court and I just couldn't stop crying. It wasn't true, but I was so upset about everything that I lost my temper at work. I got suspended and during the disciplinary everything came out. He was always calling the police or contacting social workers. Once I tried to unplug the phone to stop him making a call and he smashed my head against the wall. I was so scared. I was so afraid they would believe him and I would lose my job. I felt like if I lost my job I would lose everything.

When everything came out my employer was really supportive. They organised counselling and gave me some numbers to call and put me in touch with the Charity. My supervisor has been great. He changed my working hours and I was able to go part-time and stop doing night shifts. I was really lucky that work was supportive and I had family support. My co-workers really helped me and have become genuine friends through all of this. Once, when he threw me out of the house one of them brought me clothes and a few other bits and pieces, they are always there for me.

I always tried my best to focus at work, but sometimes it was really hard. I was worried about the kids and my ex was constantly bothering me with phone calls, then there were the constant calls to the police and social workers... When things were really bad, work was a real distraction and gave me something else to focus on. With everything that was going on at home, work felt like a break, and there were times when I managed to forget home completely. It was also a bit of adult company which I really needed and a way to meet new people – which I love.

My daughter struggled so much to deal with everything that was going on at home between us. On top of that he was really controlling towards her and just wouldn't give her any space. I had to give up work in the end. No matter how much you love your job, your kids come first. Things have been really hard for her, but she's 15 now and understands a lot more. I was

devastated when I had to give up work. I still saw them for coffee and things like that, but I missed them and the work so much it nearly broke me.

Despite the challenges of managing work and home – work gave me strength when I needed it most. Praise from parents or co-workers built me up when I was at my lowest. Work made me feel independent. Money was tight – we argued about it a lot – but work gave me a degree of financial independence. On top of that it also made me feel like I didn't need to ask anyone from back home for help – that I could stand on my own two feet. Before I came to the UK, my mother did everything for me and coming here gave me freedom – freedom to work, to earn my own money, to do what I wanted to do.

Work keeps your mind occupied too. I've done lots of training and learnt lots of new things. My supervisor and my co-workers encouraged me to go for a promotion. I was really nervous – I didn't think I was up to it, but I did it and it was great. Then there was the friendship of course.

Even when we weren't together anymore he was still making things difficult; coming to the house, asking for money. Eventually my new partner said, "enough is enough, an ex is an ex". My new partner gave me the strength to finally sever the ties with my ex, but work helped too. It gave me the confidence to stand my ground. I think it made me stronger. It's really hard to say if I was the same person at home and at work when it was all going on, but I'm certainly a different person now.

I'm on maternity leave at the moment, but I plan to go back to work. I always wanted to go back. It will be so different now! Without everything at home to worry about, the girls are more independent and he can't tell me what to do anymore.

4.4 PARTICIPANT 2 – NICOLE

Participant 2 worked in an office environment in a variety of senior management roles; her discussion of work focused heavily on the notion of success (for example holding a senior management role and earning a commensurate salary). Her career success and associated income enabled her and her husband to present to the world the image of a happy, successful couple, and her role at work was instrumental in hiding the abuse she was experiencing. She is now in a relationship with a new, supportive partner, has embarked on a new career and plays an active role in supporting the charity's outreach work. For Participant 2, work and workplace achievement was equated with status and personal success and she came to be known as Nicole (meaning: victory of the people – variant of Nicola)

NICOLE

And to the outside world, everybody thought we were really happy and 'that was that' type of thing. And so it just matched the fact that I was a success at work and I was a success at home. So that was kind of the image that I had...

4.4.1 Nicole's story

Role 1

There was a point in the relationship when the physical violence got really bad. Whenever there were injuries to explain, I would tell my co-workers I had been in a car accident – they must have thought I was a terrible driver! I was properly black and blue half of the time and of course everyone realised what was going on. My boss was really worried about me. He had a second home he said I could move in to. Another manager at work took me to a refuge and someone else again talked to me about charities that might be able to help. It was all too much though. My head was all over the place and I was too scared to speak to anyone. There were so many people who wanted to help, but I was mortified; I felt so ashamed; humiliated and totally unprofessional and I never wanted to feel like that again. Within six weeks I had left and relocated and that was that. My boss was off sick, which made it easier. For me, people finding out made things so much worse. It brought the two worlds together and I was afraid of what he would do if he found out that people knew. My family and friends didn't know, there was no way I wanted work finding out. Over time my ex-husband got better at hiding it and stopped hitting me in the face - which made it much easier to hide from my co-workers.

I absolutely was not the same person at home and at work. At work I was quite cold - cut off. I was very efficient and focused on getting the job done. I focused a lot on my staff and celebrated their success. On the one hand I felt more confident at work but weirdly also felt like a total fraud. The more I was promoted, the more I wondered how I had managed to get there. I looked on the outside like a successful businesswoman who had their life planned out, but on the inside I felt like a crippling failure who was unable to function outside work.

Role 2

One Christmas my team gave me a framed picture of us all together. It was quite unusual to find me in a photo with them – I usually got someone else to stand in the picture. I've never liked the limelight; my new partner pulls me up on it regularly. I'm more than happy to put in all the work and all the effort and do everything, but I never want to be the face of something. I can't remember what the occasion was, but I remember feeling really proud of

them when the photo was taken. We might have won something, or someone had graduated – I always pushed them to get their degrees; it was a perk of the job. I wouldn't have said I was close to them. I knew a fair amount about them and I cared about how they were doing but I didn't take a lot of interest in their personal lives and I think that was a conscious decision. My experience in my previous roles where the stuff at home had "leaked in" meant I made a conscious decision not to let that happen again. People knew I was married and everyone thought we were very happy and that was that. I looked like someone who was successful at work and successful at home. My ex-husband enjoyed the vicarious success of being married to a senior executive and we had a very nice lifestyle. My life outside work – as part of a successful, happy married couple matched the fact that I was a success at work. He liked telling his family and friends about my job – and he liked the money that came with it. It didn't change his behaviour though.

I loved being involved in high profile projects, some of the work I have done has had real lasting impact. I have also really loved being able to support others in their careers. I love to get messages from previous team members to hear how they are doing. My self-esteem was pretty tied up with work - it defined me, to be honest with you. It made me feel good; as if I had a function, a role, a purpose – like I was worthy. Of course, work could be stressful sometime, but I felt safe and content when I was at work. I don't like to say it, but sometimes being at work made me feel powerful, I felt like I could make a difference – like giving someone their first job. I don't like the word "power" though. It reminds me of my ex and the kind of power that was exerted over me at home. Power comes with control.

I've never disclosed voluntarily, but there came a point where I had to tell my employer as I went into refuge for three weeks. I had been due to be promoted, but when I got back they told me they were thinking about making me redundant. I was absolutely devastated, but I took the redundancy. All I needed was some time. If they could have signed me off sick for six months or a year, I think I could have come back. I sometimes wonder how things would have played out if they'd given me that, but then all I wanted to do was run away and hide – so redundancy didn't seem like a bad option.

Things got very hard at work – in terms of managing the abuse - when I had a baby. There was just too much to balance. That's the point at which I really started to struggle with my mental health. I felt like I was an imposter at work, failing as a woman and now failing as a mother though financially I was doing really well. When I knew I was having a baby I became even more fearful of people finding out – in case they took her away. It all got too much which I think was why I didn't fight for my job. Redundancy just seemed like an easier option. People don't recognise how traumatic having a child can be, and I think if you've perfected this mask you wear for other reasons, then the mask you wear as a mum who's coping, is even more effective than somebody else's might be.

Role 3

I think I really compartmentalised my lives - my work and home life felt very separate. It helped me cope, but it also destroyed me in court. My image as a successful professional was used to undermine my credibility in legal proceedings. How could things have been that bad if I was managing to cope at work? They basically called me a liar.

By this point my life was really spiralling out of control, so things “leaked in” again. I’d had my child removed, I’d been raped, I’d gone through a divorce, I’d been sectioned (and released immediately because there wasn’t anything wrong with me), I was being stalked, I had PTSD and then to top it all off I got sacked. I have never done anything wrong in my life. There was a settlement agreement of course, but they didn’t even begin to try and support me in any way. But do you know what? With my business hat on I completely understand why they did it. That was during the “stalking and harassment phase”, and I was so focused on what was going on outside work, how much use would I have been? I don’t think workplaces are set up to manage DV. I think it is a massive challenge to be honest with you. From a business perspective there’s the sickness and absenteeism and disruption and as you become more senior it becomes less and less acceptable. So, I don’t really blame them, even though it meant I lost my home, which was connected to the role. They could have done so much more, but this was at the time that everyone (in court) was saying I made everything up. I’d gone from being the victim to being the criminal. I’d gone from the job before and “we’re really sorry this is happening to you, but there’s nothing we can do”, to being the person who’d made everything up and “can it really be that bad?”. The manager in Role one who offered me support was a man, whereas in Roles two and three my managers were women. To be honest, redundancy and dismissal were all the more devastating coming from a woman.

Role 4

When I think about how I am at work, I don’t really know which bits are me, or the real me – I’m not sure I even know who I am. I was very successful in sales and actually I hate that about myself. It scares me that I can manipulate people – but now I say that out loud it sounds like something my ex-husband would say about me. We were together such a long time, there are certain parts of us that are still intertwined. I met him when I was young and he was part of a very formative period in my life.

I have zero power in the job I’m in right now (working for a charity). What the organisation does makes me feel warm and fuzzy, but I am finding the organisation itself and how it functions very frustrating. So, I don’t feel very happy at work at the moment. I’ve gone from feeling happy at work and terrible at home to the exact opposite. I see this role as paying my dues in a new sector and I am about to move on to something else, which I’m really pleased about. I feel a bit detached from work at the moment and it makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. It’s been such a hugely important part of my life for such a long time and I feel a bit lost now.

4.5 PARTICIPANT 3 – JUDITH

During the abuse Participant 3 worked firstly in an office environment and later as a housekeeper. She is currently not working due to ill health associated with the abuse but hopes to become actively involved in a role which supports women and allows her to use her experience to benefit others. The abuse that she experienced in her relationship left her self-esteem crushed. She describes feeling “dehumanised” and “like a piece of meat” at home. Participant 3 described work as a source of validation and she came to be known as Judith (meaning: she will be praised)

JUDITH

I felt like it was something for me. I felt like work was a place where I was valued. I felt like I. All the good things about me, I'm a responsible person, I'm trustworthy, I'm reliable, I'm committed... Those things were noticed at work, so they validated me as a person. I looked forward to going to work.

4.5.1 Judith's story

Role 1

I was recovering from an eye operation when I met him, but while we were together I started work in an office manager position for a local cleaning company. To be honest, I applied for a job as a cleaner - which tells you something about my self-esteem at the time – but when I went to the interview, the manager said, “I'd really would like you to come and work in my office as an office manager”. So, it turned out quite well, really. What was going on at home was horrendous - my self-esteem was through the floor, but to be honest, I don't think I really recognised that I was in an abusive relationship at the time. Looking back, I don't really know how I managed.

When I was at work, I felt like what was something for me. I felt like work was a place where I was valued. I felt like all the good things about me were recognised - that I'm a responsible person, I'm trustworthy, I'm reliable, I'm committed. Those things were noticed at work, so they validated me as a person. I looked forward to going to work and, because I think it was a space where I wasn't a mother and I wasn't a wife. I was just me. So, I enjoyed the job. I couldn't talk about what was happening at home with anybody. I didn't trust anybody there - I felt like if I shared my situation it was going to be gossiped about, which wasn't useful for anybody. And also, it wasn't professional. It wasn't professional for me to share something as personal as that.

I didn't think about disclosing at work. I would say, “I've had a bit of a rough night,” or “my other half was kicking-off last night,”. You know, the normal stuff that people say. But as far as the disclosure goes, it didn't even enter my head. I can honestly tell you that at the time, I didn't believe that what I was experiencing was domestic violence. At the very beginning of the relationship, I ignored all sorts of red flags, because I believed that domestic violence was when a husband or partner kicked or punched the other person. I knew nothing about emotional violence, psychological violence, financial violence, coercive control. I didn't even really understand what assault was until last year. I thought if he drew blood or I got bruises, that was domestic violence and at that time, none of those things had happened. Even when he raped me - as naive as it sounds - I believed that because he was my husband he was entitled to do that. So, I didn't even think of reporting that to the police.

I didn't want to make friendships with people. I was very lost... I didn't know who I was. I didn't know what I stood for. I was a mother. I wasn't a woman. I couldn't choose what I wanted to wear. Very rarely – if I went out - I was able to choose what I bought myself for lunch. So I was really of the mindset that I wasn't my own being. After he'd gone, though I was physically free, I think psychologically I had so many demons that I had to overcome. I have committed some of my free time to a charitable organisation. When I was looking into it, I did a lot of research, and I found out that the founder's daughter was called Judith. She seemed like such a strong, empowering woman – ahead of her time - and I thought, "I like that name". So, I decided to change my name and I think it's been a really important part of my recovery, from an identity point of view.

Sometimes at work I had to help out in emergencies. Sometimes my boss would ring me with an emergency and I'd have to tap into the information and relay that... And that made me feel important. I felt like I was a valued asset to the company, whereas I didn't feel like that at home. My boss would listen to my ideas – sometimes they weren't great ideas – but he would also listen, and at times I felt a little glimmer, a possibility that my ideas and experiences were valuable. So, I felt validated at times, but I think it didn't happen often enough to build my self-esteem up or my confidence.

Towards the end of my position, they actually physically confronted each other – him and my boss. I was about three or four months pregnant. I ended up having a car crash in the company car. It wasn't my fault, but when I called the man to come and help me, he got physically confrontational with my boss. There was no concern for me – he was worried about his baby. I felt embarrassed about that and ashamed that he had reacted to my boss in that way, because obviously I'm having to have a relationship with my boss, a professional relationship, and I felt like the man at home had overstepped that mark and made my work environment difficult for me. I'd already decided that I wasn't going to rush back to work after having my baby. Once we'd conceived the baby the violence went through the roof. Now I understand that that's kind of what happens sometimes with perpetrators. So, I decided that I wasn't going to come back to that job. It was partly that I didn't want to be working full time after the baby was born, but also that my boss had found out something about my personal relationship.

Role 2

After the baby was born I started working for the family as a housekeeper. By that point I was in the process of divorcing him. I was going through a terrible time – rushing round that massive house like a mad thing - and work was a great distraction. She used to give me an unbelievable list of things to do and I always managed it which gave me a huge sense of satisfaction. Most of the time I was there on my own so it was a safe place to make phone calls. What was strange about that situation was that the lady that I was working for was also being domestically abused. I wouldn't say we built up a friendship, but certainly an association. I think by then I was becoming aware of the difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship. I realised what was happening and we confided in each other. There was one occasion when I arrived at work and he had beaten her up so much she wouldn't let me in the house. She ran her own business and they were an extremely wealthy family. The only people who knew what was going on behind closed doors were the two of them, the children and me. After that a boundary had been crossed. I knew something about them that I probably shouldn't have known about. Shortly afterwards she rang me and

said, "Unfortunately we're going to have to let you go". I realised that it wasn't because I was doing an unsatisfactory job.... It was because I knew too much.

Role 3

My ex disappeared in 2014 after he assaulted me and my youngest daughter, then six years later he reappeared and now he's dragging me through the courts looking for access. I was working as an LSA at a school while all this was going on. Eventually, after six months I had a very open and frank conversation with my boss as the whole thing was making me ill. She couldn't believe that I had managed to cope for so long. Work were supportive and signed me off sick, but I've now been off so long they have had to dismiss me on grounds of ill-health. I wouldn't have lost my job had it had not been for him coming back and continuing the abuse. So, I'm in a situation now where I'm unemployed, I've got long term health problems because the court case is still continuing and I've lost a job that I really loved. I'm thinking it is all because of this perpetrator trying to continue to control me, but I will not let that man break my spirit again.

Everyone is aware the DV exists, but many people are worried to talk about it and lots of people don't really understand what it actually is. I think things should be more open in the workplace, like a poster about DV on the bulletin board. Maybe If I had started working in a place that had domestic violence poster up I would have thought my employer is aware that domestic violence exists. Maybe by having that poster there, that might have made me feel like I could have an open dialogue about that situation at home. I just don't think it's the kind of conversation people have in the workplace.

In the past couple of years, we've started to focus on mental health in the workplace a lot more. So, you know, if we're becoming aware of mental health, why then could we not talk about alcoholism or drug addiction or domestic violence happening at home? We all see these posters with ChildLine, for the kids to reach out. But what about, other situations that go on? Trust is such a big issue for women who have lived through that. It's not something that they would open up about quite easily. But I feel that approached in the right way, as sensitively as possible, I think possibly people would feel comfortable to start talking about these things they're experiencing in the workplace. I don't think there's any reason why not.

On top of having a first aider in the workplace, why doesn't a spokeswoman go into all workplaces and educate staff and employees on domestic violence? Someone in the workplace might not necessarily be experiencing domestic violence, but they might know someone that is. Domestic violence is so commonplace, it's probably likely that we all know someone that's experienced it at some point. Educating people on what domestic violence actually is, leads to empowerment, and I think that maybe reduces the stigma around talking about domestic violence in the workplace. As soon as I'm fit and well, I'm going to go back to work, but I'm not going to go back to my previous job, I'm going to do something with The Charity, Rape Crisis, or advocacy or outreach worker or something like that – that's where my heart is. I would love to use my experiences to help other people. I remember saying to an outreach worker that I didn't want my domestic violence to define me, but now I realise that I'm a survivor of it, which is a very different thing altogether. I am able to separate from it now. It's a memory - something I went through - but it's not part of me anymore.

4.6 PARTICIPANT 4 – FRAN

As a yoga teacher, Participant 4 described both a physical and an emotional separation made possible by her work. Closing the door of the yoga studio and taking her seat at the front of the class provided Fran with a physical distinction between the challenges she faced outside work and her place of work. Participant 4 experienced work as a place of escape and freedom, in both a physical and emotional sense and she came to be known as Fran (meaning: free woman = abbreviation of Frances)

FRAN

At the yoga studio once, I literally emotionally and consciously had the thought. 'I'm leaving that shit at the door', and I closed that door and I was in there and I was just basically a clear channel through which yoga could be talked about.

4.6.1 Fran's story

Soon after moving to London, I become pregnant with my first child and basically, things started to wind down for me workwise. I very naively thought - and I even said to my yoga students - once the baby is born, I'll take three months off and I'll see you after that, so have a great summer - Bye! How stupid was I? I was very naive and it's probably what most first time mums think – “Oh, yeah, I'll get back to normal in no time!”. You just don't understand how it completely revolutionises your life. So, I had the baby and we also moved out of London so on top of a baby I now also had a commute as most of my clients were in London.

Once the baby was born, it just wasn't feasible for me to go back to work. The baby was a terrible sleeper - I basically can't remember the last time I had a decent night's sleep.

So, the decision was very much made; I gave up my career and helped to build up his career so that he could support us as a family. I set up meetings for him, with the local clubs around here, I spoke to lots of people, I helped him to build a base of private clients, I redid his website. I tidied up all the paperwork so that he could do his tax. At the same time, I was taking care of the home, doing the cooking, doing the shopping, taking care of the baby and we'd just moved into this home, so I was buying furniture, creating a nest. In terms of my own career, I sacrificed it. I had to it – there wasn't really any other option for me at that point.

I was doing all those invisible jobs that no one thinks about. I have never worked as hard as I did when I first became a mum, but he minimised all of those efforts. And then, things started to deteriorate. I remember him really flipping his lid that the dishwasher hadn't been loaded; “God, you're so fucking lazy...” The baby was really fractious and only ever slept for 45 minutes at a time and I was utterly, utterly exhausted, but there was no sharing of the burden. He'd do the token nappy change or occasionally empty the bins, but there was no real support. There was no emotional support, no recognition of what I was doing, not just in terms of the house or the baby, but in terms of actually building his career. Stupidly I kept thinking that it was for the benefit of all of us as a family. I believed that was my role – to support him. And it was working. Over the next four years his career really took off. I'm not saying we were super rich, but he was supporting a family of four (I'd had my youngest by then) and we could afford to go on holiday, the children did lots of activities, we were living in a three bedroomed house and running a car. I was his marketing manager, his PR, his business development manager his PA, I would assist at classes. In my mind I was running the

family business; not for him per se – but to help provide for my family. Obviously, he was the one doing the teaching – but I know that his career would not have taken off as it did if it hadn't been for me.

There were times – when he couldn't manage it – that I taught some of his private clients and it felt like a stab wound every time they said nice things about him. All I wanted to do on so many occasions, was say to them, “He beats the shit out of me. He swears at me all the time. He manipulates me all the time. He says that I'm ugly and fat, and I've got no friends and nobody loves me and that my family hate me.” It absolutely sickens me that he is still a yoga teacher. I wish there was somewhere that I could report him and he could be struck off or something. When we met he was scrabbling together a couple of classes at the local gym whereas now he's got private clients left right and centre, he gives lectures, he teaches on training courses, he travels abroad to teach on retreats... And now it's me who's struggling to get people through the door of the community centre.

It was when I was pregnant with my second child that I contacted the Charity. I realised I had to take care of the baby. If I hadn't been pregnant at that point, I wouldn't have called them and God only knows where things might have gone. At one of my meetings with the Charity, the worker said, “You know, what you're going through is abuse.”. And I was like, “What do you mean? No, it's not.”. It took a long time for me to recognise that it was abuse, and then all of a sudden I started putting names to these behaviours and I started to recognise them as being abusive. It was amazing to learn this new language and be able to articulate the experiences that I was going through. Coercive control? Never heard that word before. Manipulation... What's that about? How does that work? Gaslighting. Never heard of that before. That was the point I started to change. I started to understand that I was in an abusive relationship and came to see myself as a victim of abuse and started to ask myself how I was going to get out of it, how was I going to save myself and my children.

No one had a clue what was going on. He has this amazing mask that he puts on in public, which is one of reasonableness, of equanimity of being calm and gentle and kind and - of course - thinking about his children first. For a long time, I hoped that he would come home wearing that mask, but he never did. It's taken a heck of a long time and many, many shocks to realise that that was just never going to happen. When I gave birth to my second child the abuse continued; in fact, it escalated. The more I learned about it, the more I was seeing it, the more I was experiencing it. Eventually I got to a point where I said to him, “This needs to stop. You need to leave.”. He was really violent by this time, and I was relieved to get him out of the house. The first thing he did was block access to all of our money. Despite wearing the mask of a devoted father outside the house, he was perfectly prepared to let his children starve. I had to go back to work in order to feed myself and my children.

My youngest was a toddler and the older one was at pre-school and I absolutely was not ready to go back; physically I was out of shape – I still am - and mentally I had been trashed for the previous three years. Physically and mentally, I was so far from where I wanted to be, but I had to go back and do it. If I'd had the choice I would have gone back when I knew that I could have had a good night's sleep. I would have gone back to work when I knew that I could have taken a few weeks to read up on yoga books. I would have gone back to work when I knew I could have had a few weeks of getting back into my own personal yoga practice. But basically, I was desperate for money; completely desperate. And feeling desperate is not a good mindset for any kind of work.

The decision to go back to work was forced on me. But - that said - at the end of the class, when people came up and said, "Oh, I really enjoyed your class, thank you!" – it was flattering, it was uplifting, I felt needed, I felt respected, I felt listened to. And that came at a time when my ego had been chucked underneath the bin and spat on and crushed and kicked to the curb, so those moments for me were emotionally enriching, they were uplifting. They made me feel normal again - like a human being. It felt shocking to realise that somebody would respect what I had to say and would listen to me. When my eldest child was two they used to call me Twat, because that's what he called me. Work reminded me of what it felt like to be Fran again, to be called by my own name. Work felt like a way of coming back to myself, and I was grateful for that.

One huge benefit for me of returning to yoga was being able to leave all my baggage at the door. Once, at the yoga studio, I consciously had this thought, "I'm leaving all that shit at the door.", and I closed that door and I took my seat in that communal space and focussed on the class. It felt so alleviating. It was the first time that I didn't feel so weighed down by his abuse. During the class the communication is pretty much one way, but when I chatted to people at the end of the class, it felt so good to remember that that was how things used to feel.

For me, being self-employed and not having to answer to anyone else's schedules or deadlines has been really important. When someone tells you how to behave and what to do on such a constant daily basis at home, and then you go to work and with the best of intentions, your boss tells you what to do, when to do it by; that is like lighting a match to a bonfire of emotion. I don't think I could have coped with that. I would just be raging. I'd have felt boxed in at work and boxed in at home; as if my wings had been clipped and I would either have wanted to fight my way out of it - If I had any energy left - or just wither away. So, I am very, very grateful, that I was my own boss and that I had enough experience and knowledge behind me to start a yoga class in a village hall. I'm not doing big things right now - I'm teaching two yoga classes a week and I've taught at a couple of festivals. Both the kids sleep through now and things are getting easier and I'm starting to get some time to myself, which I didn't have before.

