

***“Is she thick as sh*t? You
get with someone like that
for the abuse”:***

A Qualitative Analysis of Twitter to
Understand Public Perceptions of
Female Celebrity Survivors of
Intimate Partner Abuse.



**UNIVERSITY OF
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Sophie Leitch

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Abstract

Male violence against women and girls has grabbed the attention of the public and policy-makers in recent years following numerous extreme examples of misogyny and femicide, most notably the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer. Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is especially topical currently due to the recent high-profile proceedings between Amber Heard and Johnny Depp, which have generated significant public interest, and strong opinions on the matter.

The aim of this dissertation was to better understand public opinions about female survivors of IPA. To achieve this, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on Tweets which had been shared in relation to the three celebrity survivors selected as case studies: Amber Heard, Evan Rachel Wood and Rhianna. The research highlighted that, despite significant changes within legislation and the criminal justice system's response to IPA over the years, victim blaming attitudes, as reflected within early positivistic victimology theories, remain prevalent in society today. Such attitudes ultimately impact on the support provided to survivors and their ability to obtain justice. The research demonstrated the continued difficulties in obtaining "*victim status*", and how this status can be rejected as a result of both how the abuser is perceived as well as the survivor's own behaviour or characteristics. The data indicated that the highly influential notion of Christie's "*ideal victim*" persists, albeit the characteristics associated with it have evolved in line with women's changing position in society. It is evident that more research is required in this field to better understand the complexities around who is granted victim status and who is denied it, alongside education programmes to improve the public's understanding of IPA.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

CJS	Criminal Justice System
DA	Domestic Abuse
DV	Domestic Violence
E&W	England and Wales
IPA	Intimate Partner Abuse
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MVAWG	Male Violence Against Women and Girls
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

Glossary of Terminology

<p>Domestic Abuse</p>	<p>Women’s Aid (n.d.a.) defines Domestic Abuse as:</p> <p><i>“an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is very common. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men.”</i></p>
<p>Gas-lighting</p>	<p>Ananias Foundation (2020) describes Gaslighting as:</p> <p><i>“psychological manipulation that makes the recipient question their feelings, instincts, and even their sanity...over time, this pattern causes the targeted person to feel confused, anxious, isolated, and depressed...[It] is emotional abuse.”</i></p>
<p>Grooming</p>	<p>Abuse and Relationships (n.d.) describe Grooming as:</p> <p><i>“a tactic of overcoming the survivor’s defences by slowly desensitising his or her natural reaction to abusive behaviours...Grooming works by mixing positive behaviours with elements of abuse. At the beginning, all behaviours are positive. Slowly, abusive elements are added in amounts that surprise the survivor to an extent, but do not push alarm to a high level. Overtime, the inappropriate comes to feel normal.”</i></p>
<p>Troll</p>	<p>Beckett (2017) describes trolling as:</p> <p><i>“a specific act of throwing bait into the internet water in the form of deliberately provocative statements...and waiting for someone to bite.”</i></p>

<p>Super complaint</p>	<p>The Independent Office for Police Conduct (n.d.) provide details about the super-complaints system:</p> <p><i>“[it] was launched in November 2018 and is administered by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue services. The system allows ‘designated organisations’ (such as charities) to raise broad or systemic issues that could affect public confidence in policing – for example, the handling of domestic abuse cases.”</i></p>
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Introduction

This dissertation explores the topic of how female celebrity survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA) are viewed by the public. IPA is a type of Domestic Abuse (DA) and is understood to be one of the most common forms of abuse experienced by women (World Health Organisation, 2012). DA is legally defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as abusive behaviour committed by Person A towards Person B, where both persons are aged 16 or over and are personally connected, either as relatives or through a current or previous intimate relationship. This definition incorporates a range of abusive behaviours, that are included whether they are a one-off or a “*course of conduct*”, specifically: physical, sexual, violent, threatening, controlling, coercive, economical, psychological, emotional and “*other*”. Research and statistics indicate that IPA disproportionately impacts women, with estimates indicating that one in four women in the United Kingdom (UK) will suffer DA in their lifetime (Living without abuse, n.d., Women’s Aid, n.d.). For that reason, female survivors are the focus of this research.

This research focuses on celebrity female IPA survivors. One reason is that incidents are generally considered more “*newsworthy*” when a celebrity is involved and this will ultimately result in a larger audience from which to extract data (Greer, 2017). Many of the views expressed would therefore reflect assumptions, as those commenting are unlikely to have a personal knowledge of the survivor, abuser or the circumstances (Whiting et al., 2019). Celebrities are also less likely to be perceived as weak, as a result of their wealth and social influence, which should enable interesting analysis and insight around Christie’s (1986) notion of the “*ideal victim*”.

Rationale

Recently, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) has featured heavily both in public discourse and the political agenda, influenced by high-profile cases of femicide and misogyny, including the murder of Sarah Everard (BBC News, n.d., HMICFRS, 2021).

Evidence demonstrates that DA continues to rise, having increased by 6% in the year ending March 2021 with a total of 845,734 DA related offences having been recorded (Office for National Statistics, 2021). The real number is likely to be much higher both because this offending is vastly under-reported, and due to methodological issues with the National Crime Survey caused by the Covid pandemic (Lee, 2017, Spalek, 2017). Despite the evidence of the prevalence of IPA, it has not received the same recognition as other forms of abuse under the VAWG umbrella. For example, the focus of the VAWG strategy predominantly concerns the dangers that women encounter in public spaces (GOV.UK, 2021). It is vital to continue research into this topic so that further action may be taken by those with the power to do so. Second-wave feminists have demonstrated that research and activism can result in change, for example the introduction of refuges for IPA survivors (Duggan, 2018, Harne & Radford, 2008). Public perceptions which tend to blame survivors or to trivialise IPA have real-world implications for its continued prevalence (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016, Ivert et al., 2018).

Research Scope

This research focuses on IPA as an element of VAWG and refers specifically to heterosexual female survivors. The United Nations (1993, p2) define VAWG as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

It should not be misinterpreted to suggest that men or members of LGBTQ+ do not experience IPA (Hall, 2016). These are complex topics, which would benefit from further research, however, they fall beyond the scope of this dissertation. IPA is a global problem, however, this research focuses on the experience in E&W (World Health Organisation, 2021).

Terminology

Whilst DA is the term used in legislation, a range of terminology is used to label or explain abusive violent behaviours which occur within intimate or family relationships. Differences in terminology are often influenced by the context of the reference, for example, due to the source and its age. It can be argued that the language around DA is trivialising; for example, the connotations that *“domestic”* is not a police matter and the downplaying of the fact that it is overwhelmingly abuse perpetrated by men, against women, within a patriarchal society (Mason-Bish & Duggan, 2020, Mullender, 1996, Wiper & Lewis, 2020). Katz (2012) criticises its

presentation as “*gender-based violence*” and asserts it should be referred to as “*Male Violence Against Women and Girls*” (MVAWG) to ensure men are active in the narrative, and therefore, accountable. Some police forces have adopted the term “MVAWG”, for example Bedfordshire Police (n.d.) and Hampshire Constabulary (n.d.).

The term “*Domestic Violence*” (DV) may be found in older literature, when the focus was more on physical violence than the other types of abuse that are now widely recognised. Some texts refer to “*Intimate Partner Violence*” (IPV) or “*IPA*”. As this research is focusing on abuse committed by intimate or ex-intimate partners it will mainly use the term IPA. DA includes a much wider range of relationships, and so the two terms should not be considered interchangeable. The term “*DA*” is used in research, where necessary, to accurately reflect statistics or research findings.

A key area of feminist debate is the terminology used to label the person that has suffered the abuse. Traditional victimology theories refer to “*victims*”, as do some charities (for example, SafeLives, n.d) (McGarry & Walklate, 2015). Some continue to use the term “*victim*” because it is the terminology used within the Criminal Justice System (CJS), whilst others cite their reason as choosing it because it reflects the lack of accountability that should be attributed to the abused person (Harne & Radford, 2008, Wiper and Lewis, 2020). The term “*victim*” has been rejected for various reasons, including the feminist argument that the label is a self-fulfilling prophecy that portrays powerlessness and passiveness and gives power to the perpetrator (Barberet & Barberet, 2010, Croall, 2011, Fohring, 2018, McGarry & Walklate, 2015). Since the 1980s, some feminists have called for the term “*survivor*” to be adopted, in order to

focus on how the abused person has moved forward following their abuse (Croall 2011, Jordan, 2013).

It is important to recognise, however, that those who suffer IPA are not a homogenous group; some prefer the term victim, some prefer survivor and others reject both labels for their over-simplification of a complex and fluid status (Roebuck et al., 2020). A range of terms are used within research and data, and it is important to mirror these terms to best reflect and analyse public, political and academic perceptions. When referring to the case studies, the researcher will seek to use the terminology that each woman has used to describe herself, but where no such self-definition has occurred, will use the term “*survivor*”, in recognition of the strength they have demonstrated in disclosing the abuse.

Similarly, there are a range of terms used to describe the person alleged to have committed IPA, for example, “*perpetrator*”, “*abuser*” or “*defendant*”. The terminology is often influenced by the type of text as well as the progress, or outcome, of any criminal proceedings. In recognition of the abuse the survivors have experienced, and to avoid the complexity of using legally charged language, the researcher will refer to those alleged to have committed IPA as the “*abuser*”. The researcher recognises that not all readers will agree with this terminology but has chosen to echo the voice of the survivors.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the research are:

1. To explore whether victims of IPA fit into key victimology theories; and
2. To gain a better understanding of the public's perceptions of celebrities that have suffered IPA through analysis of social media content posted in response to such disclosures.

To meet the aims the following objectives have been identified:

- To examine how the England and Wales (E&W) CJS have historically defined and responded to IPA;
- To put IPA into a modern-day context by clarifying the current legal position;
- To conduct a thorough literature review which explores key theoretical perspectives concerning the process of obtaining victim status;
- To interpret how these key victimological theories apply to victims of IPA¹;
- To critically analyse three case studies regarding celebrities who have disclosed IPA victimisation; and
- To collate and analyse Twitter posts (Tweets) made in response to the articles about IPA victimisation using qualitative content analysis to identify any key themes in public perceptions towards IPA victims.

Research Design

This dissertation draws upon traditional victimology theories, as well as more recent research into IPA enabling a better understanding as to what influences the

¹ Many of these theories were introduced prior to IPA being recognised as a criminal matter.

public perception of its survivors in modern times. It explores Twitter to review the opinions being shared in relation to female celebrity survivors' disclosures of IPA. Specifically, the researcher uses qualitative content analysis on Tweets shared in direct response to news reports concerning these disclosures.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Portsmouth, SCCJ Ethics Committee on 13 January 2022². The key issue was the use of publicly shared content found on social media, without having gained informed consent. The associated concerns were mitigated through selecting Twitter over other social media websites, due to the more public nature of its platform, along with the anonymisation of data. The further concerns of the impact of investigating such a sensitive topic were mitigated through using social media posts as opposed to asking participants about the topic, and through regular supervision to ensure the researcher's well-being. These issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 provides an extensive literature review, which critically focuses on early victimological theories as well as more recent research and grey literature about DA.

² SCCJ reference: 889

Chapter 3 provides details of the methodology of this research. It describes how the relevant Tweets were identified and selected and how they were analysed using qualitative content analysis. It provides the researcher's rationales for the chosen methodology. It informs the reader about the ethical considerations of this research, and how potential issues were mitigated through the research design. This chapter also provides a summary of each of the three celebrity case studies that have been selected for this research. These include Amber Heard (hereafter referred to as Amber), Evan Rachel Woods (hereafter referred to as Evan) and Rhianna.

The results of this research are explored in chapter 4, with reference made to identified themes. The implications of the results are discussed, critically drawing on how they fit within the current literature and research into this topic.

Chapter 5 provides the conclusion to this dissertation. This chapter reflects on the limitations of the study, and how research into this topic can be furthered.

Literature Review

This research sets out to answer the question “*what does social media content reveal about how the public perceives celebrity survivors of IPA?*”. To support the qualitative content analysis of Tweets, a literature review was conducted to better understand the topic. The study of public perceptions of female celebrity IPA survivors is a specific topic, and resultingly, a broad research strategy was set, due to the limited directly relevant research available³. The majority of this literature is from the UK or the USA, however, literature from other countries has been referenced where appropriate.

This review starts by exploring the historical and current E&W response to IPA. It then moves on to explore traditional victimological theories. Whilst the study of the perceptions of victims and survivors was not the focus of all victimology academics, those theories which set out to define who is at risk of victimisation, and why, provide a useful insight into how these victims, including IPA survivors were, and possibly continue to be, perceived.

This review focuses on literature about survivors, however, IPA is a topic of interest in multiple other disciplines, including criminology, sociology and psychology, and such theories will be referred to where necessary to provide context (Marsh et al., 2004). This literature review explores key topics around the victim label, the language used in respect of IPA, DA myths and victim blaming. This chapter then explores the

³ See appendix 1 for the literature review search strategy

literature concerning media coverage of IPA and research into celebrity IPA before providing reflections on the literature and how it relates to this research.

DA in E&W: a Brief History

There have been considerable changes to the public, political and legislative response to IPA since the nineteenth century, when inequalities within society meant that a woman could be charged with petty treason for killing her husband, whilst a husband killing his wife would be charged with the lesser offence of murder (Monckton-Smith, 2021). At the same time, controlling one's wife and children through physical abuse was sanctioned under the Rule of Coverture [1860] (Centre for Women's Justice, n.d.). The Rule of Thumb [1857] allowed men to beat their wives with a rod if it was no thicker than his thumb and the extent of respite afforded to women (and even then, only those living in London) was a curfew for any beatings, introduced in 1895 to minimise the impact on neighbours (Centre for Women's Justice, n.d.).

The profile of DA was raised by a combination of feminist research and activism, which resulted in changes to political agendas and the CJS including legislative recognition (Daigle & Mutfic, 2020, Duggan, 2018, Wiper & Lewis, 2020). This occurred as part of the wider "*victim movement*" which began in the 1960s, with changes to British policy beginning in the 1970s, including the opening of the first DA refuge (Harne & Radford, 2008, Marsh et al., 2004). Such efforts mean that there is now a very different social and political landscape than there was at the time positivistic theories were introduced.

IPA was not recognised by E&W legislation until the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act [1976], and as such, may not have been a consideration of those trying to understand criminal victimisation prior to this (Carrabine et al., 2020, Centre for Women's Justice, n.d.). Other legislative acts followed this, including the Domestic Violence and Magistrates Act [1978] and the Matrimonial Homes Act [1983]. In 1986 and 1990, the police were encouraged, through Home Office Circulars, to treat DA as they would treat any other serious crime by improving victim services and keeping accurate records (Marsh et al., 2004). The Coroners and Justice Act [2009] removed the defence of "*provocation*" and replaced it with the partial defence of "*loss of control*" (Marsh et al., 2004). The Serious Crime Act [2015] created the offence of coercive control, which it defines as the repeated or continued controlling or coercive behaviour by a person towards someone who they are personally connected with, which they ought to know will have a serious effect on that person. This concept was introduced by Stark in 2007. Unfortunately, however, the CJS is set up to investigate individual incidents, rather than patterns, and convictions for coercive control remain low (Monckton-Smith, 2021).