I've set up a separate email account (for him to email me) called HIAT@email.com, which stands for [Husband] is a twat. So, every time he writes me an email he is addressing it to [Husband] is a twat. It just makes me laugh. He doesn't know what it stands for, but if he works it out – so much the better. It's little things like that that make you feel as if you're regaining a bit of your sanity.

4.7 PARTICIPANT 5

Participant 5 worked in a wide variety of roles including retail work and recruitment and now works from home, combining studying with freelance work. Whereas for the other participants work has affected their lives in a range of positive ways, for Participant 5 the experience of work (and in particular workplace) has been overwhelmingly negative. In her case work was experienced as a place of danger and isolation, characterised by a sense of inauthenticity and lack of belongingness. Participant 5 came to be known as Mona (meaning: solitary woman)

MONA

I was like...there's no point... I can't do this if I know where it's going to head, and it just seemed like they wanted me gone and I couldn't really understand what I had possibly done...

4.7.1 Mona's story

Sometimes I would look forward to going into work, but if it was a particularly bad time at home, I would dread going in because of the whole, "Oh, how are you? How was your weekend?". And you can't be honest. I don't like not being truthful, so I'd say that it was fine; it was good - but it wasn't actually. I suppose, I preferred being at work to being at home to some degree, but to be honest going to work was just stressful. He was always really possessive and always wanted to know what I was doing. He would constantly call so I never really got that much peace, apart from the jobs when there wasn't really much to do. Part of the reason for having so many jobs, was because I had to leave quite a few, so temporary work just worked better. It's very difficult going in to work every day and having to put on an act. It's really tiring having to behave and smile in a way that's completely at odds with your reality. When it's a temporary role, it's a lot easier because you're only around those people for a short period of time, and if anything happens - if he had a meltdown or something, then it didn't really matter if I left.

There were jobs that I really enjoyed – that felt like a break from home. When I was working in recruitment I was always really excited about going to work, but once I shared with my manager what was going on at home, I didn't enjoy going into work because the whole atmosphere changed; which made me regret saying anything. The way people spoke to me, the degree of autonomy I had, the kind of assignments I was given all changed. I think she respected me less. She started making little jokes here and there in conversations with other colleagues relating to abuse. I just remember thinking, "Why?". Did she really dislike me like that much? We'd got along fine beforehand, but then afterwards it became clear that my manager believed that it was my problem, I shouldn't be bringing it to work and if it was impacting my work then I should leave. I was pregnant at the time and was really sick, but there was not one ounce of kind of consideration. With some flexibility, a bit of understanding I could have stayed at work. I asked if I could start later in the morning and finish work later – like ten o'clock until seven or something like that. That would have given me some time on my own at home in the morning and I wouldn't have had to spend so much time with him in the evening. But they said no. Being able to make adjustments like that to my working hours would have helped me a lot and probably would have improved my output, but one of the managers said, "There are people working here who are terminally ill and they still manage to come to work every day". They just wanted me gone. One minute I was being congratulated on meeting my targets and the next I was on performance review. They

amended my targets to make them completely impossible then sat me down and said they felt it was unlikely I would fulfil the conditions of my probation and that I should probably just leave, so I handed in my notice.

It can be a bit strange sometimes how people react. I never expected anyone to pat me on the back or give me a hug or anything like that, but you just kind of expect the bare minimum. If you'd been in a car accident or you fallen down the stairs; even if somebody didn't like you, they'd give you the bare minimum of compassion. But for some reason some people think you don't even deserve that. I find it so strange.

I left the relationship when I was pregnant, but my ex kept tabs on me and always seemed to know where I was. For a while, things were quite chilled - it wasn't too bad. But then I started a new job; it was just me and my child and I needed to earn some more money, so I went into a management role in retail. It was so stressful when I was working there and I couldn't tell anyone why – I didn't want to after what had happened at my last workplace. It was in a department store and he would just turn up there, and I would have to act like he was a normal customer and I would end up saying to people, "Oh, this is my partner.", even though we weren't even together anymore. I just couldn't do it anymore. Everywhere I went I was looking around, worrying that he was there somewhere. I was really afraid, but I couldn't tell anyone, and I would just hide in the office until I felt ok again. I realised that I couldn't keep working like that, scared that he might turn up at any moment, and I was worried I would lose my job if I told anyone, and so I decided to work from home, it was just easier than trying to work with other people. I was exhausted. I was putting so much energy into putting on this brave face at work, I was constantly worried that he would be spying on me so I could never have a proper conversation with anyone in case he could hear. And he would just appear from nowhere. I'd go round the corner and there he was. I spent years being guarded about what I said as if he was there even when he wasn't there. I can't do that anymore, so it's easier to work on my own.

I think I was a different person at that time, it changed who I was and that person was not necessarily somebody people would have wanted to be around. I definitely wore a mask at work and joined in with the kind of chit chat that keeps the office going. It disrupts the whole atmosphere of a workplace when somebody isn't doing that and people don't like it. So, I was different at work. Maybe you could say I was more like my old self when I was at work. I work from home these days and I wouldn't be keen on going into an office now because I can't do that sort of thing anymore.

I mainly work in an admin role on projects now. I tend to specialise in more creative projects and I currently have a contract working for a large American company. My current boss is a man and - I don't know - I can't really put a finger on this, but in my experience male colleagues or employers have been more considerate than females. This guy that I work with in America is so considerate, I've told him everything about my experiences and why I'm the way I am and how I work best; and he's been completely chilled about it. So, it's been a really strange experience for me; that being honest with a man about something like this has been a lot easier than being honest with a woman. I don't get why. If you were to stereotype genders, you'd just assume that you're more likely to get a more sensitive response from a female manager, but I've just found that with the women I've worked with recently, that the respect went after I told them.

When I'm at home I find it slightly easier because I can see where my windows are, I can see where my exits are - I have full awareness of everything. In an office, there's so many other variables, including other people. So, I could sit there comfortable in some places thinking, "Right, the door's locked all the time.". You'd have to get in through a key buzzer or something, but then someone leaves it open... When I worked in recruitment the door was supposed to always be locked and I was feeling OK, but then at lunchtime, there he is in the office, and I'm like, "How did you get in here?". He was able to just walk straight up - so what's the point? After the way I was treated and the response that I got when I worked in recruitment, I don't really trust anybody anymore. At home I'm ultimately responsible if a window or a door is open or not. So, it's a bit more chilled,

I've been really stressed recently because the guy I'm working with said that I might have to go to America and I've been so overwhelmed with stress about that because, a lot of things will be out of my control and I'll be at the mercy of other people, and have to rely on other people's common sense, and - based on my experiences - I just don't trust anybody. I know I have PTSD and I am hyper vigilant, which means when I have to rely on other people I can't relax or concentrate or work properly, because I'm putting all my energy into staying alert although it has calmed down a bit over the years.

When I was in that relationship, I didn't know that any services for domestic abuse existed at that point. I knew from reading and watching films and just hearing it, that it was an issue for women, but I never actually knew that there were systemic things being done to try and help. My understanding of it was that it was just part of being female; that it just happens sometimes, and there's nothing much you can really do about it. I don't think I even knew the right words to describe it, so it took me a while (when I was working with the Charity) to kind of really just describe things that way, because it just wasn't on my radar at all. People don't understand the effect it has on you. People are like, "You're not together. What's the problem?". Hello? Just because we're not together doesn't mean that the exact same thing isn't continuing, in fact for me it got worse after I left. Sometimes I think if I'd stayed with him, it would have been 100 times easier than the way it actually was. It was so much more difficult.

Work is about survival. Not so much money to survive - I don't really think about the money so much, it's more that I need work itself to survive, I need things to do - even if it's for free. Don't get me wrong, I don't let myself get shorted; but regardless of how much I get out of it, I have to do it because I can't survive without it. When my relationship was at its worst - before I started working from home - work was just an added problem that I had to navigate. Now; work and I are the same thing, there isn't anything else outside of me being a mum - work is just everything that I have, and without it, I don't think I could really survive. How I feel about work has evolved a lot. I see it a lot more positively now although I realise it's not the healthiest of attitudes - because I don't have a distinction really between my personal life and my working life. I wouldn't say work makes me happy. I'm here, I am in control, I am doing a job I'm good at, but I just always have this expectation that it's going to go wrong somewhere, or get ruined somehow, either by myself or by somebody else and that makes me feel a bit sad.

4.8 PARTICIPANT 6 – ANTONIA

Participant 6 works in an educational setting with young children and still lives with her abuser (her husband). She is an EU National and has recently gained British Citizenship. Participant 6 describes being physically comforted and embraced by colleagues and expresses the love she feels for the children she supports. For Participant 6, work represents an opportunity to both give and receive love and she came to be known as Antonia (meaning: worthy of love)

ANTONIA

And I don't have my own [children]. So it's just probably even more important for me to see them and just show them the love that I have for them and teach them the things that they need.

4.8.1 Antonia's story

I have some lovely cards from the parents and from my co-workers. [reading] "Thank you for always being so loving and caring... You are one in a million..". They've written lovely things about my hugs, about my smile, about how they like being with me... It's just lovely. [reading] "Use your smile to change the world, but don't let the world change your smile". [reading] "Thank you for your kind spirit and loving ear - I'm so glad we are a team". When I look at those cards I feel like I am appreciated and loved and that somebody is happy to have me in their life. It's just completely different to being at home. I don't really feel appreciated at home. So, I just try to forget about it and live my life concentrating on the good things that I can do. I would love to have a child, but not with someone like him. When I think about it I get very upset, but then I think about all the wonderful children that I have around me, and that I am in a position to help them grow and develop and learn. I am so happy to have the ability to influence them and help them with all their little problems - to help bring them up as well. Work is definitely a respite from home. There are times when things are peaceful at home, but work feels more like my home.

When I am at home I often have to suppress my feelings, I can't express myself as I would like to. So, what I've learned recently is just to speak in my native language, which my husband does not understand. It doesn't mean things are sorted out, but at least I can get things off my chest and avoid an argument. Most of the time I leave home at home, but there have been times when things are really bad when it has influenced my work. There was a point a few years ago when things were really bad and I was very tearful at work. I had been working there for years and my co-workers knew a little bit about what was happening. They were really worried about me and told my team leader. The next day when I was a little bit calmer she shared her sister's experience. Her sister had been through something similar and she helped her sister to leave the relationship. The sister got divorced and sometime afterwards she got married to a wonderful man and has got a beautiful family. I think she wanted me to know that there is a way out. I still remember that. So that was 2018. That was about the time I started getting support from the Charity. It was amazing to get that counselling and support and understanding. Because I was blaming myself so much for all of it, and it was just so lovely to find a listening ear and see things from a different perspective. It was a really difficult time and all the stress and sleepless nights led to me being admitted to a psychiatric hospital for three weeks. Everyone at work was so full of understanding. That's when I got some of the lovely cards. The head was incredibly supportive and we worked out a phased return to work and before long things at work were back to normal.

I got some practical support from work, but to be honest it was the emotional support that was the most important. The fact that my co-workers were so understanding, knowing that they still wanted to talk to me was the most important thing. They weren't judgmental or opinionated. They didn't look at me as if I was mad or anything like that. Because it sometimes feels like it's just my word against his. My friends were amazing too and it was nice to feel like they could back up my story.

My head teacher knew about it as well. She suggested that I go back to the Charity and maybe take part in some other courses or something, but because they are during school time, I don't want to do that. I don't want to put my workplace under any more pressure - it always puts more pressure on other colleagues when somebody is missing and I just wouldn't want to do that again. They said whatever decision I made they were going to support me and they'd be on my side. I'm just so grateful for that because it just means so much. It means that I can still work there, be there and carry on doing what I love. Two of my co-workers told me they had been in relationships like mine in the past and one still is. I know they wouldn't tell anyone, but it's just important to feel their friendship and their support. No one else at work knows.

I definitely feel safer at school. I know that nobody's going to do me any harm on purpose. I wouldn't say that my husband is hurting me on purpose, but he just can't control yourself, and at school people just know the boundaries and how to behave. He is pretty supportive of me going to work, although he doesn't understand why I stay after work so long though. I always want to stay until everything is done – it's just the way I am. Sometimes – if there's something special going on at school there are extra things to be done at the end of the school day, some of my co-workers friends and family come in to help, but I would never ask him to come in. He had a conversation with my head teacher on the phone last year. My head teacher wanted to invite him in for a cup of tea and have a chat with her. But I didn't want that to happen – I don't want him there.

Working with children feels like important work to me. Children are so little, they think in different ways, they feel in different ways. It's important to find their level so they can understand. I'm learn so much from them every day. I remember my own teachers and how important they were for me, and it makes me feel like I would like to be the same if I can. I don't feel like I have a big heart. I don't feel that I am amazing or wonderful. I don't feel all those things that I hear in those cards about myself, but it's lovely to read them and to see that other people may feel and think like that. When I come home, I still think about work. I still remember what was going on. I still analyse what was going on. I still read emails or do training and prepare other things that have to be done, so that means that I have less time for my husband, which makes him feel like work is number one and that I don't care about him. And the thing is, my work is more important than him actually, but I try not to feel guilty about it. Maybe he's jealous because I love my job so much. Sometimes he says, "Why don't you stay at school? Why don't you just live there and sleep there? You don't have to come home because you feel happier there than at home anyway." , but I just try not to respond to it.

I am learning now that it's important for me to feel that I can manage on my own; and feel strong as a woman, as a person. That's what I'm trying to do. Work has given me some independence. I can buy my own cosmetics and things that I need and manage my phone or whatever else I need to buy or save for. I have some of my own money that I've earned myself. Work has allowed me to gain British Citizenship independent of my husband, I paid for it

myself and used my work history rather than applying as the wife of a citizen. And now it's all done. My husband was angry that I didn't ask his permission. He doesn't feel like it's necessary because he's a British citizen – so I don't need to be, He wanted to have a big argument about it, but I just told myself not to get upset. He's known for years that I wanted to do it and I'm really lucky that I could. I needed to have a certain number of years to prove it – to be able to show continuous employment without any gaps. So that was actually much more important than the money side. I don't earn enough to be fully self-sufficient. I don't have a car and I can't do some of the things I wish I could, but at least I have a stable job with a steady income that I love; and can be independent in my own little way. I've been here more than 10 years now and I'd like to stay here longer term. I've chosen England as my home. I appreciate British values and I sort of feel half British by this point! I do worry a bit about the future though. What will my life look like if I leave him? Living with strangers. It's just a shame I can't actually live at school

I would love employers to take an interest in domestic abuse and try to understand what they could do for women, and what they could do to support women in similar situations. There are so many of us. At my own school, I know one, two, three women who are or were in a similar situation, and some women may not be talking about it at all. I'd like employers to know how much it means to us and how much they can influence things that might help to make things better for women.

Of all the support I received, it was the care and the concern and simply wanting me to still be there that was the most important part I think. I know there is stigma around domestic abuse, I never felt it from my co-workers, but I know it's there and I think it's a reason why some women don't tell their co-workers. If we could change that, that would be a great thing. I didn't talk about it at work for years, it was five years before I told anyone. It's so difficult to talk about, it's so personal, so private; and of course, you worry about how people might react and that it might change things at work and end up making everything worse. You need to trust the people you are talking to as well. I confided in my co-workers and when things really escalated they disclosed some of it to my team-leader. But I understand why women don't share. We want to be strong. We want to be brave.

At the beginning I didn't recognise it. I just thought that I was in a difficult relationship, that it was just a difficult marriage. I thought it was my fault, that I was doing something wrong and I kept asking myself – “ What can I do to make it better? What do I need to change?”. I did that for a long time until I realised that maybe I am not always the one that is wrong. Maybe things could be different at home. This probably sounds mad, but it took me years to realise, but one day it dawned on me. Now – after support from the charity – I feel more able to understand what was going on, and I hope that that understanding is the first step to moving on with my life.

4.9 PARTICIPANT 7 – VIVIENNE

Participant 7 works in project management role and has a background in pharmacology. She was in a relationship with her abuser for more than 30 years, having met him when she was very young. Participant 7 regularly administered carefully measure doses of sedatives combined with alcohol to induce unconsciousness and retrograde amnesia (sometimes sleeping for entire weekends). In her own words “the professional saved the woman” - knowing that she was required to be mentally alert for work and able to drive safely prevented her from overdosing and she feels very strongly that work prevented her from spiralling out of control and ultimately saved her life. Participant 7 came to be known as Vivienne (meaning: alive, full of life)

VIVIENNE

I know it. It [not working] would have been the beginning of proper drinking regularly. I was, I was slowly losing hold on what had kept me afloat for so many years. Namely the job. [Said while describing a period between jobs]

4.9.1 Vivienne’s story

I work in the same industry as my ex, so the mask I wear at work, I will have to wear forever. We met at school. So, for me - my whole career, my whole professional life is really closely intertwined with the relationship itself. My last two or three contracts are my first experiences of work while I've been alone. I'm doing the job and making choices on my own for the first ever time, and it's a bit scary. It's really, really exciting, but there are times when I'm thinking, oh my God, what if I get it wrong? It's actually probably more scary than liberating at the moment.

I've actually had a relatively successful career despite my personal situation. I've tended to rely a lot on mentors, as I still feel quite unsure making decisions by myself. He used to tell me I was only ever going to be a failure, and it is really hard to shake that. So that's why I need the mentoring, I need that reassurance. Work was definitely positive. I never wanted to talk about what was going on at home when I was at work. Work was good because I was extremely good at not talking about personal stuff at work. I was great at chatting, but always in control of what I let slip. If you asked my co-workers, they'd tell you I was very chatty, without realising they don't know the first thing about me. That compartmentalisation thing - I do it by myself, I do it instinctively, I don't actually need to be consciously aware of it. It's exactly the same as when I was a kid. It might have been Hell at the weekend... Monday would come, and I would go into school as if everything was fine.

I started using medication to cope when I was quite young. I have a background in pharmacology, I know how much to take to be safe, and how much to take to provoke retrograde amnesia. I was careful. I knew how much to take to make sure I would be OK on Monday, safe to drive. It was extreme, and I'm sure – from a psychological perspective – not very healthy, but it got me through it.

The first time I ever talked about it was in a group session organised by the Charity. First off, it was hearing the others that gave me the strength. It gave me the awareness of what was happening to me. And secondly, it was the first time I recognised it for what it was, I accepted for the first time in more than thirty years that it was never going to get better. And those two things were what I needed to be able to walk away. I had done so much counselling - I

kept coming back to, "It's my fault. What can I do not to trigger his anger?". I needed that realisation that he was the one with issues. I already knew that it had to change. I knew I would die if it stayed. So, three weeks in – after 30 years of denial – I left.

What happened to me feels completely surreal. There are basically two kinds of people, those who get it and those who don't. Normal people - people who have no experience of abuse – just cannot grasp it. They think you are completely mad, that you are making up stories, that it can't be that bad, and they distance themselves immediately. People who understand – who have been there – well, you just get a completely different reaction. As soon as I said anything at work I regretted it. I'm still in contact with those people, and I'm just pretending it didn't happen – that I didn't say anything, that they don't know – and I wish they would do the same. I'm trying not to feel ashamed. I am free of that relationship and back to normality again, and I want them to see me that way. I have to leave the shame behind, and it's a conscious effort. I have to consciously block the memories and just pretend it didn't happen. I want them to see me as a normal colleague.

I work with scientists so I have this intellectual, rational persona at work. I am 100 percent true to my professional persona when I'm at work. Because of the nature of the work, it's very intellectual, very, cognitive, very brain orientated - not just for me, for all of us. So, it's relatively easy to keep my personal life out of work, and I have some rules that help as well – like, I don't drink alcohol at work functions. I'm extremely good at controlling the information that people have about me, but I don't see that as not being authentic. I can build rapport with co-workers really easily and I don't feel any less authentic for not telling them. I think when you suffer severe trauma, you can't share it. Even my friends, I have some friends who love me - I know they love me – but they just can't take it. It's too much for them. When you start telling them a bit you can feel them recoiling, thinking; "That is proper shit." - excuse, my language... I realise that my own friends find it too heavy, let alone someone I meet at the coffee machine at work

Enabling women to work is a lifesaver. If you go into a refuge you cannot work. I cannot tell you the despair I felt when I was told that. My career is what kept me going through all of it; through the relationship and the divorce – it's why I survived. He would say, you're stupid, you're this, you're that, you're not capable; and work would give me an alternative view of myself. Towards the end of the relationship, he discouraged me from looking for work. During the 18 months prior to my leaving, I hadn't been working and without work I could feel myself slowly losing hold on what had kept me afloat for so many years. I was a total mess, and it was the professional that got out of that house. That's who left. The pharmacist left. I know that if I hadn't left it would have been the beginning of proper drinking regularly. The professional saved the woman, the woman was a disaster. When I walked out, I didn't exist. I was a shell of a person.

I identify so much with who I am professionally. When my family life was total mayhem, I was still that girl at school who was doing well, who was a good friend; and that identity has got me through it. Work means you can earn therefore you can get out. It also meant I never resorted to drinking because the minute, I found myself reaching for a drink on one of those Saturdays I would think, "Come on, you know you've got a busy week next week." Week in, week out it was that professional persona dragging me back out to face the outside world. My health has been protected by the need to maintain my ability to perform professionally, it's a really virtuous circle. Working would help me cope and then give me finances and stuff

to get out and to survive. But at the same time, I would make some decisions in order to protect my professional persona.

I'm still not sure who I am. Putting on the work clothes and saying, that I'm a pharmacist, or a project manager is actually the best way for me to introduce myself. It's a very authentic way to introduce myself, maybe not a very personal one, but it's still authentic. I'm authentic in my professional persona. And I think we have to be careful not to confuse depth and authenticity. You don't have to show your inner self. I don't tell people about how I feel when I pray and in the same way, I don't need to discuss all my trauma to still be authentic in terms of my values.

Women need practical help, like an employer being able to release a salary in advance to help someone to get temporary accommodation, or to feed their kids. Maybe someone might need support with emergency childcare. Maybe putting the employee immediately on a kind of compassionate program so that if they don't turn up at work one morning, there's an understanding of why that might be. But to start to think that you can ask questions, give advice on the actual nature of the abuse or the psychological damage or anything like that... Anyone who isn't a professional is kidding themselves and could end up giving the wrong advice and hurting someone. Basic mental health first aid is useful and a really good idea, but you need to know your limitations. If a First Aider found themselves at the scene of an accident, they might know how to do CPR but they're not going to be able to save someone who is bleeding to death; they are by no means equivalent to a paramedic let alone a doctor. They need to call 999, pass on any information they have and wait for the ambulance. Mental Health First Aiders should be exactly the same.

If you were to improve the workplace culture in terms of mental health generally, you would directly improve things for women in abusive situations, because often we do have mental health issues on top, or as a result of the abuse. Workplaces have been so bad with regard to mental health - stigmatising people who acknowledge having mental health issues and things like that, so I think there's a wider discussion around work and mental health that would answer some of the needs of those experiencing abuse. That's the feeling I have, and I think now is the time. Society is ready to talk mental health and there's been a lot of talk about abuse in lockdown. I think now's the time to start talking about it. Five, ten years ago that wasn't the case. The change in perception, understanding, awareness. Now is a good time.

4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the stories of the seven women who participated in the research; Mitra, Nicole, Judith, Fran, Mona, Antonia and Vivienne. Their stories were presented by means of a crafted narrative using Crowther *et al.*'s (2017) methodology, as described in Chapter 3.

The women's accounts were anonymised to preserve their privacy and safety and each woman's account was assigned a name; attributed to the women on the basis of the central theme which work seemed to represent for each of them. For Mitra and Antonia work was primarily about relationships; in Mitra's case friendship and support and in Antonia's case affection and the ability to give and receive love. For Nicole, work was entangled with ideas of personal and professional success, for Judith work provided validation and reassurance. Fran viewed work as freedom and a return to her old self, Vivienne as something which kept her alive during her darkest times. For Mona, work represented loneliness and disconnection.

Though the women's experiences were all different, a number of shared themes arose from analysis and interpretation of the stories. These themes are explored in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Having presented the women's stories of their experiences of work and workplace disclosure, this chapter discusses the shared themes identified through detailed analysis of the women's narratives. As such, the following sections draw on existing literature as well as personal insights and forestructures, to illuminate the women's accounts of work. The chapter begins by reviewing the key shared themes identified during analysis before discussing them in turn and also takes the opportunity to set the women's experiences against the backdrop of self-determination theory – the theoretical lens used to contextualise the research. The chapter continues by reflecting on the women's experiences of work and disclosure in the context of the current prevalent support model.

5.2 SHARED THEMES

Detailed analysis of the participants experiences via interpretative phenomenological analysis identified the following themes:

- The mask of the survivor
- Multiple roles
- Workplace interactions
- Personal Autonomy
- Experiences of disclosure and support
- The journey to survivorhood

Following discussion of the first 4 themes, section 5.8 considers the women's experiences in terms of a journey to survivorhood, identifying IP Abuse as a liminal experience. The women's experiences of work and disclosure are reviewed in section 5.9 in the context of the theoretical lens selected for this research by considering them in terms of the three needs (of autonomy, belongingness and competence) identified by SDT. Following this, the women's experiences are considered in the light of the current prevalent support model in section 5.10.

5.3 THE MASK OF THE SURVIVOR

Shame, blame, judgement

When describing their ability to separate their home and work life, the women used the metaphor of a mask; which they put on at work and take off at home – thus concealing their identity as a survivor. The women described the shame they felt in terms of their experiences of abuse and described feeling foolish or embarrassed with regard to their situation. Being a survivor of abuse was described by the women as completely incompatible with professionalism and in particular with career progression, responsibility and seniority. For this reason, the women felt it necessary to hide their identity as a survivor and create a work persona which they perceived as compatible with a professional working environment.

JUDITH

The naivety, the shame, the embarrassment...

NICOLE

I was humiliated I think. I felt very, very unprofessional

And I think as you become more senior... it's even more [un]acceptable...

In Quinn *et al.*'s 2014 investigation of CSI (identities associated with social devaluation) they identified that the desire to disclose one's stigmatised identity is compromised by the existence of both anticipated and internalised stigma. For the women, both anticipated and internalised stigma played a huge role in their workplace interactions and experiences, and fear of being unmasked led the women to adopt a clearly delineated workplace identity and compromised their ability to connect on a personal level with co-workers.

JUDITH

I didn't want to make friendships with people

MONA

... I didn't try to get too friendly

NICOLE

I'm like friends and family didn't know. I certainly didn't want work knowing!

Both Fran and Vivienne frequently returned to the concept of the mask. In their case, workplace identity is further complicated by the fact that they work in the same industry and move in the same circles as their abusers. Fran likened the pain of hearing a mutual client talking positively about her abuser to being stabbed and as Vivienne puts it, given that she may share clients or co-workers with her husband through her career - the mask she wears, she will have to wear forever. This firmly held belief that they must not disclose their experiences in a client context, stems in part from the fear described by Nicole – and echoed by Judith - that survivors of abuse are not perceived as responsible, but also comes from a fear of not being believed.

In Fran's case, the public perception of her husband as a gentle, caring father working in an environment associated with calmness and self-awareness totally contradicted both her experience of living with her abuser and the perception of what a person who might commit violent acts looks like. In search of a description of the ideal perpetrator, Stolk (2018) identified that an ideal perpetrator should appear aggressive and somehow immoral – completely at odds with a family-oriented yoga teacher. While talking about her own mask, Fran also introduced the idea of the mask of the abuser.

FRAN

...there's that amazing mask that he puts on in public, which is one of reasonableness, of equanimity of being calm and gentle and kind and, of course, thinking about his children first...

The women's abusers also wore a mask and hid their true feelings and behaviours from those around them, creating a clear distinction between behaviour they exhibit in their home and work domains, causing Vivienne to surmise that for every abused woman there is an abuser

who is somebody's friend or co-worker, wearing a mask that prevents others from recognising them. In Enander's (2011) exploration of women's emotion work in relation to leaving abusive relationships, she uses the metaphor of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde to describe the relationship between the private and public face of an abuser. The public face – and the one that was initially displayed at the beginning of the relationship – is Dr Jekyll, described by the participants in Enander's study as "Kind, warm, considerate, charming, humorous, empathic and exciting" (p36), but the private face is very much that of Mr Hyde.

The kind, compassionate Dr Jekyll does not fit the mould of a perpetrator of violent crime, who is expected to be a strong, aggressive individual with no moral compass. And just as there are expectations of how a perpetrator should seem (Stolk, 2018), equally there are societally expected traits that the ideal victim would possess (Bosma *et al.*, 2018). Drawing on Christie's description of the ideal victim (1986), Bosma *et al.* described the challenges faced by strong, successful women who do not fit societal expectations of a victim; a conclusion supported by Lloyd and Ramon's findings (2017) on the existence of victim stereotypes. Victims are expected to be weak, powerless and somehow less competent than their abuser if they are to elicit sympathy and be believed. Women who are educated, capable, or able to support themselves financially do not make good victims and tend to be viewed as lacking in credibility. This was exactly Nicole's experience. The compartmentalisation that had been a valued coping mechanisms during her abuse became her undoing in court proceedings, where she was painted as unreliable. How could such a strong, capable, confident woman – a CFO – be a victim of abuse?

NICOLE

I think it was it was a great coping mechanism. It really helped. It got me through a lot of stuff. But in court, it was used to undermine everything and to tell me basically that I fabricated everything...it's how they destroy you in court.

Where the two parties are a charming man and a successful woman, a situation arises where the male abuser does not appear to fit the description of the ideal perpetrator, and the female survivor does not seem to be an ideal victim. Under such circumstances how is a woman to be believed? A number of writers have identified that professionals - as well as members of the public - are susceptible to the acceptance of myths associated with abuse survivors; and doctors (Persson *et al.*, 2018), social workers (Fleckinger, 2020), counselling professionals (Thapar- Björkert and Morgan, 2010) and police officers (DeJong *et al.*, 2008) have all been identified as judging and blaming survivors. Where even professionals and those who have chosen to work in caring roles hold these beliefs, it follows that such ideas are prevalent among co-workers and line managers and (as reported by Reich *et al.* (2015)) have been internalised by the women themselves. These negative beliefs about IP abuse survivors are further compounded by the existence of the just world hypothesis (Lerner, 1980). If one is to continue to believe that the world is fair, one must blame the victim.

5.3.1 Reflection – Media portrayal of abusers

Domestic homicide is widely portrayed in the media as a tragedy where a previously blameless/mild mannered man has committed a single act which is subsequently

explained away as a crime of passion/a moment of insanity/the result of drug or alcohol abuse/the result of a mental health condition or more recently the result of stress relating to COVID 19; with both parties being portrayed as victims of tragic circumstances. This is exactly the kind of coverage which followed my mum's death. To the outside world, "...they were a very loving, happy couple." (Daily Mail, 2014). She appeared confident and forthright and very much in control – absolutely not a classic victim. Her murder was reported as a double tragedy where a "...confused and bewildered..." "Dementia sufferer..." (Daily Mail, 2014) was left wondering what had happened to his wife. Compounded by only selective excerpts of Victim Impact Statements being read in court which are then reported even more selectively and out of context, this leads to a situation where the information made available to the general public with regard to Domestic Homicide (and domestic abuse more generally) is potentially skewed in the perpetrator's favour and does not accurately reflect the victim's experience or that of their family. I currently feel that by writing an honest account of my experience of this research I am creating the accurate "official" reflection of my experience that is currently missing, and hope that by communicating the women's experiences I can somehow – in some small way – make things right for them in this regard.

5.3.2 Shame and the looking glass self

Ashforth *et al.* (2008) define identity as "a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question "who am I?" (p327). The women expressed a sense of lost identity in relation to the abuse. Mitra and Mona described themselves as being different people during the abuse, Nicole and Judith described not knowing who they were and Fran expressed the joy of feeling like her "old self" when she resumed teaching. In answer to the question of self-expression in the workplace, the women questioned how it was possible to "be yourself" at work under such circumstances, and despite the huge strides that they have made in terms of their abuse journeys, Vivienne and Nicole are still very much in the process of re-establishing their identities.

JUDITH

I was very lost. I didn't know who I was... I didn't know what I stood for...

VIVIENNE

I'm still not sure who I am

NICOLE

I'm quite lost at the moment

With such a sense of lost identity, the expression of workplace identity then becomes not so much a case of "who am I?", but "who do I want to be?" or perhaps "who do I want other people to think I am?". This concept of identity as a reflection of how the women wanted others to see them, rather than how they actually saw themselves has much in common with Cooley's description of the looking glass self. Cooley (1902, p207) describes us as "living in the minds of others", and the women's discussion of their workplace identities was heavily influenced by how they feared they might be perceived in contrast to how they wanted to be

perceived – or more accurately how they did not want to be perceived - by their co-workers. At work the women described a sense of feeling valued, trusted and worthwhile – in stark contrast to their experience at home of feeling demeaned and degraded.

JUDITH

I felt like work was a place where I was valued. I felt like I. All the good things about me, I'm a responsible person, I'm trustworthy, I'm reliable, I'm committed... Those things were noticed at work, so they validated me as a person

NICOLE

I was a success at work and I was a success at home. So that was kind of the image that I had at work

Being seen by others in this way allowed the women to see themselves through their colleagues' eyes and the positive emotions elicited by this altered perception of themselves provided a buffer to protect to a degree from the negative emotions the women experienced outside the workplace. This reflection of themselves as successful, professional women was a stark contrast to the sense of shame the women actually felt in relation to the abuse. Judith expressed her fear of being a source of gossip at work and her embarrassment when (after an altercation with her husband) her manager found out what “kind of man” she was married to. Vivienne expressed her need “to leave the shame behind”.

VIVIENNE

...you have to leave the shame behind. I have to really... it's a conscious effort. I have to consciously block the memories and...just pretend it didn't happen.

The women's overwhelming sense of shame is reflected in discourse relating to established ideas regarding how both domestic abuse and survivors of abuse are perceived, with Peters (2008) identifying a number of Domestic Violence Myths which are widely held. Peters identified that it is widely believed that; women bring abuse on themselves as a result of unappealing personality traits or behaviour, that there is always a reason (or excuse) for the perpetrator's behaviour and that domestic abuse is not serious or widespread. Such beliefs are responsible for the stigma associated with abuse (Yamawaki *et al.*, 2012) and – in common with a number of other identities – survivors of IP Abuse often choose to hide their identity as survivors in an effort to protect themselves from the negative repercussions associated with disclosure.

In line with Quinn *et al.*'s findings, the women exhibited high levels of both anticipated and internalised stigma. In terms of internalised stigma, there was a shared belief that the women themselves were – in line with Peter's abuse myths - to blame for the abuse they experienced; with Judith and Vivienne going as far as seeking Anger Management therapy in an effort to alter what they perceived as their triggering behaviour. Such reactions to abuse are common, with Enander (2011) commenting on the frequency with which women experiencing abuse seek professional help – not to ask how to leave the relationship but instead – to seek advice on how to console a male partner and make him happier and more comfortable in the relationship. Antonia also talked about blaming herself for the abuse, and Judith expressed

shame and embarrassment at starting a relationship with the perpetrator in the first place, as if in beginning a relationship with her abuser she was to blame for the fact that he abused her; despite him not exhibiting such behaviour in the early stages of the relationship.

In addition to their internalised stigma and self-blame, anticipated stigma also prevented the women from disclosing. Nicole described the incompatibility of abuse and career advancement believing that disclosure would harm her career prospects.

NICOLE

I think [it's] just the humiliation, to be honest with you, of it happening and [of] people knowing because you can't be a boss who's being beaten up - it just doesn't work. Like, you know, it's degrading and it's demoralising. And I found it hard to believe that people could take me seriously...

Judith feared gossip, Antonia expressed the joy and relief she felt at being able to keep her job after disclosure. Mona chose not to disclose out of fear of losing her job and Vivienne talked of the regret she felt on disclosing, desperately wishing that she could take back her disclosure so that her co-workers would think she was “normal”.

In Quinn *et al.*'s research, not all groups felt the same sense of shame associated with their stigmatised identity and exhibited differing attitude towards others being aware of their identity. For individuals in the group recovering from substance abuse, disclosure and outness was seen as helpful and desirable, whereas for IP abuse survivors, this was not the case. Quinn surmised that this difference was in line with the current mode of treatment for addiction – the 12 steps – (AA, 2022) where disclosure and openness is a valued part of recovery and the stigmatised identity itself is reframed as a disease rather than a character flaw. Such a response is in stark contrast to the blame and shame associated with IP abuse. The women blamed themselves as well as experiencing blame and shame at the hands of co-workers. Judith also experienced vicarious shame, when as a result of a disclosure of abuse from her boss, she was asked to leave her job. Her relationship with blame and shame is now somewhat different however, she no longer feels ashamed of her experiences and now attributes blame to her husband for the loss of three jobs.

5.3.3 Reflection – shared experiences

As I progressed through the interviews, and on reflection afterwards, I realised I shared many experiences with the women as a child and young person growing up with the effects of IP Abuse (some of which have extended into adulthood); and could in many cases apply the same themes to my own experiences and reflections. I have felt some of the shame the women described – particularly after my mum died – fearing that people would judge me, thinking I came from a bad family. I have had bad experiences – and have sometimes regretted – disclosure and share Nicole and Judith's desire to use my experiences to help other women living with the effects of IP Abuse

5.4 MULTIPLE ROLES

When describing the diverse roles they play in their lives, the women described themselves as having three distinct identities – two associated with the home domain; that of a woman and a mother; and their professional identity expressed in the domain of work. The women

worked hard to protect their professional identity by means of their workplace mask, believing that being a survivor of abuse was incompatible with professionalism and credibility.

The women described the challenge of balancing the needs and demands of these three distinct roles noting that where the roles conflict, regardless of the high value associated with the work identity it was the role of mother that took precedence. For Mitra, Fran and Nicole, protecting their children from the complexities of an abusive relationship forced a change. For Mitra and Nicole, this meant leaving their roles and in Fran's case this was the trigger for seeking help to leave the relationship. Mitra left work to focus on her child who was struggling as a result of the situation at home and Fran articulated the additional fear that comes with having a child while in an abusive relationship; fears for the child's personal safety but also the risk that a child becomes another source of opportunities for manipulation via the threat of calls to police or social services in Mitra and Nicole's case, cutting off access to child support in Fran's case and resurrecting long resolved child access issues in Judith's case.

NICOLE

Things got very, very hard at work when I had a kid and was managing the domestic abuse. ... It rocked the balance too much, I think. And that's where I think I really started to struggle with my mental health... it was just too much...

Suddenly, people can do things to you because you have a child [that] they couldn't before

Judith, Mitra and Mona reported frequent interruptions during the working day and impromptu visits at work from the abuser. Vivienne's husband placed very specific restrictions on where she was allowed to work. And towards the end of their relationship discouraged her from looking for work. Preventing women from accessing work opportunities or attending work has been identified by (Swanberg *et al.*, 2007) as a commonly used abuse tactic, as has disturbing women via visits, phone calls and persistent messaging (Showalter, 2016). The issue of abusers interfering with women's ability to access and maintain employment is so well established as a tactic of abuse that it has led to the creation of the Work/School abuse scale (W/SAS – Riger *et al.*, 2000) specifically designed to measure the effects of abusers on women's attempts to continue working/studying. Given the potential for workplaces to provide respite and sanctuary to victims of abuse (Rothman *et al.*, 2007) it is perhaps not surprising that some abusers might wish to encroach on what would otherwise be a safe space.

Antonia does not have children of her own, but has great affection for the children she supports at work. Although she would love to be a mother, she does not want to have children with her abuser, and she feels the absence of the role of mother very keenly.

ANTONIA

[Talking about the children she supports in her role] And I don't have my own. So it's just probably even more important for me to see them and just show them the love that I have for them and teach them the things that they need.

Vivienne's talked extensively about the distinction between her three roles - as a woman, a mother and a professional; viewing these roles as very distinct from each other. In order to cope with the abuse she was experiencing at home, Vivienne regularly administered carefully measure doses of sedatives combined with alcohol to induce unconsciousness and retrograde amnesia (sometimes sleeping for entire weekends). In her own words "the professional saved the woman" - knowing that she was required to be mentally alert for work and able to drive safely prevented Vivienne from overdosing and Vivienne feels very strongly that work prevented her from spiralling out of control and ultimately saved her life.

VIVIENNE

...I knew that whatever had happened on a Saturday afternoon... you know, I knew I could drive. You know, I knew exactly what was safe [based on her pharmacological knowledge]... Once I had recovered from the emotional trauma [and the medication], I was able to assess and say - no I'm absolutely fine... [I'm]... safe.

...I often say; the mother and the professional saved the woman. The woman was a disaster. When I walked out, I didn't exist - I was a shell of a person. But they were two personas that were very strong, that he could hardly touch. The mother. He scared the mother. But he never really, he never made me lose my sense of who I am as a mother. He tried very hard, but he couldn't get there. And as a professional, he couldn't get there either... He couldn't take that away from me... my personality at work is so well defined. It actually kept me a sense of self

5.4.1 Professional identity

The women's personal lives were described in terms of feeling unappreciated, repressed, controlled, demoralised, devalued and dehumanised. The women were left in no doubt as to how their abusers saw them, being regularly verbally as well as physically and psychologically abused, and the women expressed a corresponding sense of shame and a desire to keep this part of their life – and their identity as a victim of abuse - hidden from their co-workers.

JUDITH

I wasn't a woman. I was just a piece of meat... I wasn't my own being... [I've gone] from feeling like scum of the earth and like a dog to now actually, I can actually officially say that I'm a woman...

FRAN

[Remembering her relationship] he just beats the shit out of me. He... just swears at me all the time. He manipulates me all the time. He says that I'm ugly and fat, and I've got no friends and nobody loves me or my family hate me all the time...

At work, the women were able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge and in contrast to a personal life devoid of choices or personal control, work represented a space to display their competence and exert control over their environment, establishing them as independent agents making a valid contribution to their work environment. In terms of work, the women described themselves variously as "good colleagues" (Vivienne), "grafters" (Judith) and "successful" (Nicole) and described feeling proud of their work achievements and career

advancement, a far cry from the identity associated with their home environment. It was Vivienne who explicitly articulated the ability of co-workers to reflect back an alternate identity, though all the women (with the exception of Mona) described the stark differences between how the women felt at home in contrast to their workplace.

VIVIENNE

it's a sense of self, a sense of identity and... as I said, because I'm so dependent on the image that people give back to me, he would say, you're stupid, your this, you're that you're not capable; and work would give me another image. And somehow that was balancing enough...

At work the women were able to see themselves through their colleagues eyes and – in line with Cooley's looking glass self (Cooley, 1902) - feel the corresponding pride associated with this alternative self-image.

Work that provides a sense of legacy, transcendence or personal impact is an important tool in the quest to offset the impact of living in a home devoid of personal autonomy and control. For Nicole the issue of autonomy over others was important and she had conflicting feelings about this.

NICOLE

I was a hugely successful in sales and I hate sales... I just can't stand it. I realised that I can manipulate people to get them to buy things if I want to. And I hate that aspect of myself. ...Sometimes like, I hear [myself saying] that though and I think, I don't think that's me speaking - that's my husband speaking even when I said that out loud. So there are certain parts because we were together for such a long time, they're still very intertwined into my being

Nicole talked passionately about the ability to support others in their career and took great – vicarious – pleasure in seeing others succeed. Nicole however did not view this as having power, which she very much associated with coercion (as she had experienced in her relationship). She was very uncomfortable with the idea that she had power at work, and despite having a talent for sales was extremely reluctant to engage in sales based activities as she identified the persuasive nature of sales as a form of manipulation. In common with many survivors of complex PTSD (Pinciotti *et al.*, 2022) Nicole feared that she would exhibit the same behaviours as her abuser and she was concerned about any activity (such as persuasion), or label (such as powerful) that could be interpreted as using the same tactics as her abuser used and feared that she might be able to behave in a way that relied on tactics that had been used against her. Although Nicole enjoyed the autonomy associated with large projects and supporting the careers of others, she was not able to fully enjoy the success and autonomy her hard work could have brought her as a result of these fears.

5.4.2 Identity and Authenticity

Hewlin *et al.* (2020) describe the inextricable link between identity and authenticity. The assumption of such a clear relationship however becomes problematic when describing the women's relationship to identity; with Mona expressing exactly this link, but other women (notably Vivienne) rejecting this. For Mona, the decision to disclose in a role that she

particularly enjoyed was driven by a need to feel honest and authentic. Describing herself as an honest person, Mona felt dishonest withholding this part of herself from her co-workers and made the decision to disclose at work.

MONA

...if it was a particularly bad time at home, I would dread going to work because it was the whole. Oh, how are you? How was your weekend kind of thing? And it was kind of like, you can't be honest. I don't like not being truthful, so I'd say - It was it was fine. It was good. But it wasn't actually.

Mona was the only participant who held the view that authenticity and non-disclosure were incompatible. Vivienne very clearly articulated a sense of being authentic within her work persona without feeling the need to disclose – but rather choosing not to disclose in order to maintain that persona. In doing so, Vivienne distinguished between depth and authenticity:

VIVIENNE

I'm authentic in my professional persona. And I think we have to be careful not to confuse depth and authenticity. You don't have to show your inner self...I don't tell people about how I feel when I pray...because that's a very personal thing. And [in] the same way, I don't need to discuss all my trauma to still be authentic in terms of my values...

For the other women, the need for separation and compartmentalisation also overrode any need to share their experiences in terms of feeling authentic at work. The sense of feeling like a different person at work was shared among the women, with disclosure seen as a risk to their carefully constructed work-life boundary.

5.4.3 Reflection – authenticity

Discussion with the women in relation to disclosure and authenticity, gave me pause for reflection on my own sense of authenticity in this context. Initially, during the interview, I doubted Vivienne's account and felt she might not be being honest, struggling to understand how a relationship that glossed over such an important part of her life could be described as authentic. I identified much more with Mona's descriptions of her work relationships, where she felt dishonest at not being open with her co-workers. After the interview however, I reflected on a conversation I had with a friend following my mum's death. During that conversation my friend said, "I always assumed your parents were divorced because you've never mentioned your dad." Reflecting on this, I realised that within a relationship that I felt to be authentic I had never even mentioned my dad, let alone discussed anything that had happened at home. In this instance – and on further reflection – in most of my other relationships - I had also experienced authenticity, though not necessarily depth.

Now – following my mum's death – I identify much more with Mona's approach. If I'm not honest (and not talking about my mum and her death feels dishonest), I feel like I am deceiving people. Whenever I feel I'm becoming close to someone I feel the need to tell them (although this does not happen often). In common with Vivienne, I had also been rigidly, and successfully compartmentalising up to the point where my mum died,

which led me to ask myself why I would now actively reject a mechanism that I had been implementing very successfully, and completely subconsciously for 42 years? Perhaps now that the information surrounding my mum's death is in the public domain and easily accessed via a simple Google Search, I no longer feel obliged to conceal this part of myself.

5.5 WORKPLACE INTERACTIONS

5.5.1 Interactions with co-workers

Work organisations are collections of people and involve human interaction. That interaction can be transactional in nature or workplaces can be places where friendships are formed and genuine interactions take place (Rumens, 2016); and workplace interactions can be experienced as a necessary function of the working day or as something more important. For women living with the effects of IP abuse, the social aspect of work has the potential to impact women in a variety of ways. Work interactions serve to consolidate workplace identity (identified as a valuable coping mechanism and source of self-esteem (Beecham, 2009; Rothman *et al.*, 2007)); interactions can also provide a source of comfort and compensate for elements lacking in one's personal relationship and enhance personal wellbeing and connection.

Some women experienced their workplace interactions on a purely transactional level and consciously resisted entering into workplace friendships, opting instead to be friendly but maintain a professional distance. This response maintains the separation between the home and work identity and works with the concept of Cooley's looking glass, by controlling the information that co-workers have with regard to the woman's personal life and therefore the image that a woman imagines their co-worker has of them (and thus reduces the possibility of shame associated with imagined co-worker perceptions). Such an approach to workplace interactions is driven by the anticipated and internalised stigma identified by Quinn *et al.* (2014) and works on the assumption that if co-workers find out about the abuse a woman has experienced, there will be a corresponding negative judgement. In some cases, the formal nature of workplace interactions was a mechanism the women put in place to protect themselves from a suspicious abuser, either because of his tendency to use social isolation as an abuse tactic or out of jealousy of the woman's workplace interaction with other men. The more distant the workplace interactions, the less the abuser has to be angry about.

JUDITH

Because I was working quite closely with my boss as far as responsibilities were concerned... I think he couldn't disassociate from that relationship... He thought there was something more.