DA in E&W: Current Context

Unfortunately, IPA remains extremely prevalent and continues to increase; there were an estimated 1.6 million DA survivors in the year ending March 2020 (College of Policing & National Police Chiefs Council, 2021, Office for National Statistics, 2021). The CJS remains a patriarchal institution and is often considered to engage in victim blaming practices, indicating that it remains under the influence of

positivistic victimology (Davies, 2018, Marsh et al., 2004, McGarry & Walklate, 2015). IPA survivors report lower levels of satisfaction with, and faith in, the CJS than victims of other crimes, resulting in under-reporting (Roebuck et al., 2020, Wiper & Lewis, 2020). Feminists have accused the CJS of permitting the continuance of IPA through its reluctance to intervene in “*private*” matters and of being slow and inconsistent when they do respond (Marsh et al, 2004). Until very recently, the CJS has relied upon legislation created to deal with “*stranger violence*”, which does not easily translate to the complex patterns of DA offending (Harne & Radford, 2008). There has been progress in recent years however, with the Domestic Abuse Act [2021] being introduced to improve the CJS response to VAWG (GOV.UK, 2021).

In 2021, the Home Office appointed a DA commissioner and provided funding of over £39.3 million towards DA initiatives (College of Policing, 2021). Whilst this appears a positive step, in the same year, the Centre for Women’s Justice made a “*super complaint*” to the Independent Office for Police Conduct about the failure of police to protect women through the use measures such as bail, non-molestation orders, DV Protection Notices and DV Protection Orders (HMICFRS et al., 2021). IPA survivors have accused the police of not properly investigating IPA offences and research supports that they do not consistently use the powers available to them when pursuing perpetrators (HMIC, 2017, HMICFRS, 2021, Marsh et al., 2004, Rossetti et al., 2017).

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme seeks to prevent IPA by allowing police to inform individuals if their partner has a history of perpetrating IPA, so long as

certain criteria is met⁴ (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017). Unfortunately, knowing the dangers does not necessarily mean that a person is able to safely leave the relationship, particularly if they have little faith that the CJS will be able to protect them (Monckton-Smith, 2021). There is a danger of police inaction if they perceive that the victim, equipped with the information, is managing the risk themselves (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2017).

Another CJS approach to IPA is the adoption of evidence-led, or “*victimless*” prosecutions, in which efforts are made to conduct investigations in such a way that the survivor does not need to participate in proceedings, and these can be conducted against the survivor’s wishes if it is within the public interest (HMIC, 2014). This approach places public interest ahead of the views of the survivor and assumes that IPA survivors will all benefit (Hoyle, 2007). In line with Christie’s (1977) theory of “*conflicts of property*”, the survivor is effectively left with little say about the handling of their own “*conflicts*”, (as cited in Fattah, 2016).

The College of Policing and National Police Chiefs Council (2021) VAWG strategy indicates a commitment to tackling VAWG; introducing a three-year plan aimed at building trust and confidence, the relentless pursuit of perpetrators and creating safer spaces. It seeks to standardise the policing of VAWG offences and commits to ensuring consistent data collection from the police alongside commissioning research to ultimately eradicate these crimes. This strategy notes the aspiration that men be “*upstanders not bystanders*”, however, it fails to use language

⁴ This is often referred to as “Clare’s law”; the initiative is named after Clare Wood who was murdered by her ex-partner in 2009.

that demonstrates a recognition that VAWG is overwhelmingly committed by men. This contrasts with Katz's (2012) call to utilise active language to shift the focus from those who suffer the abuse (women) to those who perpetrate it (men).

Victimology: an Overview

Victimology, the scientific study of victims of crime, emerged as a discipline in the 1940s (Daigle & Muftic, 2020, Godfrey, 2018). It consists of a vast range of theories; however, it is broadly understood to consist of two main models; positivist (sometimes referred to as orthodox) and revisionist (Davies et al., 2017, Francis, 2017). The early victimology theories fall within the positivist model; these were influenced by the patriarchal society, which still exists today, and focus on how an individual contributes to their own victimisation (Davies, 2018, Davies et al., 2017, Francis, 2017). Effectively, early victimology mirrored criminology in that it was founded on "*determinism, differentiation and pathology*" to differentiate victims from the "*normal person*" (Walklate, 2013). These theories have been subject to criticism for a range of reasons yet remain dominant in modern society (McGarry & Walklate, 2015). A review of their shortcomings helps to explore the change in direction and focus that revisionist theorists, particularly feminists, adopted to better understand the victimisation of women (Francis, 2017, Tapley & Davies, 2020, Walklate, 2013).

Later positivist theories focused on the "*risky lifestyles*" of individuals, assuming that victimisation occurs in the public rather than the private space and neglecting to account for societal influence (Davies 2018, Hanisch, 2006, Tapley & Davies, 2020). These theories suggest that the risk of being a victim is mitigated by

staying at home; this is certainly not the case for IPA survivors (Pratt & Turanovic, 2016).

Feminist victimology, which falls within the revisionist model, seeks to uncover the gendered nature of victimisation and to fight the sexism and misogyny that exists in the CJS (Barberet & Barberet, 2010). The relationship between feminists and victimology is a complex one; whilst they contribute to research, feminists have also accused victimology of being a “*patriarchal weapon*”, claiming that it seeks to legitimise men’s power over women and that it ignores VAWG, seeing it as a justified product of the patriarchy (Barberet & Barberet, 2010, Marsh et al., 2004, Rock, 2017). Feminists were originally involved in political activism before becoming involved in victimological academia (Cook & Jones, 2007, Hoyle, 2007). Far from presenting a united front, the different strands of feminism: liberal; radical; socialist and post-modern, vary in methodological approaches, core values and goals (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2018, Walklate, 2013). Each strand has had a notably different impact; for example, liberal feminism has advanced academic knowledge whereas radical and socialist feminism have been instrumental in influencing political agendas (Walklate, 2013).

Victim Status

The notion of being recognised as a victim does not feature in positivistic theories but is a key concern within revisionist theories (McGarry & Walklate, 2015). Positivistic theories are centred around the binary view that victims suffer victimisation because they differ in some way to “*non-victims*”, whereas feminists take

a wider view and consider the influence of patriarchal views and structures (McGarry & Walklate, 2015). IPA survivors are sometimes viewed as culpable for their victimisation due to their perceived failure to leave the relationship; placing responsibility on the survivor rather than the abuser and failing to address the risk the abuser poses to future potential partners (Duggan, 2018). Feminists argue that the focus should not be on the individuals directly involved, but in the patriarchal society in which IPA is allowed to thrive (Marsh et al., 2004, Rock, 2017).

The recognition that positivistic theories failed to acknowledge any influences external to the involved individuals, resulted in them becoming discredited as radical, critical and feminist theories came to the forefront (Davies, 2018, Davies et al., 2017, Francis, 2017, McGarry & Walklate, 2015). These theories mirrored the changes ongoing in society, as the public began to recognise structural power imbalances, patriarchal dominance, and victimisation within the home (Davies, 2018, Davies et al., 2017). A key focus of critical victimology is the labelling of victims, alongside the state's role in creating victims through maintaining inequality (Marsh et al., 2004).

A key theory within critical victimology is Christie's (1986) concept of the ideal victim. As opposed to the positivistic focus of determining who is likely to experience victimisation, Christie's work focused on who is likely to be recognised by society as a victim; someone who is seen as weak and deserves sympathy and support. He identified an interdependent relationship between the ideal victim and the "*ideal offender*": the dangerous stranger. He highlighted that those known to the victim are less likely to be perceived as ideal, and as a result, so are their victims. He identified that women and children were more likely to be recognised as ideal victims, however

acknowledged that women's roles within society were changing and that the perception they were weak might change accordingly.

Strobl (2010) observed that there are four main categories in which a victim might fall. The two of least contention are "*actual victim*" and "*non victim*", where self-identification and recognition from others match. He also noted that there are "*designated victims*", those who are seen as victims by "*relevant others*" despite not identifying as victims themselves, and finally there are "*rejected victims*", those who consider themselves to be victims whilst others do not accept this. He identified that to be recognised as a victim, it is important to be seen as part of the in-group, law-abiding and not responsible for the victimisation. Beyond that, Strobl (2010) identified behaviours that are expected of a victim, these centre around prioritising the needs of the CJS before self-interest. Strobl (2010) further reflected that whilst the victim label results in sympathetic treatment in some cultures, in others it invites cruelty, and is therefore rejected. Spalek (2017) supports this notion, highlighting that some who receive the victim label will be valorised whereas others will be condemned.

IPA Myths and Victim Blaming

Von Hentig created the Victim Proneness typology in 1948; this focused on the importance of considering the victim and offender together, and most relevant to this research, characterised women as being highly prone to victimisation, due to their social and psychological state (as cited in Daigle & Mutfic, 2020, Godfrey, 2018, Marsh et al., 2004, Walklate, 2013). Mendelsohn's (1956, as cited in Tapley & Davies, 2020) culpability typology effectively ranked individuals between the two extremes of being

innocent to being guilty of causing their victimisation. Despite their differences, with Von Hentig's criminological approach and Mendelsohn's philosophical approach, they are both considered to be the founding fathers of victimology (Marsh et al., 2004). Both have since been criticised for using "*primitive*" and "*anecdotal*" methods and have been accused of victim blaming (Francis, 2017, Rock, 2018, Tapley & Davies, 2020, Walklate, 2013).

A key theory emerging from the culpability typology was Wolfgang's (1958, as cited in Francis, 2017) notion of victim precipitation, which allocated victims a level of responsibility for their victimisation, ranging from "*unintentional facilitation*" to provoking it (Daigle & Mutfic, 2020). Amir (as cited in Francis, 2017), subsequently, and controversially, applied this principle to rape victims (Tapley & Davis, 2020). The assumption of this theory; that the victim and the offender hold equal power, is particularly problematic when considering its application to IPA, where there is often a power imbalance (Walklate, 2013). Peters (2008, p5) introduced the notion of "*DV myths*", which he defined as

"stereotypical beliefs about domestic violence that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and which serve to minimize, deny, or justify physical aggression against intimate partners".

These myths have a significant impact on how IPA is responded to and can result in survivors choosing not to seek help due to the anticipated reactions from others, including CJS professionals and the media (Harne & Radford, 2008). These myths impact on women's behaviour, teaching them that they are responsible for their own safety (Monckton-Smith, 2021). For example, it is a myth that women can prevent

violence against themselves by changing their behaviour, or how they dress, so as not to provoke men (Monckton-Smith, 2021). The idea that IPA is a result of relationship dynamics, rather than caused by the abuser, forms part of media discourse and is prevalent within the CJS, and if it remains unchallenged, directly influences survivors' trust in the CJS (Monckton-Smith, 2021).

Victim-blaming attitudes have the potential to influence the responsibility that society accepts for supporting survivors, which can directly impact the support services made available (Mancini & Pickett, 2017, Peters, 2008). As explored below, victim blaming is influenced by a range of motivations and characteristics. For example, Mancini and Pickett (2017) explain the premise of the "*just world*" theory as the act of identifying something in the victim's behaviour that caused the incident; for example, failing to leave an abusive relationship, so that a person can alleviate their own fears of being subject to the same experience. This can help people to feel safer, however, Mancini and Pickett further noted that holding such views can lower one's sense of responsibility to help those vulnerable to the victimisation. Research shows that men are more likely than women to blame female IPA survivors (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016, Martín-Fernández et al., 2018, Yamawaki et al., 2021).

Peters (2008) found a gender difference in motivations for victim blaming, noting that women tend to engage in character blame to mitigate the perceived threat of suffering the same fate, whilst men tended to use DV myths to exonerate the abuser. A study by Yamawaki et al. (2021) explored how IPA survivors were perceived in hypothetical scenarios in which all details were the same other than whether the female survivor and male abuser were married or dating, and whether the survivor

was known to return to the abuser or not. This study found that participants who tend to believe DV myths, were more likely to exhibit victim blaming attitudes if the scenario presented the couple as dating rather than married and when there was reference to her returning to the abuser. Similarly, a study by Lelaurain et al. (2021) found that participants who subscribed to the notion of “romantic love”, in which jealousy may be expected, were more likely to legitimise IPA by blaming the survivor and exonerating the abuser. Lelaurain et al. (2018) found that, when presented with a scenario, participants wanted to know more information than was provided. The uncertainty caused them to imagine the circumstances, and their subsequent levels of justification for the IPA described was influenced by how they envisaged the scenario had unfolded. For example, some participants considered the violence to be a physical expression of emotions and therefore an act of love.

Eigneberg and Policastro (2016) reported variations of victim blaming attitudes based on participant’s personal characteristics. They found that women were less likely to blame IPA survivors and that those who had personally experienced IPA were less likely to hold the survivor responsible. They reported that older participants were less likely to justify the violence, but this appears somewhat at odds with Ivert et al.’s (2018) research which found that younger participants were less likely to blame the victims. The difference, however, may be explained by the convenience sample of students used in this study, compared to Ivert’s much larger and international research. Eigneberg and Policastro found that 29% of their participants believed that some victims “ask” to be victimised, 46% believed that you can prevent victimisation by taking precautions and 51% believed that people usually have some role in their

own victimisation. Participants tended to blame women who stayed in violent relationships and those that flirted with others. Some participants believed that women make their partners so angry that they unintentionally respond with violence. Further, 55% of the sample believed that some people enjoyed playing the role of victim; this is an interesting sentiment when considered alongside the feminist arguments that reject the term "*victim*" due to its negative implications.

Research indicates that professionals can be influenced by their perceptions of victims. For example, police officers' perceptions of individuals determine whether they consider them to be a "*genuine victim*", which subsequently impacts on how they treat them (Charman, 2020). A study of legal and health-care professionals in Cambodia found that participants, all of whom had an interest in DA legislation, expressed the opinion that women's "*emotionality*" was not compatible with the pursuit of justice and that women actually hindered the process (Brickell, 2017).

Media and Social Media

Media reports concerning IPA tend to present a sympathetic angle for the perpetrator even when reporting on domestic homicide (Monckton-Smith, 2021). The media is a patriarchal institution, which protects the white, heterosexual male, using passive and victim blaming language to minimise the abuse (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2021). Media reports tend to rely on cliches and stereotypes, place a disproportionate emphasis on the survivor, and focus on the minute details of single events, instead of presenting a more accurate overall picture of the abuse (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2017, Humphreys, 2009). Those cases which are particularly sensational, for example,

those involving celebrities or severe violence often receive significant coverage (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2017, Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). Furthermore, coverage tends to be more sympathetic to both survivors and abusers if they are privileged than if they are from marginalised groups (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2017). The way in which the media present IPA influences how society perceive survivors, and therefore, impacts on who can achieve victim status (Greer, 2017, Lee & Wong, 2020). This also impacts policy, the CJS and the support made available to survivors (Greer, 2017, Marsh, 2004).

The strand of feminism which is arguably the most relevant to this research is fourth wave feminism. A defining attribute of this is their use of the internet (an arena where sexism is frequently freely expressed) to conduct research and to challenge misogyny (Clark, 2016, Jane, 2016, Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018). Whilst feminists have been calling on women to share their experiences since the 1970s, the internet has provided a new and accessible platform to do so (Harne & Radford, 2008). Some academics have described feminists' use of social media to give survivors a voice as a key reason for the public's renewed interest in feminism, noting that it has forced society to reconsider the power imbalances and how to deal with them (Jackson et al. 2019, Sugiura & Smith, 2020). It has also been noted that it gives those who have been failed by the CJS an alternative way to seek justice and harness support (Sugiura & Smith, 2020). Some women, including feminists, however, have been critical of this approach, expressing that it disempowers women by suggesting female oppression is a homogenous experience (Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018, Korkodeilou, 2020).