For women experiencing abuse the issue of workplace interactions and a tendency to remain distant, can also be a response to the degree to which their ability to trust has been damaged by the abuse. In such cases women remain distant for fear of being let down.

JUDITH

and I couldn't talk about what was happening at home with anybody, there obviously my trust was very... I didn't trust anybody...

For Mona – who experienced hyper vigilance as a result of her experiences - workplace interactions represented a distraction and a further burden and drain on her energy, already tested to the limit.

MONA

I think the beginning at work always was fun because you're always hopeful... that it's going to be like a nice place and you get to know new people and put your best foot forward... So in the beginning... Hopeful about it. And it's enjoyable. But then there's always a point where it gets to the middle, I'm just like - can everyone just stop talking to me, please? Because, one, I've got to do my work. And then two, I've also got to concentrate on the door [in case her abuser unexpectedly appeared]

Some of the women (notably Mitra and Antonia) enjoyed very close relationships with their colleagues and consider their co-workers to be friends. For the remaining women, there were varying degrees of emotional connection between themselves and their colleagues. Judith, Vivienne and Nicole all described a desire to remain detached from their colleagues, sharing a limited amount of personal information whilst maintaining a friendly work environment.

Conversely, Mona's co-worker relationships were initially a source of sadness and disappointment and eventually stress. In her case, co-worker relationships were experienced as deeply unsatisfying when her early disclosure led to humiliation and ridicule at work, and later experiences of colleague relationships also left Mona feeling unsatisfied as – fearing the same rejection – in subsequent workplaces she remained distant from colleagues and felt a sense of dishonesty and inauthenticity in her workplace interactions. These negative experiences informed her co-worker relationships going forward. Both her co-workers' past behaviour and the perpetrator's actions have left her with very low expectations of others in terms of reliability or trustworthiness and she finds herself unwilling to invest in new relationships.

MONA

But after...the way I was treated and got the response when I worked at [that place], I don't really trust anybody.

I never expect anything of anybody

There is an element of the self-fulfilling prophecy in Mona's workplace interactions, whereby a lack of engagement with co-workers leads to exactly the kind of unfulfilling relationships Mona feared and left her colleagues unable to support her in ways which might have been beneficial and could potentially have allowed her to stay in a role for longer and build more meaningful relationships.

In the case of Mona and Vivienne, their working lives were characterised by a series of short term roles rather than a longer-term engagement with a single employer. Mona described the ease of simply leaving a short-term position if balancing work and the challenges of her home life became too difficult; and this type of working arrangement enabled Mona to avoid establishing the type of workplace relationships which she found stressful. Vivienne described contract work as commonplace in her industry, but also expressed the

embarrassment she felt after making a partial disclosure during a particularly stressful period in her life, and her desire to avoid further personal disclosures at work going forward, whilst maintaining friendly working relationships. Avoiding social interaction (and the type of belongingness akin to friendship within a co-worker context – such as that enjoyed by Mitra and Antonia) helped Mona and Vivienne to retain the autonomy over their workplace interactions and maintain their workplace personas. In Vivienne’s view, such interactions enable women living with the effects of abuse to maintain their identities as both professional women and members of “normal” society. Thus while more aloof workplace interactions reduce the likelihood of belonging in terms of friendship, they potentially enhance a sense of belonging in a professional and broader societal context.

5.5.2 Interactions with other stakeholders

For the most part the women’s experience of interaction with others in the workplace related to their relationship with co-workers, however there were other interactions which influenced the experience of work. In terms of interactions with others Antonia experienced the workplace as a space to identify and interact with similar others – discovering following her own disclosure that two of her co-workers had also experienced IP abuse. Such interactions were a source of support free of judgement and as identified by Beecham offer the potential for practical advice and support from another who understands the emotional and practical challenges only too well. For Fran, her work as a self-employed yoga teacher meant interaction with class members who recognised her as a skilled individual worthy of professional respect and common courtesy. These interactions were a huge source of support to Fran and she describes them as helping to rebuild her shattered self-confidence. In Vivienne’s case, it was professional mentors who provided her with support rather than co-workers - who she went to great lengths to hold at arms-length. When she was younger, Vivienne disclosed the abuse she was experiencing to a friend who found her disclosure extremely discomfiting. This led Vivienne to concluding that “normal people” (people who have not experienced abuse) are simply unable to process that someone close to them might have experienced such a thing. This interaction left her feeling embarrassed, lonely and disappointed and she made the decision to severely limit what she shared about her experiences going forward. Rather than friendship or emotional support, these interactions provided Vivienne with recognition of her achievements and her skills as a professional, fulfilling a need for competence (one of the three elements of SDT) at least, if not belongingness.

5.6 PERSONAL CONTROL

For all participants the experience of work was one of personal control, influence or impact to some degree; from having control over their own workload to being involved in large scale projects with a lasting legacy, to expressing their independence. For women whose home life is characterised by a lack of personal control and autonomy, the opportunity to exert control over their surroundings comes as a welcome relief.

5.6.1 Compartmentalisation

Compartmentalisation and the clear separation of home and work personas was identified by Beecham (2009) as an important coping mechanism for women experiencing abuse,

supporting Brief and Nord's discussion of the role of segmentation in the experience of work (1990) and Hochschild's discussions of the first and second shifts (1997) (the first being at work and the second the caring responsibilities at home). All the women described elements of compartmentalisation in their experience of work, with some women compartmentalising unconsciously and some (notably Vivienne and Fran) describing a very conscious decision to compartmentalise. For Fran, compartmentalisation was associated with the physical act of entering a yoga class and taking her seat at the front of the room, whereas – due in part to the nature of her role – for Vivienne there was a process of mental compartmentalisation.

FRAN

So I try and basically go in there with like - I leave all my baggage at the door.

VIVIENNE

One psychological strength I have is I compartmentalise quite well

...consciously, not allowing certain topics to come on, to come [up] so that there was no chance I would sleep and say [something]...

Beecham (2014) highlighted the potential for excessive compartmentalisation to be psychologically damaging and Vivienne noted her fears that this could be the case, recognising her compartmentalisation as conscious and “extreme” and questioning its ongoing impact. Compartmentalisation could be considered as a form of denial, and allows women to stay in an abusive relationship for longer. Showalter (2016) argues that this could put women at risk of financial abuse, however Nicole described the opposite situation, where success at work (facilitated by successful compartmentalisation) ameliorated the situation at home by appeasing her abuser. Whatever the risks of compartmentalisation, its value as (at least a short term) coping mechanism is clear, both from the literature and from the women's experiences.

All of the women initially made very clear distinctions between the home and work domain, carefully controlling the information shared with co-workers in order to maintain their workplace identities. As expressed in Campbell Clark's description of boundary management, the women crossed the border between home and work where two very different cultures existed and where they performed very different roles. In most cases the experience of disclosure was not voluntary, but rather the abuse became apparent following a critical incident of some kind – in Mitra's case an emotional outburst at work, in Nicole's case – injuries that her co-workers could not help but notice. Such critical incidents permeate the boundary between home and work, with Nicole describing the uncomfortable fact that what is going on at home often “leaks in” to the workplace.

In her discussion of boundaries between home and work, Campbell Clark describes the nature of boundaries as potentially permeable, referring to exactly the kind of intrusion of home life into work life that the women described. Although the women often experienced negative permeation of the work-home border, as Campbell Clark describes, permeability can also work positively where skills or insights gained in one domain can positively impact the other. Mitra experienced exactly this kind of development, where the confidence and voice she

gained at work ultimately helped her to establish firm boundaries within her abusive relationship and contributed to her decision to leave.

The women recognised work as a valuable physical and psychological space away from the abuser where they could immerse themselves in their professional activities. The women also however identified some of the negative aspects of effective compartmentalisation. Following accidental disclosure at work, and an unfortunate incident where well-meaning colleagues put pressure on Nicole to leave her husband, Nicole was left in a situation where the boundary between home and work had been compromised. This led to Nicole leaving her employer and her supportive co-workers – the only support system available to her at that time – to move to a different part of the country for what she and her husband viewed as a “fresh start”. In an effort to reinstate the work-home border, Nicole isolated herself and removed herself from a sympathetic employer who was eager to support her.

This sense of isolation was also experienced by Mona, who following an earlier negative experience of disclosure – chose to keep a work-home border very firmly in place. This prevented her from sharing with her co-workers that she was actually in danger every time her ex-partner visited her at work and insist she leave with him. Had her co-workers been aware, they could have put safety plans in place to protect her. For Mona there was very little difference between her experience of the home and work domains. She felt preoccupied and distracted and lived in constant fear her abuser would come to find her at work and her earlier poor experience led to ridicule and minimisation, leaving her nervous of co-worker interaction and determined not to disclose. In contrast to the other women, Mona did not reap the benefits of work as a source of strength and reassurance in her own abilities and values.

For Vivienne, having left the abusive relationship and undergone counselling she has resumed her earlier separation from work, making a conscious decision not to talk about her experiences viewing them as something she wishes to move on from rather than incorporate into her professional life going forward. In Mona’s case home and work are now inextricably linked. Unable to feel safe at work Mona now works from home where she feels more in control of her surroundings and better able to focus on her work. While the physical boundary between home and work has been removed, working from home has also removed all temporal and psychological borders between home and work leaving Mona in a situation where her work is now her only occupation (other than caring for her child) and she focuses all her attention and energy on it. Whereas a situation where home and work are integrated suggests a high degree of similarity and synergy for work (Campbell Clark, 2000), in Mona’s case the integration of the domains has gone beyond the ideal balance and Mona is more isolated than ever.

MONA

It's not the... healthiest attitude I have, because I don't have a distinction really between, personal life... and work... It's just become like... second nature. It's just part of my existence... Besides spending time with my [child] and being mum to [them]... It's like robotic in a way... Get up, go to the computer and I just start... doing... That's just how I live my life at the moment, I think.

Fran's situation was different to the other women in that the abuse was instrumental in her returning to work (whereas for the other women the abuse increased the risk of them having to leave work). Fran's experience of the management of home and work domain is also a little different to the other women's experiences, in part driven by her profession. As a yoga teacher there is a very clear division – both physical and psychological – for Fran with regard to work. The act of entering the yoga studio and taking her seat at the front of the class provides a clear physical separation and the complete focus on the here and now required to teach her students provides a strong psychological boundary.

5.6.2 Impact and Independence

For the women autonomy over their own actions and decisions included managing their own workloads, but also extended into other areas. In the case of Mitra and Antonia this included exerting a sense of independence from the perpetrator, epitomised by Antonia's ability to apply for and achieve British Citizenship, securing her right to live in the country independently, and Mitra's sense of cultural autonomy as a result of her professional achievements. The career progression and financial success achieved by Vivienne and Nicole in particular was an expression of their ability to influence their environments and in Nicole's case included involvement in high profile projects leaving a substantial long term legacy.

Much of the existing research on women living with the effects of abuse in a work context has tended to relate to financial issues (Showalter, 2016, Rothman *et al.*, 2007); either the cost impact associated with IP abuse or the role of money in supporting women to gain freedom from abuse by gaining the ability to support themselves financially. The role of money with regard to the women's experiences of work however was secondary to other workplace issues such as autonomy, professional credibility and self-esteem and did not play the prominent role suggested by existing literature. For Nicole, increasing levels of remuneration was a way of appeasing the abuser rather than a source of independence.

NICOLE

When I was like a director and stuff like that, he quite liked the notoriety that came with being married to somebody that was successful, because he deemed himself to be extremely successful. ... And he really liked that aspect of it... he liked telling his family...

For some of the women the nature of their roles meant that financial independence – particularly with children to support - would always be a struggle. Antonia described herself as being unable to be self-sufficient due to her income and listed her financial situation as a reason for remaining in her relationship. Such a description is more in line with the understanding of finance described in the literature and reflects the conclusions drawn by Showalter (2016) and Storer *et al.* (2021) with regard to financial situation and ability to leave an abusive relationship.

ANTONIA

I don't earn enough to be fully self-sufficient, having a car and driving and doing things that I wish I could do... but at least I have a stable job with a steady income that I love and can be independent in my own little way

...at least I can buy my own cosmetics and things that I need and manage my phone or whatever I need to buy or save for. I have some sort of my own money that I earned myself. ...It's difficult [though] - ... it took me a long time... to save for my British citizenship

Fran's experience of work was somewhat different to the other women. Whereas being forced to leave work had been either a reality or a feared consequence of disclosure for the other women, for Fran it was abuse that pushed her back into work. Left with two small children to care for after her husband left, cutting off all access to money, Fran returned to work in order to provide for her family. Feeling emotionally and physically unprepared for work, her return was forced by financial circumstances. For Fran work became a source of financial independence, and although not instrumental in helping her leave her abuser, was important in helping her to mitigate one of the perpetrator's ongoing abuse tactics – that of withholding money.

FRAN

Not knowing at that point that he would then shut down all of the joint accounts and close all the direct debits, to the home. [pause] I had a real like big slap in the face of like. Right, I need to go get some money now. I really need to go get some money now because I cannot... I don't know how I'm going to feed these two children and myself this week. So that's when I had to start my career again, and it wasn't when I felt like I was ready to do that

5.7 EXPERIENCES OF DISCLOSURE

This section explores the women's motivations with regard to the decision to either disclose or not disclose their identity as a survivor of IP Abuse; and their experiences when their co-workers became aware of the abuse - either through voluntary disclosure or some other means. The women's decisions not to disclose can be broadly categorised under two headings; non-disclosure resulting from fear of the anticipated response and non-disclosure due to a lack of understanding of what constitutes IP Abuse. These two broad categories will be discussed in the following sections, bringing together theory, elements from the women's stories and personal reflections to explore these reactions. The instances of voluntary disclosure were limited, and when women did disclose, these decisions stemmed from a desire for either solidarity or authenticity. In addition to exploring theory and experience around active disclosure, the role of critical incidents in disclosure will also be explored. This section will then go on to discuss the women's experiences of disclosure, which can be categorised into those associated with positive workplace responses and those associated with negative workplace response – and the women's experiences will be discussed in this chapter on these terms. It is important to note however, that the experience of disclosure and workplace response is complex; and although a workplace response may initially seem positive and certainly be well intentioned, it may not necessarily have the desired or assumed effect. Paradoxically, a positive response may ultimately be damaging to a woman and the best response may be no response at all.

5.7.1 Disrupting the status quo

A review of the literature surrounding informal disclosure of IP abuse carried out by Dworkin and Schumacher (2018) identified multiple examples of negative experiences of disclosure, with a number of studies suggesting that one out of every three women who disclose in an informal setting (i.e., to friends and family) experience a negative reaction. Similarly, the TUC (2014) identified that of the women who report IP abuse in the workplace, two thirds receive no support. The women's discourse suggested a number of possible alternatives as to why women receive either a negative or an apathetic response to disclosure. In Mona's experience disclosure disrupts the status quo and undermines a positive working environment.

MONA

It does disrupt the whole atmosphere of a workplace...I find that superiors don't really like that kind of change in atmosphere...you know that kind of chit chat that keeps the office kind of going

Nicole echoes the sense of chaos that disclosure causes and commented on the practical impact of abuse on the workplace.

NICOLE

...I don't think workplaces are set up or capable to manage [it]...I think balancing workplace and things like domestic abuse is just a massive challenge, to be honest with you. From a business perspective, it doesn't work due to the amount of sickness, absenteeism, all of that kind of stuff. It's just not acceptable

Antonia also feared the impact of IP abuse support on her workplace and had turned down potential offers of additional leave due to her concerns around the additional pressure this would place on her co-workers.

The women concluded that those experiencing abuse who disclose become a burden to their workplaces either by creating a negative atmosphere, incurring additional cost or placing co-workers under more pressure. Any wellbeing support offered by any employee incurs an associated cost and administrative burden, but in common with other issues related to wellbeing, the costs of inaction must also be considered. López-Sánchez (2019) found the global economic costs of IP abuse to be substantial and as identified by GOV.UK, the cost to the UK economy of Domestic Abuse is £1.9 billion per annum (GOV.UK, 2018) via sickness, absence and lost productivity (Rothman *et al.*, 2007).

5.7.2 Reflection – life outside work

I have often felt at work that employers would really prefer it if employees behaved as if they did not have a life outside work and I did not feel comfortable with the idea of talking about anything relating to my mum at work. I remember a situation (some time after my mum died) when I was in a meeting where someone showed a video of their experiences of white-collar boxing. I found this very distressing and excused myself from the meeting to find an empty meeting room where I stayed until I had recovered from a panic attack. This research (and my work as a Trustee) recasts my experience as "helpful" in that it gives context to the work and is therefore an appropriate discussion

topic. To begin with I found this new perspective quite challenging. The idea that my thoughts and feelings (and “bias”) are of interest to someone else and that I am able to openly talk about them is both refreshing and intimidating in equal measures.

Vivienne however, offers an alternative perspective. In her view it is not cost, inconvenience or disruption to the work environment that makes disclosure so difficult, but rather the complete inability of “normal” people to process accounts of abuse.

VIVIENNE

...you can feel them recoiling, thinking; that is proper shit - excuse, my language...”

Normal people - people who have no experience of abuse – just cannot grasp it. They think you are completely mad, that you are making up stories, that it can’t be that bad, and they distance themselves immediately. People who understand – who have been there – well, you just get a completely different reaction.

The reactions Vivienne describes may stem from shock, disbelief or even secondary trauma on hearing a description of traumatic events (Warwick-Booth and Coan, 2022; Williamson *et al.*, 2020). Such negative reactions have been identified by Dworkin and Schumacher (2018) as potentially damaging to survivors and anticipation of such a response is enough to prevent Vivienne from disclosing going forward and had a profound impact on Mona’s subsequent experience of work.

5.7.3 Reflection – Reactions to disclosure

In some instances, my experiences have reflected Vivienne’s view that “normal” people are not equipped to deal with the realities of abuse and the idea that people they know are affected; with some relationships dwindling since my mum’s death. Maybe people don’t want to be faced with an unpleasant idea so close to home, or maybe they just don’t know what to say – so they say nothing. On the other hand, some instances have reflected Antonia and Mitra’s experiences that nothing changes, except perhaps that friends understand me a little better. On talking to one friend about my mum she remarked: “I feel like I’ve got to know you more in the last half hour than in the last 20 years.”

5.7.4 Knowledge of abuse

When it came to the issue of recognising abuse, only Nicole recognised that she was a survivor of abuse early on in her relationship. All the other women described a lack of understanding of what IP abuse was or a desire to deny the abuse. Group work and support from the charity was instrumental in the women coming to terms with the nature of their relationships and the need to access support to be able to keep themselves safe. Vivienne described herself as having been in denial for more than 30 years and it was only through group work that she finally came to understand her experiences, and Fran described the “new language” that she learnt during group work:

FRAN

...it was amazing to learn this new language in order to articulate the experiences that

I was going through...it was... then [that] I started mentally changing and...[seeing] myself as a victim of abuse

Antonia described feeling foolish for not realising the nature of her relationship earlier – blaming herself for her lack of understanding of abuse, and both Mona and Judith described their initial belief that abuse was simply part of being a woman in a relationship.

MONA

I [knew] from reading and watching films and just hearing it...I've always known this is an issue for women... My understanding of it was [that it's] just... part of being female, and it just happens sometimes, and there's nothing much you can really do about that...

JUDITH

I believed domestic violence was when a husband or partner or whoever kicked or punched the other person. I knew nothing about emotional violence, psychological violence, financial violence, coercive control... I thought...when he drew blood or when I got bruises, that was domestic violence. And at that time, none of those things had happened... So as far as the disclosure, no, I didn't. It didn't even enter my head

[That] was the first time I was raped. And even then. As naive as it sounds, I believed that because he was my husband...he was entitled to do that. So, I didn't even think of reporting that to the police.

The women described a lack of appreciation of abuse, a lack of understanding of consent and an underlying acceptance that abuse in some form is inevitable within a relationship. There is little research exploring women's awareness and understanding of abuse beyond (Warwick-Booth and Coan's (2022) exploration of this issue with a group of young women (aged 13-25) identified as at risk from abuse. Among this age group, young women report that coercive control and aggressive behaviour within an intimate relationship is widespread and considered to be normal (Davies, 2015). The introduction of compulsory Healthy Relationship education in schools (PSHE-Association, 2023) is absolutely a step in the right direction but beyond the school system there is a lack of opportunities for education and awareness building for women. The women reported the education associated with the Charity as pivotal in recognising the abuse and finding the strength to make changes; however, such education was only accessed when the women reached crisis point and there is space for more preventative education.

The joy of learning a new vocabulary that would finally allow her to interpret and articulate her experiences described by Fran, stems from the same lack of awareness and education. Historical descriptions of IP abuse have focused on physical violence and although new words such as "gaslighting", "coercive control" and "financial abuse" are entering the lexicon associated with abuse, they have yet to become well established and are not well understood even by those experiencing such abuse – as evidenced by the women's experiences. On the subject of IP abuse and vocabulary, Bonomi *et al.* (2006) describe the impact of language used by professionals in conversation with those potentially at risk of IP abuse. For example, asking someone if they are experiencing abuse may not elicit a disclosure as it presupposes an understanding of what abuse actually is.

5.7.5 Critical Incidents

For Mitra, Nicole, Judith, Antonia and Vivienne; a critical incident led to involuntary disclosure of the abuse on at least one occasion. For Judith and Nicole, there were multiple instances of involuntary disclosure in a range of roles caused by a range of incidents. In Nicole's case each experience of disclosure - the discovery of the abuse by co-workers resulting from her injuries in one role, a move into refuge in another role, and a particularly difficult period relating to court proceedings in a third - led to Nicole leaving her job; once through choice and twice involuntarily. Nicole described this intrusion of her home life into her work life as instances where "it" – the abuse – "had leaked in" suggesting the type of boundary between home and work life described by Campbell Clark (2000) characteristic of the maintenance of work-life boundaries discussed in section 5.6.1 (in relation to boundary management).

For women whose co-workers become aware of their abuse in this way, the autonomy they had previously experienced in terms of managing their abuse is compromised, their carefully managed work persona affected. As well as being stressful and upsetting for the women themselves, such sudden awareness of abuse has the potential to cause emotional dissonance and confusion for work colleagues. Having previously understood their co-workers as strong, confident, capable women; co-workers are now confronted with the realisation that these strong, competent women – who do not fit the received wisdom regarding how a victim should present (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017) - are in fact victims of abuse and violent crime.

5.7.6 Reflection – withholding information

A series of critical incidents led my mum to disclose elements of her experiences – always to different people, and never the full story. While living at home, my siblings and I experienced the violence, but were sworn to secrecy. After a visit from the police, she confided in a neighbour and stayed the night. After a broken arm, she confided in a medical professional - who did not escalate the disclosure – but told everyone else she had fallen over. No one ever had the full picture of what was going on. Ultimately it was her death that led to the full details of her experiences being disclosed. Still, the full picture of her experiences needed to be pieced together by all the people with whom she had shared part of her story. There was shock and disbelief (and in some cases denial) among those who felt they knew her and him and for those individuals, there followed the difficult process of equating the people they thought they knew with the reality of my mum's experiences.

5.7.7 Negative workplace responses to disclosure

Many of the women's experiences were negative. In some workplaces, the response from management and colleagues was extremely negative, characterised at best by a lack of sympathy and at worst as victim blaming and secondary victimisation (defined by The European Institute for Gender Equality as "when the victim suffers further harm not as a direct result of the criminal act but due to the manner in which institutions and other individuals deal with the victim" (EIGE, 2022)).

Nicole experienced a negative workplace response in two roles; one leading to redundancy and another to dismissal (and a subsequent settlement agreement). Her experience of

disclosure (involuntary in both cases) reflected the fear that the women articulated when describing their reasons for non-disclosure; leading to exactly the questioning of professional integrity and the sense of blame the women feared. Nicole's fear that "you can't be a boss who is being beaten up" appeared to be realised and in a fragile state she felt compelled to accept the situation.

NICOLE

...now if I look back [if I had felt stronger]... at the time... then I probably would have fought for my job a bit more, I think; to stay and keep going, whereas it was just too much.

This perception of a loss of integrity and professionalism also characterised Mona's experience of disclosure. Choosing to voluntarily disclose her situation Mona was met with ridicule and constructively dismissed when her role became untenable

MONA

So I think the respect went... after she was aware she'd made like little jokes here and there in conversations with other colleagues... relating to abuse and that. [And I thought] did she really dislike me like that much?

...after being congratulated on meeting X, Y, Z, different targets and stuff like that, come back after the Christmas break, complete change of mood and attitude. And then I got handed a performance review...