Advances in technology have inspired feminist movements and campaigns which have led to changes in legislation (Sugiura & Smith, 2020). Those who speak out about their abuse, however, risk receiving victim-blaming responses, and in some cases, threats and intimidation (Sugiura & Smith, 2020). Research has found that victim-blaming content on Twitter was more likely to be re-tweeted than content which offered support to victims (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). A particularly hard-hitting example of the use of the internet to call out VAWG is Ingala-Smith's (2020) "*counting dead women*" website, which lists all victims of femicide, along with brief details of the circumstances of their death.

Research on IPA Amongst Celebrities

The available research regarding celebrity IPA tends to focus on sporting celebrities as perpetrators. In studying the IPA perpetrated by English footballer Danny Simpson, Yardley et al. (2019) noted the "*loveable rogue*" status that is often assigned to footballers. They reviewed a sample of 93 articles about the serious assault he was found guilty of committing against his partner, Stephanie Ward, and found that his footballer status over-rode the status of abuser. They further noted that the survivor was all but absent from the narrative, and that the incident was seen more as an inconvenience for his career. They found that the media determined Stephanie Ward did not meet ideal victim status, and was often blamed for the abuse, and for not behaving as women were expected within those circles. A study into the media portrayal of American soccer player, Hope Solo, after she perpetrated IPA, reflected on how gender was presented in respect of her case, with comparison to IPA perpetrated

by male athletes at a similar time (Chase, 2019). It found that the media tended to present a gender-neutral narrative of IPA. It highlighted the impact of this language and noted that the denial of the fact that is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women has repercussions for how IPA is perceived and responded to.

Intersectionality

Feminist research and activism does not represent all women equally. Feminists have been criticised for only representing white, middle-class women (Hoyle, 2007, Phipps, 2020). For example, black and ethnic minority women did not feel able to speak out about DA during the feminist campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s due to their concerns about the levels of racism expressed at that time (Hoyle, 2007). Feminism is accused of being unable to challenge white supremacy, failing to recognise the power differentials between white women and black women, and demonstrating racist and exclusionary politics (Moon & Holling, 2020, Spalek, 2017). Crenshaw (2006) writes about how, for topics such as VAWG, women's experiences are also shaped by their race and their class. She introduces the notion of intersectionality as a basis for reconceptualising race and explains that gender, race and class all work together to shape a woman's experiences. She expresses that gender and race are seen as negative frameworks used to marginalise those who are considered to be "*different*" and criticises both feminist and anti-racist discourses for their disregard as to how women of colour experience VAWG. She notes that women of colour fall within two subordinated groups which often have conflicting political

agendas and provides the example of efforts to conceal intra-racial violence as an effort to escape racial stereotyping.

Summary

In summary, this literature review has highlighted how the now outdated and academically criticised notions of victim proneness, culpability and precipitation continue to influence the media portrayal, public opinion and CJS response to IPA (Daigle & Mutfic, 2020). It suggests that patriarchal views persist, and that society still tends to either blame IPA survivors or find fault in their actions. In particular, individuals may seek to differentiate survivors from the normal person, to rationalise why that person was victimised, and to promote a sense of safety for themselves (Mancini and Pickett, 2017). The literature indicates that society may look at the individual characteristics, attributes and behaviours of survivors, as opposed to abusers, to determine whether they are deserving of the victim label and the support that goes with it.

The literature indicates that, even amongst feminists, there will be opposing views about the causes of IPA victimisation and the societal response to it, due to the range of theories and perspectives within feminist victimology. Christie's (1986) critical notion of the ideal victim is particularly interesting, as whilst he shared these views approximately 10 years after the introduction of DV legislation in E&W, this review has highlighted that there have been significant changes since then, in regard to the recognition of and response to IPA, meaning there is the potential that the influencing

factors in obtaining that status have changed along with public opinion and legislative direction.

The literature further indicated that knowledge, or professional experience of IPA does not necessarily reduce victim blaming attitudes. The attitudes of professionals towards survivors can influence both how survivors deal with their victimisation, and can allow myths and stereotypes to go unchallenged, reinforcing victim blaming attitudes held by the wider public (Brickell, 2017, Peters, 2008). The literature on celebrity IPA is limited but tends to support other research, which indicates that male abusers, particularly those who are part of an ingroup, are offered sympathy, whereas the behaviour and characteristics of female survivors are subject to scrutiny (Chase, 2019, Strobl, 2010, Yardley et al., 2019).

These considerations were instrumental in the initial identification of codes to enable data analysis, which is explained in detail in the following chapters. The next chapter presents the methodology utilised in this research.

Research Methodology

As per the aims and objectives set out in full in Chapter 1, I undertook this research to explore how society views and reacts to disclosures of IPA. To answer my research question, *“What does social media content reveal about public perceptions of female celebrity victims of male perpetrated IPA?”*, I collated 236 Tweets and analysed them using qualitative content analysis. This chapter provides the details of the methods used to conduct this research, including how the sample was selected, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for data collection, a rationale for the three case studies chosen, along with summaries about each and details about how the data was collected and analysed. Finally, it identifies the relevant ethical considerations and explains how potential issues were mitigated.

Method

Rehman and Allharthi (2016) set out the considerations a researcher should have in designing their research paradigm, breaking this down into four key areas. The first two areas being the identification of one’s understanding of reality, their ontological position, and how that reality can be studied, their epistemological beliefs. They explicitly note that by sharing these beliefs with the readers, researchers can make the relevance of their study clear. They note that researchers should then consider their methodology, i.e., what type of data is required, and finally, the more specific methods of collecting and analysing their data.

Having reflected on my own beliefs about the social world, and how the researcher interacts with reality, I identify with the perspectives of interpretivism and historical realism, as I am seeking to understand how reality has been impacted by factors such as policy and culture (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). It is also imperative that readers are assured of the integrity of my research. As well as being influenced by the literature review, it is inevitable that my methodology has been influenced by my own viewpoints (Clark et al., 2021). It is therefore important that I inform readers who I am and what I believe in. I am a female professional who works closely with the CJS. I have conducted this research from a feminist perspective, and in doing so, I have exercised conscious partiality whilst seeking to highlight the difficulties and oppression that women continue to face (Clark et al., 2021).

In determining how to conduct my research, I was mindful that my research paradigm should be based on the requirements of the study, rather than simply based on my personal preferences (Jupp, Davies & Francis, 2000, Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The nature of my research question effectively ruled out a positivistic approach; positivism treats social science as it does the natural sciences and asserts that research conducted at different times will yield the same results, whereas my intentions included the assessment of the relevance of theories following significant social and legislative change (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Further, I was mindful of the fact that, until radical victimologists used qualitative approaches to enable a fuller understanding of IPA, survivors were left overlooked by victimology (Godfrey, 2018). I therefore considered qualitative research to be an appropriate method through which to meet my research aims. Whilst it is significantly more time consuming, qualitative

methods provide deeper and richer data than would be achieved through quantitative methods (Clark et al., 2021).

This is a sensitive topic which would likely be an emotional trigger for some individuals. By utilising social media data, which had already been willingly shared, I did not need to ask participants questions which could impact on their well-being. This approach enabled me to collate and analyse unsolicited human interactions on a larger scale than I otherwise would have had the resources to achieve (McCormick et al., 2017). I believe that this method has allowed me an in-depth insight into this topic, whilst mitigating the risk of psychological harm to participants. I chose Twitter as the social media platform to collect data from because their terms and conditions and privacy policy are particularly clear about the public nature of content shared on the platform (Twitter, n.d., Twitter, n.d.a).

I was drawn to qualitative content analysis, a form of thematic analysis in which the researcher constructs meaning from text by allowing categories to emerge from the data and ensuring that this data is presented with suitable context (Clark et al., 2021). I made efforts to ensure as much context as possible was available to readers by providing details of the article to which the Tweets were directed, albeit, I recognise that it was not possible to fully set out the full context for every Tweet (Clark et al., 2021).