Such reactions serve to reinforce the anticipated and internalised stigma already associated with being a survivor of IP Abuse (Quinn *et al.*) and result in a woman leaving her place of work – either voluntarily in order to escape the hostile working environment, or involuntarily as a result of actions taken by the employer. In these instances, the workplace reaction to disclosure appeared to fall back on the well documented abuse myths identified by Peters (2008) and the women were identified as troublesome and not worthy of sympathy. Mona postulated that the reaction to abuse survivors is different to the reaction that others who have experienced a traumatic incident might receive, suggesting a belief that it is not sympathy that is lacking in the workplace, but sympathy for survivors of IP abuse.

MONA

... if you were in a car accident or you fell down the stairs. You know, you just you get...Even when somebody doesn't like you, they give you the bare minimum of compassion... but for this, it's just like now, you don't deserve any of that at all...

The women's experiences highlighted a sense that survivors of IP Abuse are viewed by workplaces as a problem that needs to be addressed. Nicole and Mona reported feeling that management viewed the disclosure of abuse as a disruption to the working environment and that women were seen as creating tension and embarrassment at work. The women were aware that responding to employees experiencing trauma does divert attention away from other workplace related tasks, potentially resulting in time off for survivors or other accommodation of their needs. Nicole – speaking from an operational perspective – recognised the organisational costs associated with support; and Antonia expressed her

reluctance to accept all the support offered by her workplace for fear of the additional pressure it would put on her co-workers. Nicole posited that this additional effort and potential cost to the organisation was viewed in the context of being an issue of cost versus benefit, and that ultimately it is easier and faster to manoeuvre a survivor out of the workplace (whether gently or forcibly) than to support her. Removing the problem – the survivor – dissolves any embarrassment or tension caused to the working environment while also removing an employee likely to need support or time off. This solution, although unethical, if managed carefully would be entirely legal, given that there are currently no workplace requirements to provide specific support to women experiencing abuse (outside of existing Health and Safety requirements and any relevant guidance regarding Safeguarding).

The negative experiences of disclosure described by Mona and Nicole were driven by victim blaming and echoed the findings of Quinn *et al.* with regard to stigmatised identities and Peters with regard to abuse myths. For Judith there was a negative experience of disclosure that revolved around personal shame rather than blame. In her role as a housekeeper, Judith became aware that her boss was being abused by her own husband and after a particularly violent incident Judith was dismissed from the role.

JUDITH

She rang me and she said, unfortunately we're going to have to let you go. And I realised that it wasn't because I was doing an unsatisfactory job.... It's because I knew too much.

This experience of being dismissed for being aware that abuse was happening, has similarities with an experience that Nicole described where she left a supportive employer who knew of her personal circumstances and wanted to support her, in order to continue “being in an abusive relationship without people knowing”. The sense of carrying on in private is reflective of the resignation the women expressed early on in their abuse journeys that IP abuse is an unfortunate, but inevitable part of life and one that is shameful and best hidden from public view.

5.7.8 Positive workplace responses

The positive response most valued by the women was, ironically, that nothing changes; or to be more accurate nothing about the women’s relationship with their co-workers. For Mitra and Antonia, the consistent nature of their co-worker relationships before and after disclosure and the strong emotional connection they both retained to their teams was a huge source of support and consolation.

ANTONIA

I remember the lovely hug that I received from my head teacher and from my team leader there, and I never forget it...it was just so precious. And...they were just saying that whatever decision I made they were going to support me and they'd be on my side... I'm just so grateful for that because it just means so much. It just means so much that I can still work there.

Judith also experienced this kind of compassionate response in a later role where she disclosed to her manager when the strain of the reappearance and associated legal

wranglings with her ex-husband started to take a toll on her health. In each of these cases, workplace responses included a combination of adjustments to working, or time off to accommodate counselling or meetings with professionals; but it was colleague relationships that were most valued.

Now working at home, Mona – again driven by a need to be authentic in her working practices – has disclosed her experiences to a client she was working closely with at the time of the interview. Although she did not describe any concessions or amendments resulting from the disclosure, Mona felt positive about her decision to disclose this time was met with a more compassionate response.

These positive experiences of disclosure have allowed the women to maintain their sense of self as capable, credible professionals. Such experiences provide hope that not all workplaces are places where survivors are blamed and shamed and offer hope to abuse survivors.

5.7.9 Positive workplace responses with a negative impact

Although in the cases outlined above, the experience of disclosure was positive and welcomed by the women, for women not yet ready to accept help, accidental disclosure and the subsequent organisational response can be extremely stressful. Nicole described a situation (early in her career), where the support offered – though well intentioned – was overwhelming. When the abuse became obvious to co-workers, Nicole was met with advice, offers of accommodation and was taken to a specialist service by her manager. At the time she was not ready to accept this type of help and found the experience extremely difficult.

NICOLE

My boss at the time, was really worried and he had a spare house in London that he said I could move into. I had another person who - so she was my ops manager - and... her husband was like a probation officer or something...she took me to go and see a refuge... my head didn't work at that point. I was covered in bruises, too. And I remember sitting there with these people just going, "Don't tell, don't say anything. I'm not telling you my name. I'm not telling you anything..."

Though met with offers of practical support (including alternative accommodation), Vivienne's disclosure (in response to a critical incident) compromised her maintenance of a very separate workplace identity and she later regretted her disclosure, conducting her professional relationships on the basis that both she and her co-workers will pretend that her disclosure never happened. Judith did not articulate any concrete support offered to her when her manager became aware of her situation, however even a neutral response was sufficient to lead Judith to leave. Simply knowing that her manager was aware of "the kind of man" she was with, was enough to evoke shame and embarrassment.

5.7.10 Gender expectations and Disclosure

Mitra and Antonia received positive, supportive responses to disclosure (as did Judith following disclosure in her most recent role. All of these instances took place when the women were engaged in roles which involved working with children, two in primary schools and one (Mitra) in a children's residential care facility. Although it was not explored during the research it is tempting to wonder how much impact their working environment (with

regarding to organisational culture and the gender of co-workers) had on the response they received. Both of these workplaces are examples of workplaces with higher rates of female employees (McDowell, 2015) and it is not unreasonable to ask whether gender differences have a role to play in how co-workers respond to disclosure.

A number of researchers have identified differences in work behaviour associated with stereotypical gender traits. Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) posit that women may have a greater need for supportive working relationships, while Hackett *et al.* (2018) found that women are more likely to exhibit organisational citizenship behaviours and Newton and Stewart (2013) identified a tendency among women towards sympathy, generosity and kindness in their dealings with others. Additionally, Garden and Weller (2017) report that within the literature relating to the experience of practicing medicine there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that women and men practice medicine differently, accompanied by a growing sense that gender should be considered as a determinant of outcome and not simply a demographic variable. (This represents a move away from earlier research such as that undertaken by Calnan and Davidson (1998) who concluded that gender was secondary to job role and context). Whether or not the women reported positive interactions post disclosure, there was a clear expectation – voiced by a number of participants – that there would be a degree of empathy from women, if not from men. Both Nicole and Mona described the double blow of a negative response from a manager who was a woman, alluding to clear differences in expectation by gender with regard to disclosure. Mona – now working from home in a freelance capacity – described the very positive response she received from a male client in her most recent disclosure. In doing so she explicitly outlined what she described as stereotypical expectations (that women would be more sympathetic to disclosure) and her disappointment when the response she experienced was one of judgement and ridicule.

NICOLE

[It] was a woman, so yeah, that...was quite challenging, to be honest... that was... [a] more devastating blow

Recent work on gender and workplace has tended to focus on increasing gender diversity in the workplace and the benefits of doing so (Garden and Weller 2017; Newton and Stewart, 2013) and there is limited research on the impact of gender and organisational culture. Given the contrast between Mitra and Antonia's experience of disclosure and workplace support with that of the other women; it seems reasonable to ask why their experience might have been different. Both women worked in environments recognised as being examples of workplaces where the majority of co-workers are women and characterised by traditionally feminine traits (McDowell, 2015). In line with Thomas *et al.* and Garden and Weller's assertions regarding the differences in workplace behaviour derived by gender (and in particular its impact on interpersonal interactions) it is possible that the difference in response – characterised by empathy and emotional support – can be explained by the gender of the women's co-workers and its impact on the prevailing culture (and Garden and Weller's view that in terms of workplace behaviour gender should be treated as a determinant).

The positive reception from female colleagues received by Mitra and Antonia was not reflected by Mona's earlier experiences or the response to disclosure received by Nicole in more than one role. Specifically referring to interaction with more senior members of staff (rather than co-workers) Mona and Nicole described the double blow of receiving an unsympathetic response to disclosure from a female manager. Such a response – however upsetting – is in line with Van Vianen and Fischer's findings (2002) that there are only minor differences in the behaviour of male and female managers as they become more senior (corroborated by Garden and Weller's results) and that female managers tend to adopt more character traits traditionally associated with male contemporaries as they progress through the organisation.

5.8 THE JOURNEY TO SURVIVORHOOD

(IP Abuse as a liminal experience)

Discussions of trauma and transformation in relation to IP Abuse present the possibility of discussions of IP Abuse in the context of liminality. The women's discussion of work and their workplace experiences described a changing role for work dependent upon where a woman was during her journey through the process of recognising and acknowledging abuse, through seeking support and finally onto some kind of closure and sense of moving on from her experiences of abuse. This chapter explores themes of liminality in relation to the women's experiences of abuse survivorship, characterising theirs as a journey following a similar format to that identified by Little *et al.* (1998) and later theorists (e.g., Thompson, 2007) in the health sciences literature.

The concept of liminality was originally explored by van Gennep (1960), later developed by Turner (1967) and has subsequently been applied to a number of experiences notably within health sciences literature (Sleight, 2016). Its application within the sphere of IP Abuse is currently limited, but there are examples of its application in this context; notably Campos *et al.* (2019) and Allen and Wozniak (2013). Van Gennep described life as a series of progressions from one life stage or one identity to another each with its own defined entrance and exit point, for example the transition from child to adult via physical changes or the transition into motherhood. Turner, exploring these transitions, developed the concept of liminality as transformation from one social status to another and stressed the importance of rites of passage and ritual in this change which he described as an exciting and dynamic state of "pure possibility" (Turner, 1967, p97). These early explorations of liminality described an exciting, shared experience of transformation with initiates guided, supported and welcomed back into their communities, post transition. This process was described by Van Gennep as having three distinct stages, the pre-liminal stage of separation, the liminal transition phase itself and the final post liminal stage of re-incorporation where Turner argued that initiates were welcomed back into the community having achieved a higher social status post transition.

5.8.1 Liminality

A large proportion of the literature within the health sciences in relation to liminality is in the context of cancer survivorship and the Cancer Survivorship Adaptation Model (Naus *et al.*

(2009) – though widely associated with the Lance Armstrong Foundation) describes a three stage model of Living with, through and beyond cancer. This approach is modelled on the liminal phases identified by Van Gennep and Turner of pre-liminal, liminal and post liminal experience and frames *Living with* as the experience of diagnosis and treatment, *Living through* as the stage up to five years post treatment and *Living beyond* as the period beyond five years.

In terms of the women's experiences, they divided their journey into a first stage which described their experiences before accessing help, a middle stage characterised by recognition of the abuse and the experience of accessing help, and a final (ongoing) stage of moving forward with their lives post relationship. In this way, their journeys can be viewed through the lens of liminality.

5.8.1.1 Before

In the context of the pre-liminal stage, in a healthcare setting this is characterised by diagnosis and the commencement of treatment. This stage was complicated from the women's perspective by a lack of an experience which might be equated with formal diagnosis. For the women, it was not an external expert who diagnosed abuse, but a realisation on the part of the women that they were in an abusive relationship. (In some cases, professionals had in fact diagnosed abuse, but either a lack of understanding of what constitutes abuse, or an unwillingness to accept that they were in an abusive relationship delayed the women's self-diagnosis and therefore their willingness to seek support.) When it came to the issue of recognising abuse, only Nicole recognised that she was a survivor of abuse early on in her relationship. All the other women described a lack of understanding of what IP abuse was or a desire to deny the abuse. Group work and support from the charity was instrumental in the women coming to terms with the nature of their relationships and the need to access support to be able to keep themselves safe. Vivienne described herself as having been in denial for more than 30 years and it was only through group work that she finally came to understand her experiences, and Fran described the "new language" that she learnt during group work (as discussed in section 5.7.4). Antonia described feeling foolish for not realising the nature of her relationship earlier – blaming herself for her lack of understanding of abuse, and both Mona and Judith described their initial belief that abuse was simply part of being a woman in a relationship.

The women described a lack of appreciation of abuse, a lack of understanding of consent and an underlying acceptance that abuse in some form is inevitable within a relationship. There has been mixed response to recent campaigns aimed at raising the profile of IP abuse and equipping survivors with invaluable knowledge. For example, Police Scotland's campaign "Don't be that Guy" has been praised for raising awareness (Rawlinson, 2021), but in the view of Warwick-Booth and Coan (2022), makes the same mistakes as those identified by Rose Montesanti and Thurston (2015) in other similar campaigns, in that it requires men to have a high level of self-awareness (and the confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour) and does not aim to address the underlying societal issues that give rise to abuse.

5.8.1.2 During

Though there were some instances of voluntary disclosure, disclosure for the women often came in response to a critical incident or turning point. In Mitra's case, the angry outburst that led to disciplinary proceedings at work, the altercation between Judith's husband and her boss, the overwhelming incident during Vivienne's divorce (which she did not disclose to me) and the realisation among Nicole's co-workers that her injuries were the result of abuse. The women also described instances where their role as a mother provided a tipping point that made their already difficult lives even harder and either led to them giving up work or motivated them to seek support.

MITRA

You know, sometimes it's like... No matter how much you love your job, your kids come first

FRAN

Because I was like, I need to. Not just. It's not just about me anymore. I need to keep this baby safe... And it was only because of [youngest child] being inside of me... That's the only reason why I asked for help.

NICOLE

Things got very, very hard at work when I had a kid and was managing the domestic abuse... It rocked the balance too much, I think. And that's where I think I really started to struggle...

The original, anthropological, description of liminality stressed the sense of community associated with liminal experiences. Turner's original descriptions depicted groups of initiates supported and guided through their transition by experienced elders accompanied by similar others. Similarly in descriptions of liminality in the context of cancer survivorship (Little *et al.* 1998; Thompson, 2007) the valuable role of similar others in the form of support groups and peer mentorship has been identified. The women also identified the invaluable role played by similar others and the hugely valuable role played by both other women with similar experiences and appropriately qualified professionals within health settings and at the charity who were able to provide both formal and informal support.

In Antonia's case, the initial decision to voluntarily disclose was driven by similar disclosure from other co-workers. As described by Vivienne, the experience of disclosing to those who have experience of abuse is very different to disclosing to what Vivienne refers to as "normal people". The other women also reported positive experiences of group work with other survivors and the opportunity to talk openly about their experiences without fear of judgement, lack of understanding or upsetting the listener. Such positive responses to discussion with and support from similar others are in line with Donovan *et al.* (2021) who identified the positive impact of peer support on female doctors experiencing IP abuse. Such support increases the likelihood of more formalised disclosure outside the work environment (Donovan *et al.* did not find evidence that peer support increases the likelihood of workplace disclosure) and plays a role in reducing the sense of isolation often felt by those experiencing abuse. In line with these findings, Beecham (2014) identified the opportunity to meet and

communicate with similar others as a key benefit of work for women living with the effects of abuse.

5.8.1.3 After

In her discussion of liminality and its application to cancer survivorship, Thompson expresses her disappointment in relation to the application of liminality in a health science context. Harking back to the original sense of liminality as a potentially exciting transition full of opportunity and potential, she laments the discussion of the liminal journey as one potentially characterised by isolation and fear for the future (as described by Little *et al.* (1998)). Calling for a return to the original sense of liminality she describes the potential of such liminal experiences to “catapult an individual into meaningful positive change” (Thompson, 2007, p346). Elsewhere, Schiraldi (2009) describes the potentially transformative experience of trauma and the opportunity it presents for rediscovery, reinvention and post traumatic growth. By becoming involved in this research project and through discussion during the research process all the women expressed the desire to help other women in some way. By telling their stories the women expressed their hope that their experiences might help other women going forward and in particular that workplaces might be better informed of the important role of work and a supportive workplace for women living with the effects of IP abuse.

ANTONIA

What I would like to say is just [that it] makes me so happy that I can take part in your research. I wish that it could make a difference, and [get]... some people interested in this topic. And from the employer's perspective, maybe just to make a difference to other women, because there are so many of us. At my own school, I know one, two, three women who are in the similar or were in a similar situation as I am. And some women may not be talking about it at all.

For some women the desire to use their experiences to help others went beyond taking part in the research project and involved a change in career and an active role in supporting those living with the effects of abuse. In this way their career change represented a reframing of their experience as a source of empathy and experience that could be used to support others. In the second half of his book – “Man’s search for meaning” (1962), Viktor Frankl suggests the possibility of finding meaning in suffering and more philosophically meaning in life by considering how our suffering might be construed as meaningful. Frankl did not consider suffering to be meaningful in and of itself, but through his own horrific experiences as a prisoner at Auschwitz and his work (both before and after his incarceration) as a psychiatrist, suggested that finding meaning in suffering and considering suffering and subsequent recovery in a more fatalistic context can help individuals recover from its trauma. This view, in line with Schiraldi’s concept of post traumatic growth corresponds to the dramatic career changes embraced by some of the women with Judith describing her ability to help other women as “her legacy”.

JUDITH

...there's no way, there is no way on earth that I'm going through all that hell... All that hell, and managing to recover from it as well as I have, to then go - do you know what?

I'm just going to forget it ever happened... and just get on with my life...I am going to make sure that I use what I've experienced, and what he put me through and what we've all overcome as a family, and how we fought to become who we are today. There's no way that I'm not going to do anything with that information. Because that's my legacy.

Nicole, Mona and Judith, rather than fearing judgement associated with their identity (or potentially in spite of such fear) are determined to use their experiences to raise awareness of IP abuse and support other survivors. Such career changes reframe the experience of abuse, transforming it from a source of shame to a source of empathy and experience which can be used to support others on their journey. In this way the experience of abuse and the journey to a new status quo is perceived as one of strength rather than fear and shame. This new role for work could be accompanied by other life changes, for example a relocation to a much loved geographical area (in Nicole's case), or a new name (in Judith's).

5.8.2 Reflection - Identity

A conversation with Judith further focused my attention on the issue of identity and naming. Judith has changed her name since leaving her relationship. She is a member of a charitable organisation and has chosen the name of a key woman within the organisation as her own. She talked about feeling empowered by this decision and felt this act had been instrumental in her recovery. Following my mum's death, I changed my middle name by statutory declaration. My first name was chosen by my mum, I took my husband's surname when I got married, but was left with a middle name that came from my dad – the feminine version of his first name. I felt very strongly that I wanted to rid myself of his name but did not want to necessarily draw everyone else's attention to this fact, so I wanted to choose a name with the same initial. Like Judith, I chose a name that felt meaningful to me, in my case the name of a heroine from a book I read many times as a teenager. Whereas Judith spoke of empowerment, the change of name for me was an act of distancing myself from my dad. Now I have the name given to me by my mum, the name I took when I married my husband and a name I have chosen for myself.

5.8.3 Staying in the same role

Mitra and Antonia, having received a positive workplace response and enjoying close relationships with their co-workers chose to remain in role. They now enjoy more personal relationship with their co-workers who they consider to be friends and feel supported in their continuing journeys. Vivienne, by contrast, (who has also chosen to remain in her area of expertise and continue with contract work) chooses to maintain a purely professional relationship with her co-workers and has no desire to share her experiences. She expressed embarrassment at having shared her experiences with co-workers in the past and any contact with ex co-workers to whom she disclosed the abuse, is conducted on the basis that she hopes they will pretend she never said anything and she will do the same.

5.8.4 Reflection - the future

During the last few years, I have had dealings with all sorts of people in relation to my mum's death including the police, the CPS, the probation service, barristers and court officials, witness support staff, victim support case officers, trauma counsellors,

undertakers, mortuary staff, Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) panel members and those who advocate for families bereaved by Domestic Homicide. Among those people there are some who have dedicated their lives to supporting survivors or families left behind and have made huge steps in changing the law and changing perceptions around IP Abuse. I applaud their commitment but see in some of them individuals who are caught in their trauma and unable to move on with their lives. As much as I want to support women experiencing abuse I do not want to be one of those unable to move on. I am extremely grateful for the efforts and dedication of these people - and we as a family have benefitted from their work – but I do not want my family history to take over my life. Like Judith, I feel that everything that has happened is part of me, shapes much of who I am, but it does not define me.

5.8.5 Differing journeys

The journey through recognition of abuse, seeking support and moving forwards post support is not simple and can take many forms. In Nicole's case, recognition of abuse came early (as the only participant who recognised her experiences as abuse early on in her relationship), but the offer of support from her well-meaning manager prompted her to leave her role (and a supportive team) to "carry on being in an abusive relationship without people knowing". Mona's negative experience of disclosure led her to isolate herself from co-workers going forward which had the effect of putting her in danger at work (where unsuspecting co-workers – unaware of her circumstances – were only too happy to welcome her partner into her workplace). For Mitra and Antonia, their journey through recognition and seeking support followed what might be considered the ideal pattern – where disclosure led to emotional and practical support and enabled them to move forwards into a new status quo; in their cases remaining in role with a renewed relationship with their co-workers. For Vivienne, moving forward means falling back into the familiar coping mechanism of rigidly maintaining a professional persona and being the most effective and supportive co-worker she can be, within those constraints. In Fran's case, moving on means returning to her former career and re-experiencing the joy of her previous client relationships in a spirit of personal and financial independence. For Nicole, Judith, Mona and for me – moving forward means attempting to make sense of chaos and transforming personal experiences into awareness and support for women experiencing abuse.

5.8.6 Sustained liminality

The origins of liminality as a concept, describe a defined, time limited stage of transformation, where initiates exit the liminal state to re-enter their communities (Van Gennep, Turner). Discussions of liminality within health science have however introduced the concept of sustained, or prolonged liminality (initially proposed by Little *et al.* (1998)). Thompson's discussion of liminality in the context of cancer survivorship seconds Little *et al.*'s suggestion that "cancer patientness" never subsides, that survivors exist with cancer forever lurking in the shadows and there is no neat exit from this liminal experience. Instead, such individuals exist in a state of sustained liminality (Little *et al.*, 1998). For Mona, her abuser was quite literally lurking in the shadows after the end of her relationship and would appear unannounced. Nicole describes the "stalking and harassment phase" of her relationship and Judith's experiences of being found by her abuser after a five year hiatus speak to the

perpetual nature of IP abuse survivorship, as do the nuisance calls to social services and the police experienced by Mitra and the threats to her life and public verbal abuse experienced by Fran – all experienced after the end of their abusive relationships. As much as the constant cry of “why doesn’t she just leave?” might suggest, leaving an abusive relationship does not mark the end of abuse or the status as an abuse survivor. In addition to this, the re-entry into society at an elevated level which marks the anthropological descriptions of liminality does not apply to survivors of abuse. The shame, blame and stigma of abuse outside the safe confines of the survivor community means that rather than re-entering the community at a transformed, elevated social status, abuse survivors are forever tarnished whether they choose to isolate themselves (like Mona), forget the abuse (like Vivienne) or surround themselves with similar others or like-minded individuals (as in Nicole, Judith and Antonia’s cases).

5.9 SDT AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WORK AND DISCLOSURE

5.9.1 SDT and Work

Work has been identified as a social setting with the potential to either support or thwart the basic needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence as identified by SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2017). The three needs identified within SDT are not unique to women living with the effects of IP Abuse, but their life outside work does create an unusual set of circumstances, where a domineering and abusive partner removes all sense of autonomy and competence and the shame associated with IP Abuse – and the subsequent unwillingness to disclose, even to close friends and family members – creates a situation diametrically opposed to the belongingness described by Deci and Ryan as so central to wellbeing. Without such extremes within one’s personal life, the home domain has the potential to meet the three needs of SDT, to some degree at least, and Deci and Ryan recognise the possibility of the needs being met collectively across the two domains – akin to the compensation relationship between the two domains discussed by both Brief and Nord (1990) and Campbell Clark (2000), where work bridges the gaps left by the home domain. In contrast to this, in the case of women living with the effects of abuse work does not merely bridge the gaps, but potentially provides the only source for meeting the three needs. As such SDT has provided a useful framework through which to view the women’s experiences of work and workplace disclosure.