Sampling

Hundreds of pieces of published research have relied on Twitter data; this reassured me it is an appropriate and useful data source (Blank, 2017). Twitter is the social media site where participants are the most likely to be aware that the content they post is shared with a public audience (McCormick et al., 2017). This decision was subject to significant ethical considerations, as explored in depth below.

My research focuses on the current legislative position in E&W. I believe that selecting comments made in response to British media articles significantly increased the chances that participants lived in E&W either at the point of sharing their Tweet, or at some point in their lives. This approach provided the potential to reach the widest appropriate audience and therefore increased the data available to me. I decided to use stories reported by the BBC, due to their reputation of being a balanced media outlet (Clark et al., 2021).

I established that the BBC have three main Twitter accounts: @BBCNews, @BBCWorld and @BBCBreaking. I decided to search all these accounts when seeking data to maximise the amount of data available⁵. I utilised the advanced search function within Twitter, writing the name of each individual survivor within the “*exact phrase*” filter and listing the three BBC accounts as the source.

⁵ I also searched @BBCWales for articles about Ruth Dodsworth who was initially chosen as a case study. Please see appendix 3 for details about this case study and the reasons as to why it was not used.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

I selected one article shared by any of the BBC Twitter accounts relating to each survivor. I have provided details of this selection for each case study below, but for each of them, I ensured that the article specifically related to the allegations of IPA, and that there had been public engagement with that article. Tweets were only collated if they explicitly related to the IPA victim, or the surrounding circumstances. Any Tweets that I deemed to clearly be irrelevant were not included, for example, spam, promotional or duplicate posts. I set these criteria prior to the data collection phase to mitigate the potential, or perception, of any bias in my selection.

Selection of Case Studies

In selecting my case studies, I decided to identify three female celebrities whose IPA victimisation had been shared in mainstream media within E&W. I chose three case studies, rather than focusing on one, to enable the opportunity to compare and contrast the features of the individuals for a deeper analysis, however due to the limited cases to choose from, it was difficult to identify as broad a range as I had hoped. On choosing my case studies, I conducted a brief scoping exercise to identify celebrity survivors of IPA who the BBC had reported on⁶.

⁶ As a result of this strategy, Ruth Dodsworth was initially chosen as a case study. Due to the lack of engagement by the media and Twitter users, I decided not to use her. I have, however, summarised the details of her case in appendix 3.

Case Study 1: Amber

Amber, born 1986, is an American actress (IMDB, n.d.c.). Johnny Depp (hereafter referred to as Johnny), born 1963, is also an award-winning American actor (IMDB, n.d.). The two met in 2009 while filming *“The Rum Diary”* and married in 2015 (Sillito, 2020). Amber sought a divorce and restraining order in May 2016, citing IPA as the reason (Sillito, 2020). Her disclosures resurfaced in the public arena in 2020, when Johnny pursued a libel case against the Sun Newspaper who had published an article which referred to *“overwhelming evidence”* that he had been violent towards Amber (Sillito, 2020, Wotton, 2018). Amber’s allegations against Johnny included numerous violent incidents (Sillito, 2020). In a video statement made at the conclusion of the libel hearing, Amber reflected on the difficult experience of having had the most traumatic incidents of her life shared across the world and reminded the public that she had not sought out this hearing, Johnny had (Sillito, 2020).

Many *“Hollywood A listers”* were mentioned within the coverage as having provided evidence and large crowds gathered at the court each day, mainly to show their support for Johnny, who was considered by many to be the actual victim (Sillito, 2020). Ultimately, the Judge concluded that 12 of the 14 allegations of IPA were found proven (to the civil standard), and that The Sun’s article had been *“substantially true”* (BBC News, 2020). A statement by Women’s Aid (2020) stated that even those who are not seen as the *“perfect victim”* deserve to be believed, even when the abuser has a high profile. This was an interesting choice of language as it indicates recognition that Amber was not necessarily viewed as a perfect victim, albeit no details about this comment followed.

At the time of collecting the data for this dissertation, Amber faced significant media and social media attention, and was later described as having “*lost in the court of public opinion and in front of the jury*” having been found guilty of defamation in subsequent proceedings brought about by Johnny in response to her allegations⁷ (Levinson-King, 2022). I decided that it would be most appropriate to choose an article relating to the 2020 proceedings described above, rather than any ongoing media interest in relation to the most recent case. My rationale is that by relying on concluded proceedings, I can confidently describe Amber as a survivor and Johnny as an abuser for the purposes of this research, as that was ultimately the conclusion of the judge.

There was significant media coverage associated with this case. I decided to review the responses to an article entitled “*Amber Heard: I loved Depp, but he could be a monster*”, published 23rd July 2020 (BBC News, 2020a). I chose this due to the indication from the headline that it focused on Amber’s experience with Johnny throughout their relationship, both good and bad, and as mentioned above, as it related to the previous proceedings as opposed to the ongoing ones.

Case Study 2: Evan

On 1 February 2021, Evan, an American actress born in 1987, disclosed that she had previously been abused by Marilyn Manson (real name Brian Hugh Warner, hereafter referred to as Marilyn) (BBC News, 2021b, IMDB n.d.a, IMDB n.d.b). She had

⁷ At the time of data collection, the 2022 defamation case against Amber was ongoing, however, the proceedings concluded whilst I was in the process of writing up my research.

been in a relationship with him between 2007 and 2010, when they became engaged before breaking up later that year (BBC News, 2021b). She had previously disclosed that she was a survivor of domestic and sexual abuse, but had not named her abuser (BBC News, 2021b). She explained that she had been raped by a partner but had not recognised it as rape at the time because of their relationship status (BBC News, 2016). Marilyn has denied the allegations against him, and his representatives have defended his 2009 interview quote, in which he stated *"I have fantasies every day about smashing [Evan's] skull in with a sledgehammer"*, as being rock star theatrics (BBC News, 2021b). Marilyn, born in America in 1969, is a musician who is known for his satanic lyrics and anti-Christian music and has been romantically linked to other celebrities (IMDB n.d.b). Four other women have since disclosed that Marilyn had sexually or physically abused them (BBC News, 2021b).

There were four articles made available through my search strategy, I selected an article entitled *"US actress and musician Evan Rachel Wood accuses singer Marilyn Manson of abuse during their three-year relationship in the late noughties"*, published 1st February 2021. This was because the headline indicated that it was the article that was most clearly relevant to the IPA allegations Evan had made against Marilyn (BBC News, 2021c).

Case Study 3: Rhianna

Rhianna (Robyn Rhianna Fenty), born 1988, is a Barbadian born, multi-millionaire singer, who has released numerous top selling songs and is deemed one of the most influential people in the world, and one of the wealthiest celebrities (IMDB,

n.d.d). Her previous partner, Chris Brown (hereafter referred to as Chris), born 1989, is also an award-winning singer (AllMusic, n.d.). He was sentenced to five years of probation following an assault in which he “*really hit*” Rhianna and bit her arm in 2009 (BBC News, 2015, BBC News, 2017). Both have spoken about the assault since; in 2015, Rhianna reflected on the difficulty in having to talk about the incident, stating she did not want to remember and relive it, but felt compelled to respond to questions about it as it is such a serious matter that impacts many people (BBC News, 2015). Chris provided his recollections of the assault in a documentary, in which he stated the pair had argued about another woman and he had hit Rhianna after she had been kicking and hitting him (BBC News, 2017). The couple briefly rekindled their relationship in 2012, with Rhianna reflecting that she thought she could change him, and that she thought she might be one of those people who were strong enough to handle it (BBC News, 2015).

In choosing an article for this case study, I was mindful that the allegations were older, and therefore, were made at a time where Twitter had less users (Backlinko, 2022). I therefore sought to locate the most recent, relevant article to minimise the impact of the time difference. I selected “*Chris Brown speaks about Rihanna assault*”, published 16th August 2017, which had been prompted by Chris’s reflections on the abuse within a recent documentary (BBC News, 2017).

Data Collection

All data collection took place on 16 May 2022. The three main BBC Twitter profiles were searched using the names of the survivors, and then the abusers, to ascertain the amount of content available in relation to each case study. In respect of the survivors, there were a total of 45 Tweets about Amber, four about Evan, and 16 about Rhianna. These Tweets were not all in relation to the IPA allegations. In respect of the abusers, there were 95 Tweets about Johnny, 18 about Marilyn and 53 about Chris Brown. Again, these Tweets covered a range of topics.

I then selected one article relating to each case study. I clicked into each article to review and collate the comments that had been made in response to it. I made a digital record of the content of all Tweets that fell within the inclusion criteria set out above. I utilised Excel workbooks to store the data I collected, using a different worksheet for each article. Within this, I made a record of the content of the Tweet, the date it was posted and the responses it had received.

Data Analysis

I conducted qualitative data analysis manually rather than using computer software (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2016). My rationale for this is that my sample was not so large as to render this type of analysis unachievable, and it meant I was able to assure myself that I had thoroughly reviewed all the material.

Following the conclusion of my literature review, I created a coding frame⁸.

This was informed by the research I had reviewed and acted as a starting point for my analysis. As I became more familiar with the data I had collected, I added to and amended some of these codes. This approach enabled me to conduct a thorough and detailed analysis (Wincup, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Due to the nature of Twitter, it was not feasible to obtain consent from my participants (Ahmed et al., 2017). I made the decision to pursue this research without informing any participants that their Tweets would be utilised as data in my research. This meant that participants were not able to provide informed consent, nor were they made aware of the right to withdraw. I am aware that there is significant debate amongst academics as to whether informed consent should be obtained in such studies, with arguments made on either side (Sugiura et al., 2017). Ultimately, to avoid reactivity of participants, and to observe their uninfluenced attitudes, my research relied on participants being unaware that I was accessing and analysing their data (Jupp et al., 2000, McCormick et al., 2017). I designed my study so as not to give my presence away to participants, as I did not want to risk causing them to act any differently, for example, trying to present more favourably.

To mitigate any ethical concerns associated with this approach, I have ensured anonymity and confidentiality by removing all personal identifying information. I have

⁸ See appendix 2 for the full coding frame

not collected data from any Twitter user that presents as being under 18 years old. I have not included full verbatim quotations, due to the risk that these could be used to locate the original post. Further, I have conducted reverse searches on the relevant curated posts to ensure that they are not identifiable. I have ensured that all data collected throughout this research has been stored in adherence with both General Data Protection Regulations [2018] and Twitter (n.d.) terms and conditions. I did not intentionally collect any personal data in this research. Where Tweets included reference to personal data, I ensured that I did not include any details that would enable identification of the person. Whilst content on Twitter is within the public domain, it is appropriate to protect the identities of my participants. I have not used any personally identifying information, such as usernames.

To eliminate the potential for, or perception of, bias, I set clear criteria for my research prior to data collection and analysis, reflected critically on my own viewpoints, adhered rigorously to my research plan, and engaged in regular supervision sessions. I maintained an open working relationship with my supervisor, to both ensure the quality of my research and to minimise the emotional impact of my exposure to such a sensitive topic, particularly the emotional and sometimes hateful content that accompanied it.

Through adopting the processes described above, I was able to collate and analyse data to meet my research aims. My findings are described and explored in the following chapter.

Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question “*What does social media content reveal about public perceptions of female celebrity victims of male perpetrated IPA?*”. The aims were to explore whether survivors of IPA fit into key victimology theories and to gain a better understanding of the public’s perceptions of celebrities who have suffered IPA through analysis of social media content posted in response to such disclosures. To achieve these aims, the research has involved critical analysis of three case studies of celebrity IPA survivors, through qualitative content analysis of Tweets made in response to selected BBC articles relating to the abuse. This chapter provides the results and discussion of the research, firstly providing a brief overview of the findings of each case study, then moving on to a more detailed and holistic analysis of each of the themes identified within the research.

Case Study 1: Amber

The selected article, “*Amber Heard: I loved Depp, but he could be a monster*” was published on 23/07/2020 (BBC News, 2020a). It provides details of the testimony of Amber and her sister during the libel case that Johnny pursued against The Sun Newspaper, as well as text messages that she had sent other people about Johnny during their relationship. At the time of review, this article had a total of 97 replies, which included 81 Tweets deemed relevant to this research (73 original posts and 9 replies).

A review of this data highlighted several key concepts. There were multiple references to one particularly grotesque incident; Johnny had alleged that Amber had left human faeces in their bed. Amber denied this allegation, however it was presented within Tweets as having been accepted as fact. Amber was portrayed as a “*liar*” in multiple Tweets, often through the medium of GIFs⁹. Beyond this, there were numerous character smears presented against her, with participants describing her as “*mad*”, “*flakey*” and “*toxic*”. Some participants referred to evidence from the court proceedings to discredit her account. Several participants indicated that the content of this article was not worth caring about. Others accused the BBC of biased reporting, specifically due to their apparent support of Amber as well as an allegation that they generally share toxic articles about men.

Case Study 2: Evan

The selected article, “*US actress and musician Evan Rachel Wood accuses singer Marilyn Manson of abuse during their three-year relationship in the late noughties*” was published on 01/02/2021 (BBC News, 2021b). It refers to Evan’s allegations that Marilyn had groomed her as a teenager. It also provides brief details of allegations made by four other females that Marilyn had abused them, alongside corroborative allegations made by a male who worked with Marilyn, who claimed to have witnessed some of this abuse. The article clarifies that Evan had previously spoken of abuse and had been instrumental in the introduction of the Phoenix Act, which increased the statute of limitations for DV from three years to five (in the USA).

⁹ A GIF is a “Graphics Interchange Format”, it can be a static or an animated image

At the time of review, this article had a total of 130 replies, of which 89 were relevant to this research (63 original posts and 26 replies).

There were numerous key concepts evident in this data. There was a sarcastic tone to many of the Tweets relating to Marilyn, for example participants stated that he seemed “*nice*”. Some Tweets dehumanised Marilyn through referring to his perceived animalistic attributes; this appeared to demean Evan, suggesting that she knowingly became involved with an abuser. Many participants focused on Marilyn, with Evan almost missing from the narrative. Whilst there was little doubt in the Tweets that he was abusive, very little consideration was given to Evan or the impact of the abuse on her. When participants did focus on Evan, a key debate concerned her motives for disclosing the abuse now, with the speculation that she was seeking financial gain being countered by those seeking to educate others on IPA. Some participants highlighted that Evan had been a child at the commencement of the relationship. One Tweet questioning why girls choose to stay in such relationships instead of being single resulted in significant debate whereby other participants attempted to educate the original participant on the complexities of IPA.

Case Study 3: Rhianna

The selected article, “*Chris Brown speaks about Rhianna assault*”, was published on 16/08/2017 (BBC News, 2017). It is effectively the voice of Chris, who is given the opportunity to provide his reasons for the violence. He described the relationship as being a volatile one and stated the incident in question occurred because Rhianna responded violently in response to his infidelity with one of his

employees. The article informs readers that Chris received five years of probation and a community order for this assault. It notes that Chris believed he would be “*haunted*” forever by the photographs of the injuries Rhianna sustained during this assault, effectively suggesting that he too is a victim as a result of this incident.

As per the other case studies, a review of the data highlighted some key topics. There was a sense of outrage about the article, with some expressing dissatisfaction that an abuser had been given a platform to share his version of events, and others expressing disinterest as there were more important things happening in the world. Participants also questioned Chris’s motives for recalling the incident, and several commented that the abuse was being downplayed. Several participants used derogatory language about Chris, and there was a noticeable lack of focus on Rhianna in the content of the Tweets. There was one reference made regarding the beating of women being part of “*black culture*”, and that this is something that needs to stop.