5.9.1.1 *Autonomy*

The women spoke extensively of the need for and the value of feeling in control. When describing their ability to exert control in relation to work, the women’s experiences encompassed a broad range of issues including boundary management as well as authority and responsibility within the organisational hierarchy and issues of personal independence (Mitra and Antonia) and financial autonomy (Fran).

The use of the survivor’s mask, a carefully curated work persona and management of personal information provide further examples of the exercising of personal autonomy as part of the women’s navigation of the workplace as does the active decision of whether or not to voluntarily disclose abuse.

As part of their journey through survivorhood, the conscious decision to reframe experiences of abuse from a source of pain and shame to one of expertise and empathy (as described in

later sections during discussion of liminality) provides another example of active choice and personal control. Mona's, Nicole's and Judith's decisions to move into survivor-related fields of work and their subsequent reframing of their experiences provide a stark contrast to the women's prior management of the abuse.

5.9.1.2 *Relatedness*

As described in section 5.5, workplaces provide ample opportunities for interaction and have the potential to be experienced as a place of belongingness. For Mitra and Antonia, the workplace was a space to experience genuine friendship and emotional support. For Fran, her work as a self-employed yoga teacher meant interaction with class members who recognised her as a skilled individual worthy of professional respect and common courtesy. In Vivienne's case, work-related interaction with professional mentors provided her with support and reassurance. Nicole and Judith described the experience of being valued team members and the women all described the potential for work as a space to experience respect for one's talents and achievements and recognition for a job well done. Such recognition and validation create an environment where the women whether or not they experienced close personal relationships – felt a sense of belonging to a community of capable professionals. In all cases (save for Mona), the workplace was experienced as a source of belongingness and relatedness despite active decisions not to disclose the experience of abuse.

A further potential source of belongingness is alluded to by Vivienne who introduces the concept of normal people (those untouched by and unaware of the complexities of abuse). Recognition as a capable professional (and careful management of a workplace persona) allows survivors to pass as “normal people” who belong to polite society rather than those tarnished by the stigma of abuse.

5.9.1.3 *Competence*

The women described work as an escape from the constraints of their home life providing physical and emotional space to distance themselves from the strain of life outside work. This space provided a much-needed distraction from home and allowed the women to counter some of the negative commentary and demeaning actions to which they were subjected at home. Workplace achievements – big and small - and interactions with co-workers provided the women with reassurance of their skills, personal attributes and contribution to the world, allowing the women to be seen, and ultimately to see themselves, as the professionally competent and capable women that they are.

5.9.2 *SDT and Disclosure*

The women chose actively not to disclose their situation, fearing that disclosure would undermine the autonomy, relatedness and sense of competency which they enjoyed at work – a finding which contradicts Uysal *et al.*'s (2009) assertion that self-concealment thwarts the three basic needs. In their exploration of self-concealment, Uysal *et al.* (2009) concluded that non-disclosure has a negative impact on wellbeing in that it thwarts belongingness by preventing a survivor from revealing their authentic self and casts doubt on an individual's sense of personal competence and self-worth by reinforcing the sense of shame articulated by so many survivors. Uysal *et al.* also argue that the decision to not disclose, requires survivors to constantly self-monitor their behaviour, and to a degree their thoughts, in order

to prevent accidental disclosure; leading to a sense of control being exerted over them and a resulting lack of autonomy.

Although their conclusions make a strong association between self-concealment and negative effects on wellbeing; in closing their analysis, Uysal *et al.* do concede that there may be situations where “concealing certain self-aspects may be less detrimental to need satisfaction and wellbeing than revealing them” (2019, p198), and this is the experience articulated by the women. The women described self-concealment is a choice – although admittedly driven by shame or fear of blame – and which provides a sense of autonomy over their lives and the self they present in the workplace. Non-disclosure, although not allowing the sort of authenticity craved by Mona in her work interactions, allows a sense of belonging in a workplace setting as a reliable, capable professional. For Vivienne, non-disclosure means belonging to society as a seemingly “normal” person. From an SDT perspective, as evidenced by Nicole and Mona’s experiences (and the fears expressed by other women), disclosure as a survivor potentially equates to being viewed as unreliable, troublesome and unprofessional, removes the ability to compartmentalise and leads to stigmatisation and isolation. In this way, non-disclosure provides an opportunity to satisfy the three needs identified by Deci and Ryan, and in contrast to Uysal *et al.*’s findings, it is disclosure rather than non-disclosure that has the potential to thwart the needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence.

Organisational cultures where women experience judgement, where their credibility is questioned and where the reaction to disclosure is one of stigma, embarrassment and a desire to remove the woman from the organisation have negative impacts on the experience of work from all three perspectives; autonomy, competence and relatedness. Such reactions are driven by a lack of understanding of IP abuse, its complexities and its survivors and are steeped in abuse myths. If one believes the myths of abuse – that a woman is making things up, that she only has herself to blame, that she is a bad person; it becomes easy to see how one’s perception of the woman as a professional, a reliable colleague and a trustworthy individual is undermined. When a woman’s identity is undermined, when her abilities are questioned and when interactions with colleagues become strained, the three elements of Deci and Ryan’s model – competence, belongingness and autonomy are undermined leaving a woman vulnerable, alone and further victimised.

5.10 REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT SUPPORT MODEL

There is no legal requirement for workplaces to have specific policies in place to support women living with the effects of abuse. Workplace responsibilities to staff which interact with the experience of abuse might be legal requirements regarding Health and Safety and the provision of a safe working environment, or the organisation’s approach to Corporate Social Responsibility and Safeguarding in terms of providing a supportive environment for staff. Organisations and individuals alike, must be mindful of the kind of support that is offered to women in relation to IP Abuse, and how that offer is extended. When someone is in distress it can be an instinctive human reaction to want to look after and protect that person. Such concern can appear parental or even controlling in nature, and for a woman who is controlled and limited in the home domain, being pressured to accept help – however well intentioned – can cause a woman to withdraw from offers of help (Women’s Aid, 2022).

Additionally, though the trauma may have been shared or otherwise identified, the traumatised individual may not yet be emotionally ready to accept support; and helping someone against their will ceases to be helpful and becomes something potentially damaging and even retraumatising to the individual.

The women did not report any awareness of formalised policies put in place by their employers, and their experiences reflected an ad hoc approach to support which seemed to largely stem from their managers attitude to IP abuse – sometimes supportive, as in Antonia and Mitra’s experience, sometimes extremely hurtful and negative – as described by Nicole and Mona. Organisations who do choose to put formal workplace policies in place, tend to base these on the Recognise – Respond – Refer model; identified in the UK’s government guidelines and adopted by some high profile organisations including Vodafone and Lloyds (PHE, 2018). However, as identified by the TUC (2014), and reflected by the women’s experiences; the number of organisations who actually formally adopt a process as sadly few and far between. The following sections describe the women’s experiences of support against the backdrop of the most widely used model and presents some of their suggestions as to how women experiencing abuse might best be supported by their employers.

5.10.1 Recognise

The preferred model starts with Recognise and begins with the concept of IP abuse being something that co-workers will be able to identify, which participants described as potentially problematic. The women talked extensively about hiding the abuse at work and worked extremely hard to ensure that the abuse was not recognised in the workplace in order to maintain compartmentalisation - used by all the women as a coping mechanism.

VIVIENNE

...that compartmentalisation thing, I do it by myself. I do it instinctively. I don't actually need to be conscious or aware of it... Psych myself up, going into work, thinking, OK, you don't have to think about it, just go in, I just go in... It really. It's exactly the same reaction I had when I was a kid going into school

ANTONIA

It's not always possible, but this is something... I'm trying to do. I'm trying to tell myself "Antonia - this is your home life, just forget about it. Now you are at your other home [work]. Just concentrate on [the] things that you need to do here..."

Vivienne hid her abuse from co-workers (and friends) for more than 25 years; Mona simply moved roles when the risk of her co-workers finding out became too high; and Antonia and Mitra – despite positive working environments and close co-worker relationships – waited years to disclose. Some of the advice which accompanies the three R’s model identifies some of the signs which might be warning signs that a co-worker is experiencing abuse. These include, nervousness and anxiety, lateness or absence, or conversely increased hours spent at work, changes in work quality and changes in choice of clothes. These are absolutely behavioural changes that might be associated with abuse, but at the same time could be attributable to a whole host of other reasons. Additionally, these signs suggest changes in behaviour associated with the beginning of abuse, and are not indicative of long term or

ongoing abuse. Furthermore, the women talked about a sense of gradual realisation that they were in an abusive relationship. If it is not clear to the woman herself that she is being abused and her behaviour at work is that same as it ever was, this does beg the question of how a co-worker might realistically be able to recognise abuse. In Nicole's case, the abuse was obvious to colleagues due to the number and severity of physical injuries she sustained, and in Judith's case the abuse was identified when her abuser and her manager almost came to blows. In all other cases, the abuse went unnoticed by colleagues, despite potentially long-standing abuse – spanning more than 20 years in Vivienne's case.

In addition to recognising the signs of abuse, the model also includes discussion of the need to recognise abuse as a problem. In terms of supporting a survivor this aspect of the model is potentially more important as recognition and understanding while serving to break down myths associated with survivors of abuse would also be helpful to women who are not equipped to recognise the abuse they are experiencing in their own relationships. The women talked of their lack of understanding of what constitutes abuse, a lack of appropriate vocabulary (such as coercive control and gas lighting) and their acceptance of behaviour later identified as abuse as “part of being a woman” (Mona). In addition to helping workplaces understand the complexities of IP Abuse, there is a need for women themselves to better understand what constitutes a healthy relationship and that “part of being a woman” does not include sexual aggression and emotional manipulation. Despite a raising of the profile of IP abuse – particularly during COVID 19 – unhelpful stereotypes around what a typical survivor looks like or what constitutes abuse are still prevalent in the media and the wider population (Lloyd and Ramon, 2017). While the model promotes the creation and implementation of a workplace policy to support survivors as part of Recognition, take up of support in relation to other work life balance policies including access to Mental Health support or parental leave (Knaak *et al.*, 2019; Petts *et al.*, 2021) shows that cultural issues (both organisational and societal) play a huge role in whether or not staff feel able to access support without judgement.

5.10.2 Respond

In this second step, the guidance defines an appropriate response as empathetic and supportive, primarily grounded in a belief that the woman's disclosure is the truth. For Antonia and Mitra, this was exactly the response they received.

ANTONIA

...I remember the lovely hug that I received from my head teacher and from my team leader there, and I [will] never forget it... it was just so precious... They were just saying that whatever decision I made they were going to support me and they'd be on my side.

MITRA

Some of my friends you know co-workers, they would phone me when I was in court and everything... my ex drove me out of the house. I didn't have clothes... nothing. One person brought me clothes, brought me things, you know, sent me things...

Colleagues provided emotional support, genuine friendship and concern and recognised the abuse as the fault of the abuser. Mona, Nicole and Vivienne's experience was very different.

Nicole described her experience in one role (from which she was unfairly dismissed) of not being believed and a veiled accusation that she was lying about the abuse. Vivienne described colleagues as thinking she was delusional and Mona's experience included jokes at her expense and a total lack of empathy, which she found very confusing and out of step with what one human being who had experienced a traumatic experience might expect of another.

NICOLE

So I think they could have handled it better. I think they could have been far more supportive. But at the end of the day, everybody was saying that I was making stuff up so I wasn't the victim anymore

MONA

you just kind of expect kind of the bare minimum as the same way as if you were in a car accident or you fell down the stairs... but for this, it's just like now, you don't deserve any of that at all.

It does not seem controversial to suggest that co-workers address the issue of abuse sensitively and without judgement, but when even social workers (Fleckinger, 2020), medical professionals (Persson *et al.*, 2018) and counsellors (Thapar- Björkert and Morgan, 2010) are susceptible to IP abuse myths, the degree of work in terms of creating a supportive organisational culture should not be underestimated.

In common with Public Health England (PHE, 2022) the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (the professional body for HR professionals) has also created guidance which can be implemented to support an employee who is experiencing abuse (CIPD, 2020). This guidance – developed in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Commission - includes flexibility in terms of working hours and work location, time off work, safety planning at work and financial support including ensuring salary is paid into an account to which the abuser does not have access. The women identified all of these as ideal as ideal mechanisms which could be put in place to support women, while reporting that the implementation of these mechanisms is currently unpredictable. Mona's request for flexible hours and time off work was rejected, while Mitra and Antonia reported changes to working patterns that enabled them to stay in employment. Nicole's experience of workplace support differed dramatically between roles, experiencing support that she found suffocating in one role and becoming an outcast in another. Coming from a financial background, Nicole's questioned the economic viability of supporting a woman experiencing abuse, noting that from an organisational perspective it might be easier and more cost effective to terminate the employment of a woman experiencing abuse (potentially via a settlement agreement) than cope with the upheaval of work absence and the potential impact on work colleagues and the wider work environment of supporting an employee through a traumatic experience.

In terms of a response's appropriateness, there were two instances described by the women, were a workplace response – though well intentioned – had overstepped the mark and become inappropriate through too much support rather than not enough. In an earlier role, Nicole described a supportive response from her manager and colleagues which she found completely overwhelming. This response included a work instigated visit to a refuge and

personal offers of support from colleagues (including alternative accommodation). This left Nicole feeling coerced and uncomfortable and led to her leaving her role and relocating to another part of the country with her abuser for a “fresh start”. In Antonia’s case, her manager personally intervened and spoke directly to Antonia’s abuser. As someone without expertise in dealing with perpetrators this had the potential to make matters worse rather than better and potentially put Antonia at further risk by antagonising her abuser. At Antonia’s request, her manager ceased contact with the perpetrator.

ANTONIA

He had the conversation with my head teacher on the phone last year...but...no. My head teacher was actually suggesting if he could come for a cup of tea and have a chat with her. But I didn't want that to happen.

One of the suggestions included in the three Rs guidance is the creation of trained staff members able to facilitate a supportive conversation with an individual disclosing abuse. Similar to a Mental Health First Aider, such domestic abuse First Aiders might be the first port of call for someone seeking support. Judith – who trained as mental Health First Aider in her most recent role – suggested this as a potential support mechanism for women experiencing abuse. While Vivienne saw the value in such an approach, she was very concerned about the potential for such Domestic Abuse First Aiders to potentially overstep the mark – as demonstrated in Antonia and Nicole’s experience – and attempt to actively intervene without the appropriate skills and understanding of the dynamics of abuse. Vivienne described this possibility in terms of the role of a First Aider:

VIVIENNE

...if you are not trained, forget it... they came up with a basic mental health first aid, which I think is useful and clever, but you need to know your limitations. In the same way with First Aid. You know what you can do for CPR [but]... you don't say a First Aider is equivalent to a paramedic... let alone a doctor, you know what I mean?... If you're a First Aider... you're a very important point. I'm a very proud First Aider... but when I stop by a... a road traffic accident, there's only so much I can do if someone is bleeding to death. I phone 999. I give them the correct location and they give me advice as to what to do... And I think with mental health and therefore with abuse by extension, I think we need to have exactly the same reaction.

Leaving an abusive relationship is difficult. The point of leaving the relationship has been identified as a time of heightened danger for women and a woman is best placed to do this safely with the support of specialist agencies (Bruton and Tyson, 2018), exactly as described by Vivienne.

5.10.3 Refer

The final stage of the model is Refer. In the case of a child or a vulnerable adult the onus to refer should indeed be on whoever recognises that the individual is in danger. In the women’s case however, unsolicited referral on their behalf is problematic. Nicole reported being escorted to a refuge by her manager, which although well intentioned was firstly inappropriate and secondly traumatising for Nicole; subjecting her to controlling behaviour

at work. Unless there is an immediate risk to a woman at work, it is not appropriate for her workplace to refer on her behalf, but completely appropriate and extremely helpful to signpost her to service which could be beneficial; including the police, domestic abuse charities and counselling services. As described in Vodafone's guidance, this stage should relate to identifying organisations to which the woman can then self-refer, rather than making a referral on her part (Vodafone, 2022).

At its best, such a model could allow a vigilant and trusted co-worker to recognise that a woman is in need of help, and via proportionate, formalised mechanisms the organisation could sensitively support and signpost the woman to appropriate professionals. At its worst, the model could compel a woman to take action she is not prepared to take, as in Nicole's case. This response – though well meant – left her traumatised and resulted in her leaving the organisation and the only support network she had, putting her in increased danger.

5.10.4 Organisational Culture

Discussion with the women revealed that organisational culture as opposed to formalised workplace policies was perceived as more important and more influential in terms of the women's ongoing experience of work following disclosure. As noted by Knaak *et al.* (2019) and Petts *et al.* (2021); wellbeing policies put in place by organisations only benefit employees where a correspondingly supportive organisational culture allows staff to access that support without fear of repercussions. A supportive culture where women are still recognised as capable, responsible women with professional skills and talents after disclosure – just as they were before - helps women to maintain their professional identity, draw comfort from workplace interactions and still experience work as a space of personal autonomy and influence (Yragui *et al.*, 2012).

Such an organisational culture might be termed supportive, humanistic (Arnaud and Wasieleski, 2014) or to use an older term - eupsychian or enlightened (Maslow, 1965; 1998). Maslow advocated for organisational cultures which focussed on the satisfaction of the higher order needs of self-esteem and self-actualisation and although his model of enlightened management may have faded into obscurity, the ideas it represents have been revived more recently; with work meaning, employee wellbeing, work-life balance and CSR falling under the remit of enlightened leadership (Payne, 2000). Rego *et al.*'s 2007 investigation of real world instances of enlightened leadership practices identified 5 categories of eupsychian or enlightened leadership behaviours and 4 categories of employee reactions listed in the table below.

5.10.5 Figure 5 - Categories of leadership behaviour and employee response (Rego et al., 2007)

Categories of leadership behaviour	Categories of employee reaction
Promotion of employee self-determination or self-development	Psychological wellbeing
Respect for inner life or personal life of employee	Commitment
Kindness, compassion, loyalty, respect	Positive behaviour and attitude towards line manager
Promotion of positive interpersonal relationships and sense of community	Increased self-worth and feelings of appreciation
Courage and open-mindedness	

Rego et al.'s investigation identified a large number of critical incidents (175) across a wide range of organisations and interviewed staff to explore their experiences of and responses to leaders' behaviour. The most cited positive behaviours were promotion of self-determination or self-development and respect for individuals' personal lives. Examples of positive behaviours cited included being thanked for work, a line manager expressing sympathy for a bereavement, understanding of an employee's need to occasionally be absent from work, and the exchange of views and discussion of current affairs with a manager. Such interactions were reported as enhancing wellbeing and improving individuals feelings of self-worth. The sympathy and understanding experienced (in particular) by Mitra and Antonia are characteristic of exactly this enlightened approach to leadership and organisational behaviour.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most interactions recorded in Rego et al.'s study ran counter to this enlightened approach, falling under Maslow's heading of antieupychian leadership (referred to as authoritarian leadership by Bland et al. (2023)). Such negative behaviours were categorised under 3 main headings: unkindness, abuses of power and disrespect for the inner/personal life of employees. Such negative interactions are more characteristic of some of the experiences articulated by Mona and Nicole. In response to such behaviour, participants in Rego et al.'s study described instances of negative emotions including feelings of shame, strained team relationships and feelings of isolation as well as the desire to leave the organisation. Again, such negative responses to management behaviour are in line with Mona and Nicole's experiences.

In terms of supporting women living with the effects of IP Abuse, respecting employees' inner world goes hand in hand with destigmatisation and the challenging of preconceptions associated with abuse. A supportive, enlightened, organisational culture where individuals can disclose without fear, supported by carefully considered practical support and signposting – as experienced by Antonia and Mitra - would be extremely beneficial to women living with the effects of IP abuse.

5.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The above discussion explored the shared themes arising from the women's experiences: The mask of the survivor, Multiple roles, Workplace interactions, Control, Experiences of disclosure and support and The journey to survivorhood. The chapter set these against the backdrop of current literature and social context and considered these experiences in light of SDT – the theoretical lens selected for this research.

The women reported high levels of anticipated and internalised stigma, exacerbated by a lack of personal understanding of what constitutes IP Abuse, as well as the prevalence of negative stereotypes associated with survivors of abuse and the existence of widespread preconceptions in relation to victims and perpetrators. The sense of shame associated with their identity as a survivor of abuse was tempered by the women's tendency to hide their experiences of abuse from their co-workers and – as described by both Beecham and Rothman *et al.* – the women identified compartmentalisation and the adoption of a workplace persona as valuable coping mechanisms. The women described themselves and their experiences in terms of adopting three roles across their lives; mother, professional and woman; and in times of crisis, it was ultimately the role of mother that took precedence. The sense of compartmentalisation described by the women had far reaching implications on workplace interactions and the women described varying relationships with co-workers and other stakeholders which ranged from genuine friendships through self-affirming reassurance to more functional, transactional interactions.

The women's experiences of work provided many opportunities for the expression of personal autonomy, ranging from the assertion of financial or cultural independence, to workplace achievement and progression and the setting of personal boundaries. The decision of whether or not to disclose, the act of compartmentalisation and the creation of a clearly defined workplace identity are all exercises in personal autonomy. Though disclosure is cited as beneficial to abuse survivors, the act of disclosure runs the risk of negatively impacting a carefully constructed workplace identity, exposes the individual to the shame and blame associated with abuse and has the potential to remove what might be the only element of autonomy a survivor has over their own lives. The women – in line with the TUC's findings in relation to disclosure – identified disclosure as a potential risky and generally unappealing course of action. The women's experiences of disclosure (which were largely as a result of a critical incident) were mixed, with Antonia and Mitra describing very positive experiences of disclosure and support, but with the other women reporting largely negative experiences.

In terms of SDT, work was experienced by the women as a setting with the potential to support the three needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence. Although workplace interactions were varied, the workplace persona adopted by the women allowed them to feel recognised and accepted as valued professionals and provided a sense of belonging to a professional community if not to a tightly knit team. Being recognised in this way underpinned the needs of competence and belongingness identified SDT and the compartmentalisation adopted by the women along with the experience of workplace impact, created the sense of autonomy identified by Deci and Ryan as central to motivation and wellbeing.

Analysis of the women's experiences provide evidence for the consideration of IP abuse as a liminal experience in line with models such as that proposed by Naus *et al.* (2009) which describes the experience of living with, through and beyond a liminal event. The women's experiences, and the sense of moving backwards and forwards between stages of the liminal journey, also reflect the sustained liminality described by Little *et al.* (1998), with the women's experiences having a long lasting impact and the identity of IP Abuse survivor as being particularly long lasting. Moving on from their experiences meant different things to different individuals, with Vivienne reverting to the experience of hiding the abuse moving forward; in the cases of Mona, Judith and Nicole actively choosing to recast their experiences of abuse as a source of expertise and empathy opens the door to the possibility of embracing post traumatic transformation.

None of the women were aware of formalised policies in relation to supporting abuse survivors at their places of work, and reported that organisational culture and line manager attitude were pivotal in terms of the response to disclosure and any subsequent support offered. In terms of the current prevalent support model of the three Rs (recognise, respond, refer), the women's experiences and reflections cast some doubt on the appropriateness of such a response. Based on a safeguarding model used to support children and vulnerable adults, the current model assumes that co-workers will be able to recognise abuse and works on the assumption that abuse will be recognised by changes in behaviour or clothing (containing an inherent assumption that the abuse is new). The women's experiences reflected a rather different picture, where well-established abuse, compartmentalisation and concealment strategies adopted by the women made recognition difficult for co-workers. In terms of the advice given within current frameworks (such as that proposed by Vodafone (2022)), the advice with regard to the second and third stages of the model (respond and refer) has the potential to be extremely helpful to abuse survivors provided practical and emotional support is offered within a trauma informed, sensitive approach which is empowering rather than directive.

The following - concluding – chapter will demonstrate how the research findings outlined above provide answers to the research question and consider directions for future research.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of the work undertaken, gives an overview of the research's findings and the contributions made by the research; and gives some suggestions for future research directions.

6.2 SUMMARY OF WORK UNDERTAKEN

This thesis has explored the experience of work and workplace disclosure of abuse for women living with the effects of IP Abuse. The research was situated within an interpretivist paradigm and took a phenomenological approach. Seven women were interviewed and the accounts of their experiences of work and workplace disclosure were explored using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

6.3 REVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The shared themes arising from analysis of the women's experiences were;

- Shame, blame and the mask of the survivor
- Control
- Disclosure
- The journey to survivorhood
- Current Support Model

6.3.1 Shame, blame and the mask

IP Abuse is highly correlated with shame. Women experience high levels of anticipated and internalised stigma, fueled by a lack of understanding of IP Abuse, a prevalence of negative stereotypes associated with survivors and the existence of widespread preconceptions regarding idealised victims and perpetrators.

6.3.2 Control

Work provides ample opportunities for personal autonomy. Opportunities to exercise personal control range from financial independence, promotion and workplace achievement to control over personal identity and the setting of personal boundaries.

6.3.3 Disclosure

The women's experiences identified disclosure to be problematic. Survivors who disclose are often not believed and their disclosure is often viewed as problematic in a work context. These findings were not consistent with previous findings that have identified disclosure as helpful, but are in line with the TUC's evidence regarding the reluctance of survivors to disclose at work.

6.3.4 The journey

(Abuse as a liminal experience)

The women's experiences provided evidence that IP Abuse can be viewed as a liminal experience. Existing models of liminality describes a three stage model of living with, through and beyond a liminal experience; the women's experiences while generally conforming to this three stage model also contained elements of sustained liminality as described by Little *et al.*

(1998), with their journeys towards survivorhood including elements of repetition, and movement backwards and forwards between different stages of the liminal experience.

6.4 RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

6.4.1 Research Question and Theoretical Lens

This research posed the following question:

- What is the experience of work and workplace disclosure for women living with the effects of intimate partner abuse?

When conducting the research, work was viewed from the perspective of SDT (Deci and Ryan) and started from the premise that work has the potential to be a meaningful activity capable of meeting the three needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence. In answering the research question, the research addressed four research objectives as detailed in the sections below:

6.4.2 Objective 1

To understand how women living with the effects of IP abuse experience work

Work was indeed experienced as a meaningful activity capable of meeting a variety of needs and SDT proved a useful lens through which to view the women's experiences. Work appeared to fulfill a variety of purposes.

6.4.2.1 Autonomy

The experience of work provides a number of ways in which the women could express their autonomy, from workplace authority and responsibility to personal independence and financial autonomy. The decision of whether or not to disclose can be considered an exercise in personal autonomy as can the decision to clearly delineate the home and work domains and keep them separate. The curation of a workplace persona and the projection of a preferred identity were also described by the women as acts of personal autonomy. The decision to reframe the experience of abuse as a source of strength and empathy rather than a source of shame – whether by taking part in this research, or by moving into careers or projects in survivor-related fields - represents another exercise in personal control.

6.4.2.2 Belongingness

Workplace relationships were experienced in a variety of ways from emotionally close relationships with co-workers, to purely professional and transactional interactions. However relationships were experienced, the workplace provided a sense of belonging – either to a tight knit group of friends or to a professional community committed to the achievement of shared goals. The one exception to this sense of belongingness was Mona, who rejected workplace interactions following a negative experience of disclosure. Interactions were not limited to co-workers, with customers, service users and mentors also providing opportunities to experience connection. Vivienne also introduced the concept of the concealment of abuse as an opportunity to pass as a “normal person” and avoid the stigma and shame associated with being a survivor of abuse.

6.4.2.3 Competence

The women described work as an escape from the constraints of their home life providing physical and emotional space to distance themselves from the strain of life outside work. This space provided a much-needed distraction from home and also allowed the women to counter some of the negative commentary and demeaning actions to which they were subjected at home. Workplace achievements – big and small - and interactions with co-workers provided the women with reassurance of their skills, personal attributes and contribution to the world, allowing the women to feel like the professionally competent and capable women that they are.

The three needs identified within SDT are not unique to women living with the effects of IP Abuse, but their life outside work does create an unusual set of circumstances, where a domineering and abusive partner removes all sense of autonomy and competence and the shame associated with IP Abuse – and the subsequent unwillingness to disclose, even to close friends and family members – creates a situation diametrically opposed to the belongingness described by Deci and Ryan as so central to wellbeing. Without such extremes within one's personal life, the home domain has the potential to meet the three needs of SDT, to some degree at least and Deci and Ryan recognise the possibility of the needs being met collectively across the two domains – akin to the compensation relationship between the two domains discussed by Campbell Clark, where work bridges the gaps left by the home domain. In contrast in the case of women living with the effects of abuse work does not merely bridge the gaps, but provides the only source for meeting the three needs.

6.4.3 Objective 2

To explore what influences the decision of whether or not to disclose the experience of IP Abuse to co-workers

The decision of whether or not to disclose is complex and in most instances the women did not actively choose to disclose, but instead the abuse became apparent as a result of a critical incident. The women's fears surrounding disclosure were heavily influenced by feelings of shame and internalised stigma and fears around how co-workers would react. Abuse myths and preconceived ideas of ideal victims - to which professional women do not conform – create suspicion and potentially lead to women who disclose receiving a negative reception, as evidenced by the women's experiences.

Uysal *et al.* (2009) concluded that self-concealment negatively impacts wellbeing as it thwarts satisfaction of the three basic needs of autonomy, relatedness (or belongingness) and competence. These findings do not align with the women's perceptions of the workplace disclosure of IP Abuse. The women (with limited exceptions) chose to not disclose their experiences of abuse out of fear of rejection, blame and that their professional credibility would be undermined.

6.4.4 Objective 3

To understand whether (and how) the experience of work changes following disclosure

The issue of how work changes following disclosure can be divided into two categories: firstly how the experience of work changes as a result of workplace reaction and response to

disclosure, and secondly how work changes as a response to a shift in perspective in relation to work as a whole on the part of the woman.

6.4.4.1 Positive workplace response

The positive response most valued by the women was, ironically, that nothing changes; or to be more accurate nothing about the women's relationship with their co-workers. Where myths and victim blaming do not prevail, the relationship between the women and their co-workers remained unchanged. In such instances, the women's workplace identity as a trusted, valued, professional co-worker is reinforced and the alternative negative perception of a survivor as a trouble-maker who is to blame for their own victimisation is suppressed. As such, the needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence remain supported as perceptions of the woman as a capable, reliable professional remain unchanged.

For women not yet ready to accept help, accidental disclosure can be extremely stressful. Well intentioned support can feel overwhelming for someone still coming to terms with their experiences and emotions. The desire to help others is of course laudable and under normal circumstances would be appreciated – but these are not normal circumstances. Help – including referral to specialist services and attempting to make arrangements on a woman's behalf - can be interpreted by survivors as undermining or potentially controlling, thwarting the important need of autonomy.

6.4.4.2 Negative workplace response

Negative workplace reactions experienced by the women included changes in colleague relationships and evaluation of a woman's professionalism – ultimately leading to constructive dismissal, actual dismissal, redundancy, refusal to accommodate reasonable requests for flexible working and public shaming of the survivor (in the shape of jokes at the survivors expense). Such reactions serve to reinforce the anticipated and internalised stigma already associated with being a survivor of IP Abuse and result in a woman leaving her place of work – either voluntarily in order to escape the hostile working environment, or involuntary as a result of actions taken by the employer. Negative response to disclosure can be extremely damaging (Dworkin and Schumacher, 2018) and undermine the sense of autonomy, belongingness and competence previously enjoyed prior to disclosure.

6.4.4.3 A new role for work

Three of the women (Nicole, Judith and Mona) have opted for a change of career, with each woman choosing to enter a sphere associated with supporting women who have experienced IP abuse. In Nicole's case this means working for a charitable organisation, in Judith's case the desire to work in a similar role once she is well enough to do so and in Monas case being engaged in a creative project conceived to support women living with the effects of IP abuse (running alongside her salaried work). Such a change in role has the potential to allow the same support for the needs of autonomy, belongingness and competence as in prior roles, but when surrounded by individuals committed to supporting women living with the effects of abuse, the need for self-concealment is reduced. In such an environment, freed from damaging myths and judgement, the women are free to either disclose or not disclose as they see fit. A specialist role in the sphere of domestic abuse, also recasts what was once a source of shame as a source of expertise and empathy. Personal experience adds an extra dimension

of competence to such work and shared purpose and complete autonomy over how much one reveals of oneself further serves to support the needs of belongingness and autonomy.

6.4.5 Objective 4

To establish how useful and easily accessible workplace support is for women living with the effects of abuse

None of the women involved in this research were aware of a formal domestic abuse policy being in place at any of the workplaces they discussed (noting that Nicole, Mona and Judith described their experiences at multiple employers). Any support that was forthcoming was at the discretion of management and responses were variable. Discussion with the women in relation to their preferred support identified some potential issues with the current support model which are detailed in section 6.5.1.

6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

6.5.1 Potential issues with the current support model

The existing model (based on the three Rs framework) relies on an implicit assumption that the role of co-workers and managers in the workplace is to recognise problems and fix them on behalf of survivors who are unable to do so themselves. Rather than create an environment where women feel safe to disclose and can be assured that they will still be seen as strong capable women, this approach has the potential to cast women as helpless, hapless victims who must be saved. Such an approach risks undermining women's sense of autonomy and competence.

The three R's model is put in place by organisations who have taken an active role in supporting survivors – and as such should be commended - one could however argue that the foundation of the model potentially reflects a somewhat naïve approach to supporting survivors by not emphasising the central role of organisational culture and destigmatisation in supporting women. A supportive organisational culture and workplace training on the nature of IP Abuse are recommended as mechanisms to support the implementation of the Recognise – Respond – Refer framework, when in fact foregrounding these two support mechanisms would provide a more effective framework.

6.5.2 The need for education

All the women described a lack of awareness as to what constitutes abuse and described a delay in recognising themselves as women in an abusive relationship. This experience is perhaps not surprising when one considers that opportunities to access education in relation to IP abuse are restricted to those who have been identified as at risk or those who have actively sought out specialist services.

It is heartening to see healthy relationships make their way onto the national curriculum meaning that young women currently making their way through the school system will be better equipped than their predecessors. As more organisations embrace wellbeing at work, incorporating information relating to abuse, relationships and how to access support into broader wellbeing support and training would raise awareness of abuse and enable those in abusive relationships to recognise the signs.

6.5.3 The need for more supportive organisational culture

Valcour *et al.* (2011) identified that it is employees perceptions of social support, rather than the existence of or content of support policies which plays the largest role in predicting a positive workplace experience. The perception of support, and of the workplace as a supportive environment, is key – with the policies themselves playing a secondary role. A supportive organisational culture creates an environment where broader social challenges are identified and accepted as part of modern life and creates an environment where employees can safely disclose; and by sharing their stories, challenge deeply ingrained survivor stereotypes (Santos, 2023). Such a culture nurtures co-worker and manager relationships and establishes a climate where support and empathy are part of the prevailing style of communication and co-worker interactions are non-judgemental and come from a place of community and belongingness. Such organisational cultures allow for authentic behaviour and unrestricted psychological movement between the home and work domain.

This desire for more humane organisational cultures sits comfortably with Arnaud and Wasieleski (2014) description of humanistic management (and its potential application to HRM) and Monaci's writings on embedding what he refers to as "humanising culture" (2020). Both writers (supported by Honneth (2008)) emphasise the need to promote organisational cultures which revolve around the concepts of dignity and integrity, which encourage organisational citizenship behaviour and allow organisational members to flourish. Monaci (2020) describes the concept of workplaces as communities and alludes to the central tenets of SDT theory as key to a humanising culture, and Arnaud and Wasieleski (2014) explicitly make this link – identifying the creation of the supportive work environment described by Deci and Ryan with its focus on promoting a sense of autonomy, belongingness and competence for all members of the organisation.

In terms of how a supportive organisational culture might manifest itself, leaders could look to Maslow's description of enlightened leadership. Via Rego *et al.*'s exploration of employee/manager interactions, 5 categories of leadership behaviour which could be categorised as enlightened were identified; promotion of self-determination and self-development, respect for employees' personal lives, kindness and compassion, promotion of positive relationships and courage, and open-mindedness.

A truly supportive, compassionate workplace is one where employee voice and psychological safety are centred; where life challenges are accepted as part of normal life and not assumed to be a source of weakness or a detriment to personal and professional credibility. By following Maslow's example of enlightened leadership - embracing open-mindedness and normalising respect for the personal life (and associated challenges) of others, leaders can build supportive organisational cultures where individuals thrive and everybody benefits (Bland *et al.*, 2023).

6.6 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY

6.6.1 SDT as a lens

This research has provided structured, theory-driven insight into the lived experience of work and how work is perceived by women living with the effects of IP Abuse, previously identified as missing from the literature (Deen *et al.*, 2022). As surmised by Deen *et al.*, SDT proved to

be a very useful framework through which to view IP Abuse (in this instance - in the context of the workplace).

6.6.2 SDT and disclosure

Findings from the research did not support Uysal *et al.*'s (2009) analysis that self-concealment – via the mechanism of SDT – is damaging to wellbeing. On the contrary, the women described the experience of disclosure as damaging to feelings of autonomy, competence and belongingness having encountered largely negative experiences of disclosure and described compartmentalisation as beneficial to meeting the three needs. It is noteworthy that Uysal *et al.*'s research was not specifically conducted in relation to IP Abuse, and in line with Quinn *et al.*'s findings (2014), it seems that not all stigmatised identities are equal, and that some identities are more stigmatised than others. In a world where responses to abuse survivors mirrored attitudes to addiction (as described in Quinn *et al.*'s research), the disclosure of IP Abuse could indeed provide benefits from the perspective of SDT.

6.6.3 The role of money

This research supports the findings of a number of researchers that work provides a variety of benefits for women living with the effects of abuse. However, the women's experience of work in relation to money are somewhat mixed and in part, deviate from findings so far.

Existing research identifies financial autonomy as a factor enabling a woman to exit an abusive relationship, however, despite relatively senior positions and commensurate salaries, Nicole and Vivienne remained in their relationships for many years. Ultimately it was support from the charity and a gradual realisation of their situations that enabled them to leave. Money made their exits simpler, but it was not money that provided the impetus to leave. Neither Judith nor Mitra described a significant role for money in either their experiences of work or their decision to exit their respective relationships. Antonia's experience conformed more to findings so far in relation to money in that she described financial dependence as her primary reason for remaining with the perpetrator. Her fears with regard to leaving stem from the idea that leaving would necessitate "living with strangers" as she believes she would be unable to afford to live on her own.

Fran's need for financial autonomy and her resulting return to work came as a direct result of the end of the relationship. In her case rather than financial independence provided by work equipping her with the means to leave the relationship, the end of the relationship (and the resulting financial hardship) pushed her back into work.

6.6.4 The risks of disclosure

The women's experiences do not support those of Kumar and Casey (2017) and Swanberg *et al.* (2007) who identified workplace disclosure as beneficial to women. On the contrary, the women's experiences identified disclosure as a high risk strategy which in most cases resulted in a negative impact, leading to women losing their job via a variety of mechanisms or leaving voluntarily to avoid the shame and embarrassment of disclosure. In their 2022 review, Deen *et al.* noted the fear of negative repercussions that many women experience in relation to disclosure (e.g., losing their job) and they also noted that despite this fear, to date there had been no empirical evidence of such negative consequences. Nicole's experience of disclosure

at more than one employer and Mona's experience provide evidence that these fears are indeed well-founded.

6.6.5 IP abuse as a liminal experience

The research identifies the potential for IP Abuse to be viewed as a liminal experience. As identified by Campos *et al.* (2019), research characterising IP abuse as a liminal experience is rare, although work conducted by Allen and Wozniak (2013) and Campos *et al.* (2019) point to its applicability. The women's journeys conformed to the premise of liminality as they were characterised by the broad stages of before, during and after; or living with, through and beyond. Analysis of the women's journeys however were more complex than the linear three stage journey previously described and instead consisted of movements backwards and forwards between stages. This view of the liminal journey is reminiscent of the sense of sustained liminality described by Little *et al.* (1998).

6.6.6 The lived experience of work

Despite a high level of interest in the meaning of work, much of the exploration of work meaning to date has focussed on quantitative measures of meaning, leaving the lived experience of work largely unexplored. This research has explored the lived experiences of work for a group of individuals previously overlooked in the work meaning literature, and in doing so has expanded the shared understanding of the role of work and the multiple meanings that work might hold, both from a methodological and a diversity perspective.

6.7 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

6.7.1 Policy versus reality

Given findings on the take up rates of staff support policies (and the prevailing workplace attitudes to those who seek help), it is clear that workplace perceptions of disclosure or accessing support significantly impact whether or not individuals ask for support (as opposed to the existence of a policy). When combined with findings in relation to Victim Support workers - who begin by stating that blame only ever lies with the abuser, but in subsequent, less formal conversation describe victims as culpable for their own abuse - this paints a stark picture when it comes to how disclosure might be received at work. Research that compared organisational policy (with regard to supporting those that seek help) with how line managers say they would respond if a disclosure was made and further comparison against the reception that those who disclosed actually received; could highlight mismatches. Comparison of policy, stated response and actual experience would help to shed light on the actual experience of disclosure rather than the idealised version that appears in a policy document.

6.7.2 Disclosure of other traumatic life events

Mona expressed a view that those who disclose abuse are met with a lack of empathy, drawing a comparison with the empathy one might expect to receive if one had sustained a car accident and the lack of empathy she received on disclosure. Findings as to differing levels of anticipated and internalised stigma associated with those recovering from addiction compared to other participants in their study, suggest that not all concealable stigmatised identities are equally stigmatised, and that some disclosures are likely to be received better than others. Future research could explore the disclosure of (and resulting workplace

response to) other traumatic life events for example responses to disclosure of fertility issues or life changing diagnoses. In the course of this research, I have become aware of a woman who disclosed her cancer diagnosis at work and was subsequently referred to at work as “cancer-girl”, which suggests there is much to be done to firstly identify and secondly take steps to respond to negative responses to trauma disclosure.

6.7.3 Disclosure in the context of gendered workplaces

The most positive responses to disclosure were received in working environments characterised by high levels of female employees – Mitra’s experience in a children’s residential care facility, Antonia’s experiences in a primary school setting and Judith’s later experience of disclosure (following the reappearance of her husband) also in a primary school. Future research could take a structured approach to comparing the experiences of disclosure in two stereotypically gendered workplace settings; one, such as primary teaching, characterised by a majority of female employees and one traditionally associated with higher levels of male employees. Such exploration could add to work such as that undertaken by Garden and Weller (2017) and Hackett *et al.* (2018) with regard to differences in workplace behaviour associated with gender. Beecham (2009) also alluded to differing responses associated with gendered workplace settings (drawing comparisons between the experiences of a participant who worked in nursing and another who worked in a male-dominated manufacturing environment) and made a similar suggestion for a more structured direct comparison.

6.7.4 IP Abuse and the home worker

Although COVID-19 impacted the research methods, the full impact of COVID-19 and its interaction with the lived experience of work and workplace disclosure has not been explored in this research. With the exception of Antonia (who was still living with her abuser at the time of the interview) the women were reflecting on experiences of work which predated the pandemic. As such there is scope to investigate the experience of work for women living with abuse in the context of COVID-19 and explore the impact of the Pandemic Paradox. Furthermore, the increase in hybrid and remote working following COVID-19 increases the urgency for more research which explores; the role of work and the impact of home working for women living with their abusers, how workplace can best support employees in this situation and what employers’ legal responsibilities to such employees might be (with regard to Health and Safety while working).

6.8 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

6.8.1 Impact on the research

The interviews took place during Autumn/Winter 2020/2021. Originally the interviews had been planned as face to face interactions, however due to COVID-19 restrictions the interviews were rescheduled as remote interviews. The only exception to this was Antonia, who for safety reasons was interviewed face to face once restrictions were lifted. The timing of the interviews meant that, although the interviews took place during and after lockdown, the women were reflecting back on a pre-lockdown period of employment. It was not therefore possible to explore the experience of work before and during lockdown from a comparative perspective.

6.8.2 The Pandemic Paradox

For women already living with a volatile partner, lockdown – rather than providing safety – increased the risk to their safety and wellbeing. The increase in calls to helplines gave rise to fears of a pandemic within a pandemic (Evans *et al.*, 2020; Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020) – a surge in cases of abuse, with women left unable to access face to face support or refuge due to restrictions, creating what Bradbury-Jones and Isham describe as the pandemic paradox – where restrictions put in place to keep people safe, actually increased the risks to their safety.

The changes to working practices forced by COVID-19 restrictions have created new opportunities for organisations in terms of flexible working, restructuring and potential cost savings. For women experiencing IP abuse however, a shift towards home working has the potential to remove coping mechanisms on which survivors have come to rely, creating another paradox – where policies put in place to (arguably) help employees reduce stress and create a more agreeable work/life balance actually make an individual's life more difficult. The recent verdict in a worker's compensation case in Australia highlights the urgent need to reconsider these responsibilities; where following the domestic homicide of an employee who was working from home, the victim's employer was required to pay compensation (ABC - Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). Even if employers are reticent regarding the adoption of policies to support survivors from the perspective of employee wellbeing, perhaps the risk of financial losses might provide the impetus required to do so.

It was not only women living with the effects of abuse who experienced the phenomenon of the pandemic paradox. Many people living alone or living with pre-existing mental health conditions experienced additional stress and isolation as a result of restrictions and the limiting of social contact (Jackson *et al.*, 2020; Elbogen *et al.*, 2021). The issues of duty of care and employee wellbeing identified in relation to those women who are not safe in their own homes, should also be extended into the realms of mental health. The enforcement of working from home as a result of COVID-19 proved that many organisations can function as normal with the majority of (or even all) staff working from home. The psychological and cultural barriers that historically prevented remote working have been eroded and the concept of working from home has been proven. The cost savings associated with encouraging remote working and downsizing office space are obvious and many organisations previously unwilling to introduce remote working are now keen to embrace it. Such tangible cost savings however need to be weighed against the potential risks to staff's physical and mental wellbeing in terms of both physical safety and social and emotional enrichment.

6.9 FINAL REFLECTIONS

As I come to the end of my PhD journey I have identified a number of personal findings and conclusions that to some degree run parallel to the findings and conclusions articulated within this research. A number of researchers have identified the risks of vicarious trauma (among for example - social workers and documentary researchers), and as noted previously (in section 3.8.1) I underestimated the physical and emotional impact that the research would have on me, despite considering it in an abstract way. I would counsel any researchers undertaking personally emotive research to be genuinely conscious of this as a possibility and

pre-emptively ensure safeguards are in place to protect their own wellbeing and not only that of participants.

Speaking to the women, hearing their stories and exploring their experiences has helped me to gain a better understanding of my own childhood experiences and the ongoing impact they have on me as an adult. At the time of writing my Victim Personal Statement (a statement written by victims of crime to describe how they have been impacted by a crime which is often referred to in court proceedings (GOV.UK, 2013)), I was aware only of the immediate impact of my mum's death, but this research and my interactions with the women and their accounts has given me the time, space and context to gain deeper personal insight into the ongoing impact of these experiences. Vivienne's account in particular, and her distinction between people who have experienced abuse and "normal people" has led me both to reflect more benevolently on some of my more disappointing experiences of disclosure, and to consider the possibility of seeking peer support myself as part of the ongoing process of recovery.

In my capacity as a domestic abuse researcher, I have recently been invited to give presentations and question and answer sessions to a group of line managers and HR professionals in a commercial context, and to student midwives in an academic setting. During these sessions I disclosed my experiences of growing up in an abusive home. I have never before disclosed this information in a professional context, but in line with the women's experiences I am trying to recast my experiences as a source of empathy and expertise rather than something to both hide and hide from. This is still a work in progress.

6.9.1 Reflection – My PhD journey

In Wilkinson's discussion of researcher reflexivity (1988), she describes the reciprocal relationship between the researcher's own life experience and the research. When reading about researcher reflexivity I was particularly taken by the concept of constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1955) and the idea that "all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision and replacement" (Kelly, 1955, p15). This has certainly been my experience of undertaking this project. My experiences up to now undoubtedly influenced the research both in terms of how I came to the decision to embark on the research and how I approached and conducted all elements of the research. In turn my experience of research has caused me to reflect on my own decision and experiences and in some cases see them in a new light. This sense of alternative understanding and constructions was also brought to mind when a friend recently asked why a PhD takes so long asking, "why can't you just do it in a year?" In any area of life one can only make a decision based on the information available at the time. Over time things may become clearer, more information may become available and a bit of distance – be it temporal, physical or psychological – may allow for valuable reflection. With the benefit of all of this, one might make a different decision now. For me, this idea reflects my PhD journey. The project that I would have completed three years ago is not the same as the project I have now completed with the benefit of all of these things and I am grateful for the time, distance and opportunities for reflection which have enabled me to expand my understanding and – I hope - do justice to the women's accounts.

APPENDIX I - TERMINOLOGY

Violence or Abuse

The term domestic abuse has a range of meanings, and covers a variety of behaviours (Shelter, 2020). The statutory definition confirms the working definition that has previously been collectively understood across the sector, in that domestic abuse relates to abusive behaviour between those in (or previously in) a relationship or between family members (GOV.UK, 2021). In effect this means the term domestic abuse relates to violence or abuse between intimate partners, female genital mutilation, so called 'honour based violence', forced marriage and violence or abusive behaviour between siblings over the age of 16 or violent or abusive behaviour between parents and adult children.

Historically domestic violence or domestic abuse was understood to exclusively refer to physical violence perpetrated by men against women, employing terms such as 'wife beating' or 'battered wives'. More recent exploration of violence and abuse in a domestic setting has revealed domestic abuse to be a much broader issue, with the potential for abuse to be inflicted by perpetrators and against survivors of any gender and sexual orientation.

After years of campaigning by organisations who support survivors, a formal statutory definition of domestic abuse has finally been created via the recent Domestic Abuse Act (GOV.UK, 2021). Prior to this no formal statutory definition of domestic abuse existed (GOV.UK, 2020) although there was general consensus across the sector as to the broad range of tactics encompassed by domestic abuse. The statutory definition recognises abuse as encompassing not just physical violence, but also psychological, sexual, emotional and financial abuse in addition to legislating for additional support for survivors both in terms of accessing legal and practical support and providing additional measures to protect victims during legal proceedings.

The words abuse and violence tend to be used interchangeably and the decision to use one term at the expense of the other is often a case of personal choice. Some theorists and practitioners (McKie, 2005) argue that the word abuse is a less shocking word than violence and minimises the suffering of survivors, however this broader term is a more accurate reflection of the range of tactics employed by perpetrators and the ways in which survivors suffer. For the purposes of this research, I have therefore decided to use the term 'abuse'.

Domestic or intimate partner?

'Domestic' suggest that the violence or abuse takes place in the home environment. Domestic violence and abuse is not confined to the four walls of the home, extending into the workplace (Rothman *et al.*, 2007; TUC, 2014) and potentially continuing once partners are no longer living together, or in the case of younger survivors, where the perpetrator and survivor have never lived together.

The fact that a variety of terms including domestic violence, intimate partner abuse and wife beating (among others) have been used interchangeably has far reaching implications with regard to the estimation of prevalence rates and recording of survivors' experiences (Beecham, 2009). Additionally, the prevalence for quantitative analysis of the relationship between intimate partner abuse and work

reveals a lack of exploration (particularly in a UK context) of women's lived experiences of work while experiencing abuse (Beecham, 2009).

Though the term domestic abuse is most commonly associated with violence and abuse within an intimate relationship setting, (Hoffman and Edwards, 2004) identified that sibling violence is actually the most common form of domestic abuse with brothers more likely to engage in sibling violence than sisters, or brothers and sisters. The fact that the term domestic abuse covers a variety of behaviours (much wider than the layman's understanding of the definition) makes it too broad a definition to be used in the current research. The term 'intimate partner' is considered to be a more precise and therefore more appropriate descriptor. The descriptor 'intimate partner' reflects the fact that abuse can take place outside of the domestic environment and narrows the focus to violence that is perpetrated within an existing intimate relationship, or between individuals who have previously been involved in an intimate relationship, rather than other family members. The current research will therefore adopt the term 'intimate partner abuse'- abbreviated to IP Abuse .

Living with the effects of abuse

There is a widely held assumption that women who experience abuse have the power to stop the abuse by simply leaving the relationship, leading to the question; "why doesn't she just leave?". This question described by Bruton and Tyson (2018) as "the stock standard question" (p340) is so widely ingrained in discussion of IP Abuse that it is (or is included in) the title of a staggering number of books and articles related to women's experiences of abuse. Though the statutory definition of domestic abuse does note that the relationship between two people required for behaviour to fit the statutory definition does include people who have previously been in a relationship (in addition to those that were in a relationship when the abuse was taking place), this does not tally with the general population's view that abuse can be ended by a woman, if she simply walks away (Bruton and Tyson, 2018). Such simplistic views are doubly problematic based firstly on the assumption that even if women have not brought the abuse on themselves, that they are somehow complicit in the continuation of the abuse by choosing to stay in an abusive relationship, and secondly that abuse stops once a romantic relationship ends. Bruton and Tyson's exploration of the experience of Australian women leaving abusive relationships confirmed other findings (including Zarbock, 2008; Ferreira and Matos, 2013 and Morrison, 2015) that the risk of violence escalates when a woman leaves an abusive relationship. One does not have to (still) be in a relationship to experience IP Abuse. For this reason, the research uses the term "women living with the effects of IP Abuse", to recognise that women can experience IP Abuse both within the confines of an abusive relationship and beyond, and that the experience of abuse has ongoing effects (beyond the end of the relationship) whether physical, emotional or financial.

APPENDIX II – SUMMARY INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research study

Who?

My name is Sinead and I am postgraduate researcher at the University of Northampton with a particular interest in work meaning. I am also a Trustee of [The Charity] and completed a piece of research last year involving the staff at [The Charity].

What?

This study focuses on the experiences of women who have survived domestic abuse; asking them to reflect on the experience of working while experiencing domestic abuse.

Participation in the research study is completely voluntary and is independent of [The Charity] and its services. Participating in the research, deciding not to participate, or deciding to withdraw from the research will not affect your access to [The Charity] staff or services in any way.

Where?

All participants in the research study will be interviewed. Given the current restrictions around COVID 19, interviews are likely to take place remotely, via Skype, or Microsoft Teams. The interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed before being analysed.

Why?

The information obtained from this study will be the basis for my PhD thesis. The information collected will also help to further the understanding of work meaning in general, and more specifically for women experiencing domestic abuse and will contribute to the discussion around policies at work for women experiencing abuse, and how employers can effectively support women.

How?

All the information collected for this study will be anonymised. Any details that might identify you will be removed. The data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and the University's secure server.

When?

Interviews are planned to take place between September and December (at a time convenient for you)

What Next?

If you think you might be interested and would like more information, please let [The Contact at the charity] know and she will pass your mobile number to me. I will then contact you by text to identify a convenient time to talk. If after a preliminary chat you would like to proceed, I will give you a formal participant information sheet and participant consent form to sign. If you decide to participate, we can then find a convenient time for the interview. Interviews are expected to last approximately one hour - but may be a little longer.

Taking part in the research provides an opportunity for you to reflect on what work means to you. I am passionate about this area of research and hope these interviews will be a positive experience for all participants.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Sinead

APPENDIX III – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Study title

How do women who have experienced *intimate partner abuse construct work meaning?

**The term intimate partner abuse will be used in the study to differentiate it from any other forms of familial abuse which might legally fall under the heading of domestic abuse.*

Researcher

Sinead McNeill

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. So that you can decide whether or not you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information to help you make your decision; discuss it with others if you wish and please ask if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information.

Who is doing the research?

I am a postgraduate researcher at the University of Northampton with a particular interest in work meaning. I completed a piece of research two years ago involving the staff at [The Charity]

I am also a Trustee at [The Charity] and know the organisation quite well. My mum experienced intimate partner abuse throughout her 40 year marriage and loved her job. Over the last few years (since my mum passed away) I have been thinking a great deal about what work meant to her in the context of her life outside work.

I see this research as a means of adding to the shared knowledge around both the subject areas of meaning in work and the experience of survivors of intimate partner abuse and completing a piece of work that holds great personal meaning.

What is the purpose of the study?

To date research on work meaning has tended to focus on particular groups – usually within management - and as such has been criticised for focusing too heavily on the experiences of men in relatively privileged positions. While work meaning is recognised as being very personal, it has often been the case that the research so far has been assumed to be representative of everyone's experience.

By extending the shared knowledge of work meaning to include the experiences of women experiencing intimate partner abuse, these preconceived notions of work meaning can be

challenged and a richer understanding of the range of experiences of work meaning can be achieved.

Why have I been invited to participate?

The study focuses on the experiences of women who have experienced intimate partner abuse; asking them to reflect on the experience of working during this time. As a survivor who has previously used [The Charity]'s services, you are eligible to participate.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the research study is completely voluntary. Those taking part in the study will be given an information sheet like this to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. Anyone taking part in the study is free to withdraw during within 30 days of interview.

What will my participation involve?

All participants in the research study will be interviewed. The interviews will take place at a time convenient for you between Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021 via Zoom, Skype or a similar technology. Interviews will be semi structured in nature and should take 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed before being analysed.

If you have a picture which describes how you feel about work (a photo or something you have drawn) you could bring this to the interview. Any photos which identify people or places will not be shared outside the interview and will purely be used to start a conversation about work.

If at any time during the interview you wish to stop the recording, you are free to do so. You are of course free to decline to answer any question within the interview or terminate the interview if you choose to.

Taking part in the research provides an opportunity for you to reflect on what work means to you. I am passionate about this area of research and hope these interviews will be a positive experience for all participants.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The information obtained from this study will be the basis for my PhD thesis. The information collected will also help to further the understanding of work meaning in general, and more specifically for women experiencing intimate partner abuse and will contribute to the discussion around policies at work for women experiencing abuse, and how employers can effectively support women.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?

Interviews will cover your experience of work, how you felt about work and how you might describe, for example, a typical day; during a period of time when you were experiencing intimate partner abuse. While I hope the experience will be extremely positive for all participants, I appreciate there is a possibility that interviews may become emotional. In advance of the interview (and as part of your decision-making process) it might be useful to consider your existing support network and who you would talk to if you felt you needed some support.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, then please contact me or one of my supervisors (whose contact details are listed below).

Will my information be kept confidential?

All the information collected for this study will be anonymised. Any details that might identify you will be removed. The data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and the University's secure server.

Confidentiality will only be breached in the event of a safeguarding issue.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results from this study will form the basis of my PhD thesis and may be published in part or in full. The data collected may also be used in the future as part of further studies, for example a longer-term study, or as a source of comparison in another study. However, if it is used it will always remain anonymous.

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, then please just let me know.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Northampton Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions about this study or your possible involvement then please contact me using the contact details below.

Statement of Independence

Although initial contact regarding the research was through [The Charity], the research is independent of [The Charity] and its services. Participating in the research, deciding not to participate, or deciding to withdraw from the research will not affect your access to [The Charity] staff or services in any way.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researcher:	Sinead McNeill	sinead.mcneill@northampton.ac.uk
Supervisor:	Sarah Jones	sarah.jones@northampton.ac.uk
Supervisor:	Maged Zakher	maged.zakher@northampton.ac.uk

APPENDIX IV – CONSENT

Confirmation of Participant Consent

How do women who have experienced intimate partner abuse construct work meaning?

Please read each statement below. If you are happy to consent, please reply to this email stating “please accept this email as my consent to participate in this research”

Thank you

1. I have read and understood the information provided to me in the Participant Information Sheet.
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about this research.
3. I agree to the interview being recorded via Zoom and the subsequent transcription of the interview content.
4. I understand that transcripts will be redacted with regard to identifying information (e.g., names of individuals or places)
5. I understand that I can decline to answer any questions, or request that the recording is paused at any point.
6. I understand that I can withdraw my answers in part or full, anytime up until 30 days after my interview date.
7. I agree to anonymised quotations being used in academic presentations or publications of this work.
8. I understand the limits to confidentiality relating to the research; i.e. that confidentiality will only be breached if there is a safeguarding concern.
9. I agree to my anonymised data being used in subsequent work that builds on this current project, e.g., a longer term project or comparative work (subject to the researcher’s right to manage access to the data).
10. I have considered how participation might impact my wellbeing (emotional or otherwise) and have identified the steps I would take to access support if necessary.

APPENDIX V – QUESTION PROMPTS

OPENING

MIDDLE

CLOSING

- *Consent*
- *My role*
- *Encourage narrative*

- *Revisit issues raised*
- *Clarification*
- *More direction*

- *Links to theory*
- *Explore contradictions*
- *Closing thoughts*
- *Thank you!*

QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

OPENING

Thank you for taking part
Thank you for returning consent form
Reconfirm consent
Reiterate my role
Did you manage to bring anything with you?
Can you tell me about your job
What was a typical day at work like?
Can you talk me through what you were doing workwise?

ROLE and MEANING

In terms of the role work played in your life, how important was it? What role did it play?
From a purely practical perspective, did work help you?
Did you ever feel that work hindered you or caused you problems?

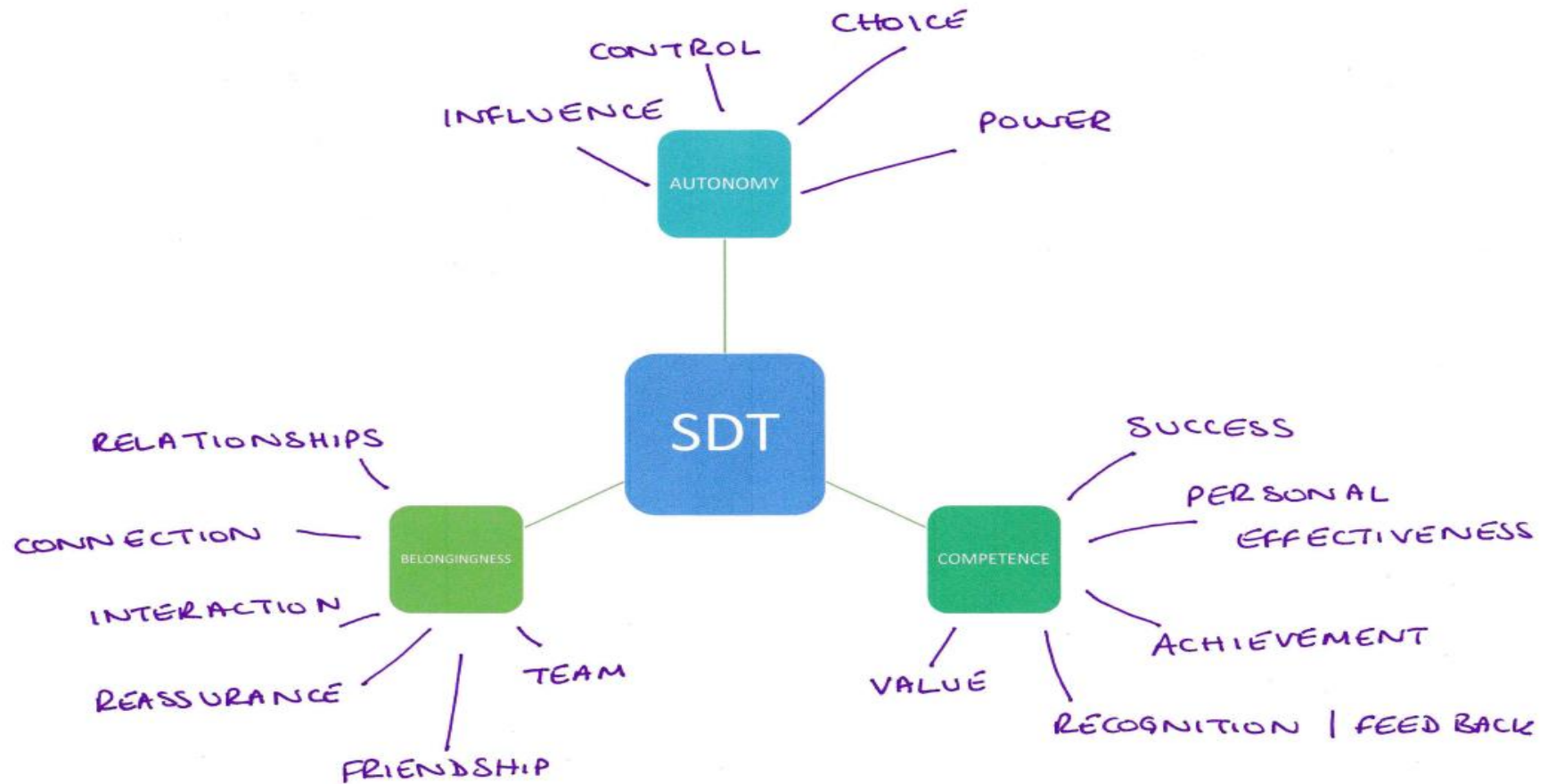
EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONS

How did you feel about work at the time?
If you reflect back on that experience of work from your current position, have your feelings about work changed?
Are you working now?
What is the difference between working then and working now?
Some women have described work as a “coping mechanism” – how does that sit with you?

HOME v WORK DOMAIN

[Introduce the concept of domain reversal (Hochschild).] This book introduces the concept of work becoming home and home becoming hard work. Does that resonate with you?
Did you feel like you were the same person at work as you were at home?
Did you try to separate home and work?
Did any of the good stuff about work come home with you?
Were you able to leave home at home or did home influence your experience of work?

APPENDIX VI – SDT MODEL



APPENDIX VII – CODING EXTRACT

DESCRIPTIVE

LINGUISTIC

CONCEPTUAL

Emergent Themes	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Distinguishes between closeness at work and friendship</p> <p>The woman v the professional</p> <p>Functioning</p> <p>Took more interest than she realises(?)</p> <p>Deliberate compartmentalisation</p> <p>Mix, leak, spillover, shattered...</p>	<p>R: Were you close to them?</p> <p>P: Um. I. I knew a lot about them, so I tend to and have always separated quite heavily work and home, so they probably wouldn't be able to say the same. But I generally knew a fair amount about them. I'm trying to decide if I was close to them. Yes, I was close to them from a work sense. I very much cared about their, you know, ability to be able to function and do well at work and, you know, that type of stuff. But I didn't take a ton of interest in their personal lives that...</p> <p>R: Sure... So just keeping home and work life separately, that's really interesting that you've mentioned that. So there's there's three kind of relationships between the home and the work domain or world, that have been identified. One is segmentation, which kind of sounds a little bit like what you were doing? There's also compensation and and spillover. So can we just talk a little bit about you kind of keeping those two worlds separate? Was that like a conscious decision? Is that something you've always done or was it about what was happening outside work?</p> <p>P: I think it was a conscious decision, a lot of stuff, yes, because it was happening outside of work in previous jobs where it had leaked in, I'd</p>	<p>Was she close to her team?</p> <p>Hesitates here...</p> <p>Distinguishes between closeness in a work context and closeness in a personal context (the woman v the professional?)</p> <p>Cared about their ability to function. Is this a comment on her own ability to function at work?</p> <p>Separation of home and work domain in terms of response to and relationships with team</p> <p>Difficult for her to maintain real separation</p> <p>But she did take interest in their personal lives and deliberately employed people who might otherwise have struggled to get a job...</p> <p>Explanation of compensation/Spillover/compartmentalisation</p> <p>Clear (and deliberate/conscious) separation of worlds</p> <p>Mix, leak, Spillover – liquid (although I said spillover first...) Later uses the word “shattered”</p>

<p>Separation as control Spillover means you have to leave</p> <p>Seniority and DV</p> <p>Disclosure and segmentation Concept of success</p> <p>Image – identity</p> <p>Lied to hide abuse</p> <p>Outwardly suggested she was to blame Humour to deflect seriousness “the stuff”</p> <p>Success at dealing with DV Lying Humiliation Professionalism</p> <p>Humour Hiding as a skill</p>	<p>ended up leaving. And so I think as my career developed and as I got higher up, I made quite conscious strong decisions to never, ever mix the two. I am like... And just not bring them into into the same world, if that makes sense. So people knew I was married and</p> <p>R: Yes...</p> <p>P: You know, they knew I had a husband. And to the outside world, everybody thought we were really happy and that was that type thing. And so it just matched the fact that I was a success at work and I was a success at home. So that was kind of the image that I had at work. So.</p> <p>R: So when it had spilled over previously, how what what does that mean?</p> <p>P: So when I was running the health clubs in [county], the physical violence was very, very bad at times. And so I would make up the... God, I must have had about nine car accidents in the space of about two or three years, I think. So I don't think anybody would get in a car with me [laughs]. But actually, it was just ways to kind of, you know, I wasn't very good at the stuff and what was happening. And my bosses ended up, of course, knowing what had gone on after a while because, you know, I mean, I was properly black and blue half of the time when I was in there and trying to run a health club. And, you know, so, yeah, I was humiliated I think. I felt very, very unprofessional, and so I chose never to let that go on and happen again. However my husband at the time, also got a lot better and stopped hitting me in the face and stuff.</p>	<p>“It had leaked in” – a crack? She didn’t share, it leaked in... (beyond her control) Learnt from experience that Spillover means you have to leave Feeling that DV is increasingly unacceptable as one is promoted...</p> <p>Not sharing perpetuated her image as successful at home as she was at work</p> <p>“success at home” same criteria used to judge home and work domains Is successful a usual word to describe a relationship?</p> <p>Had an “image” at work, which she wanted to protect</p> <p>Had to invent reasons to explain injuries. Lied at work. Said she had had accidents “don’t think anyone would get in a car with me” Does this suggest she described the accidents as her fault and not “accidents”</p> <p>Uses humour to deflect seriousness (was beaten so badly 9 times that she had to pretend to have been in a car accident)</p> <p>I wasn’t very good at the stuff. Also needed to be successful at dealing with DV</p> <p>She was physically injured, DV was obvious to colleagues Humiliation. Felt unprofessional.</p> <p>Uses humour to deflect seriousness. “husband got a lot better (at hiding DV)” “stopped hitting me in the face...” Hiding DV is a skill (for her and him)</p>
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Reflective journal	<p>R: Cleverer...</p> <p>P: So I'm like it became much easier to hide too over time, you know, when we did have to move because of it, then it gave us, I guess, a fresh start to how to carry on being in an abusive relationship without people knowing. So, yeah.</p>	<p>It feels nice to be able to side with her... Reflective journal</p>
Fresh start	<p>R: So do do you feel like it spilled over - I mean, I know you said it kind of spilled over in a visible way and then the feelings that came with that. But do you ever, do you feel like you were the same person at work and at home?</p> <p>P: No. I'm... Like when I was at work, I was. So. I don't know, it's kind of a hard question because I've I've had a lot of therapy [laughs]</p> <p>R: Of course...</p>	<p>Moving away – aim was to continue an abusive relationship without anyone knowing it, rather than stop the abuse (fresh start)</p>
Identity Reflection	<p>P: Since coming out, as everybody does, I'm sure. So I'm. I would definitely wasn't the same person. I was quite like cold, I think, and cut off when I was at work, I was. Yeah, I was just very efficient, I think, at getting my job done and making sure that I - don't get me wrong - within that I realised that people were absolutely key... And so I spent the majority of my time focusing on my staff. And my biggest saying was, you know, I needed to know what my weaknesses were because then I'd employ them in my staff. So that's how we were very successful and we were very successful. And so with that success, I guess comes - I was going to say I was possibly more confident when I was at work, but actually I spent probably my whole career with the imposter syndrome, which many women do. So the higher I got, the more I found myself going, how am I here? How did I lie so much to manage to believe that people</p>	<p>Did she feel like the same person at work and at home?</p> <p>Initial response is that she was not the same person at home... then hesitates First responses is No. Then reflects on what she has learnt in counselling</p>
Emotionally cut off at work		<p>At work: cold, cut off, efficient, successful, focussed on getting the job done, very focussed on staff development</p>
Focus on staff		
Focus on work		
Displacement		<p>If she was so cold and efficient and “cut off”, why did staff value the photo so much?</p> <p>People were key – valued staff, but didn’t want them knowing her business (but they did know her business – and they cared...)</p>
Shame		
Displacement		
Deflecting attention		<p>Focussing on staff meant she didn’t have to focus on herself. Focus for her mentally and emotionally, also useful in deflecting other people’s attention away from her: My team, my team...</p> <p>Outwardly confident, but crippled with self-doubt, felt like a failure</p>

<p>Living a lie</p> <p>Cognitive dissonance</p> <p>Lack of confidence</p> <p>Success</p> <p>Professional v private</p> <p>Functioning</p>	<p>should put me in this position? And then like stuff would happen and I'd be very successful and I'd be like, - well, that doesn't match up with my inner feeling of complete and total failure. And so it's a bit of a kind of like in work. I, I came across and I seemed very successful and very like I had my life planned out, and that I was the sort of person that people wanted to be if they wanted to be a business woman, not like, you know, in other ways. But yeah, it was like living a lie because I was sort of like not functioning [laughs] outside of work, so, you know..., it's the kind of combination role, isn't it? I think. Yeah.</p>	<p>The more successful she became, the more like a failure she felt</p> <p>Cognitive dissonance Suggests she must have lied (tricked people) to have become senior, dismissive of her own achievements</p> <p>Says people might want to be like her (then checks herself – who would want to be like her?)</p> <p>Living a lie...</p> <p>Not “functioning” outside. If her relationship wasn’t perfect she was failing... (her fault) Was living a lie. Outward façade of success.</p>
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