Coding Overview

A deductive coding system was created based on the existing research and literature. It summarised the topics that were anticipated to arise and is set out within appendix 2. Sub-codes were identified during data analysis, and, where possible, incorporated into the originally identified codes¹⁰.

¹⁰ See appendices 4-8 for the full coding frames for each of the topics discussed in this chapter

Influence of Institutions

As identified within the literature review, there has been significant progression over the past decades in the recognition and response to DA, however, academics have identified that the CJS is still influenced by positivistic victimology and feminists have gone so far as to accuse the CJS of allowing IPA to continue (Davies, 2018, Marsh et al., 2004, McGarry & Walklate, 2015). There was reference to the CJS within all the case studies, albeit the focus was not the same for each. The notion that the CJS should support survivors did not feature within any of the case studies. However, some participants expressed that the CJS should punish Marilyn for his abuse against Evan, expressing that he should be sent to “jail”, and that following the feminist #MeToo movement, abusers “like him” should be “behind bars” as well as questioning what the “authorities [are] doing about it”. Conversely, content around the punishment of Chris did not refer to expectations upon the CJS, but offered a desire that he has “the shit knocked out of him for that”. Another participant shared their view that Chris should have gone to “rehab”, indicating a view that the abuse was not a criminal matter. A key difference between these case studies is that Evan’s allegations are yet to progress through the CJS, whereas Chris has already received his outcome from the CJS for his abuse against Rhianna. Amber’s and Rhianna’s allegations have both been scrutinised through proceedings. In both cases, there are references made by participants to the evidence, whether that be in support of the survivor or otherwise. For example, a participant referred to audio material that had been released that was not supportive of Amber’s account, and another participant recommended others review the “police report to see what [Chris] ACTUALLY did”.

A further topic of interest to this research was whether the IPA tended to be viewed as a private matter, as opposed to an issue that society ought to understand and address. The fact that participants provided any comment at all implies that the relevant article was deemed worthy of their attention, regardless of their views on the individuals or circumstances. Some participants expressed a lack of interest in the articles; a participant in the Amber case study questioned *“is there any other subjects to talk about”*, and one in the Rhianna case study commented that with *“so much going on in the world...Who gives a shit about this”*. In relation to Evan, one participant indicated that they viewed the matter as a source of entertainment, as opposed to a serious topic to concern themselves with, stating that they were *“here for the comments”*.

The literature review highlighted that the media is an institution that protects the patriarchy and does so through minimising MVAWG by presenting a victim blaming narrative (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2017). This research found that participants were frustrated with the reporting in respect of both Amber’s and Rhianna’s allegations. In contrast to the literature review, Amber’s allegations were reported on in a manner that was considered to *“favour”* her over Johnny, causing a participant to question the lack of *“balance”*. On the contrary, the article concerning Rhianna’s abuse was criticised for *“giving a voice to an abuser”* and *“perpetuating narratives that abusers commonly use to justify their violence”*.

Feminist Challenge

Two sub-codes were identified from the different strands of feminism explored within the literature review: *“the patriarchy”* and *“sexism/ misogyny”*. Whilst these concepts were not explicitly apparent within the data, additional feminist sub-codes were identified including: *“challenging victim blaming”*, *“disappointment”*, *“downplaying abuse”*, *“education”* and *“personal experience”*. None of the participants identified themselves as feminists within their Tweets, and the content referred to in this section has been selected due to how it fits with the feminist agenda as opposed to suggesting the participant identified as a feminist.

There were no feminist challenges identified in any content posted about Amber. The only exception being that one participant criticised the BBC for their portrayal of men as *“bad”* in numerous articles, effectively expressing dissatisfaction with the perceived radical feminist approach to reporting. Victim blaming content was identified in all three case studies, but only remained unchallenged within this case study. Feminist challenges included expressions of disappointment and efforts to educate. One participant simply exclaimed that the comments in relation to Evan were *“trash”*, whereas other participants took the opportunity to explain IPA and how survivors cope with it, for example, explaining that there is *“NO reasonable acceptable timeline for coming forward”*, explaining the grooming process and describing gaslighting. Further, a participant commenting in respect of Rhianna sought to explain that Chris’s attempt to shift the blame onto Rhianna was *“classic abuse behaviour”*. Efforts to educate were most clearly demonstrated in the Evan case study, in response to a participant stating that they could not understand the girls that choose to stay in

toxic relationships rather than being single. This resulted in a conversation spanning more than 22 Tweets (total amount unknown due to deleted Tweets) in which other participants attempted to educate the participant about IPA, including through reference to personal experience of IPA victimisation. Amongst this exchange, several participants questioned Evan's motives for disclosing the abuse at this time, and as such some educational responses were made in reply to this. One participant provided details of her own experience of IPA across three Tweets to provide a more meaningful and detailed response than the word count would have allowed. This participant explained the stages of IPA, noting that abusers are initially "*charming*" before "*testing boundaries*", creating co-dependence, "*gas-lighting*" and then being nice again to break the survivor's instincts. The data does not appear to support the claim that feminism only represents white, middle-class women's interests (Hoyle, 2007). Analysis has demonstrated that feminist challenge occurred in the Rhianna case study, albeit there were less examples than found in Evan's case.

Victim Status

The changing role of women within society may have had an impact on someone being seen as an ideal victim simply because they are female (Christie, 1986). Analysis of the data collected found no indication that being female had any impact on being recognised as an ideal victim. Age however, featured in respect of Evan, with some participants highlighting that she was an "*innocent child*" that had been manipulated by Marilyn when they started their relationship. Evan's relationship with Marilyn was commented upon in a manner that prevented recognition of victim

status, as discussed below, this largely centred around the perception that it was entirely obvious that he would be abusive due to his public persona, and consequently, she held responsibility not to be in that relationship.

There was significant focus on the abuser within the data retrieved in each case study. In line with Christie's (1986) notion of the ideal offender, and Yardley et al.'s (2019) research into celebrity perpetrators of IPA, participants voiced ongoing support for the abusers, with one stating that Marilyn was "*innocent until proven guilty*", and another hoping that "*the jury use common sense and find [Johnny] not guilty*". Another participant, who appeared to believe the allegations against Johnny, commented that the abuse was a "*catastrophe*" for his fans, and rather than expressing any concerns about the impact on Amber, further stated that they hoped he could "*save his married life*". There were, however, indications within all case studies that some participants viewed the abusers as bad and condemned them. For example, Johnny was described as a "*bloody thug*", Marilyn was described as a "*wrong un*" and Chris received several labels including "*terrible man*", "*prick*" and "*disgusting pig*".

Both Amber and Evan fell within Strobl's (2010) rejected victim category. Amber's placement in this category was made clear by the derogatory comments made about her, for example being called a "*monster*" and the claim that she is "*full of [herself]*" alongside comments indicating that she was a liar and could not be believed. Participants rejecting Evan's victim status did so on suspicion she had ulterior motives for the timing of her disclosures, with one questioning "*does she need money?*" and another suggesting "*the stories come pouring out*" when the fame "*fades*". Another

participant commented “*who knows what the girls see in millionaires??!!*”. These comments do not appear to take account of Evan’s own fame and financial stability. Comments about Amber tended to portray her as an abuser rather than a survivor, and multiple participants rejected her victim status based on one alleged incident, which she has denied. The allegation that she left faeces on the bed appears to be taken as truth by numerous participants, who have commented simply to say things such as “*she did a monster shit on the bed*” and “*woman who poo poos the sheets*”. One participant refers to this incident as a reason not to trust her, stating “*Never believe someone who leaves fecal (sic) matter on someone else's bed*”.

Another key aspect considered by this research was the use of language when discussing the IPA and those involved. An interesting observation from the data is that, whilst Chris is portrayed as an abuser, Rhianna is not explicitly recognised as a survivor and is, in fact, largely missing from the narrative. Participants expressed disbelief about Chris’ account, for example by questioning how “*was she kicking him in a car*”. Other participants expressed distrust in his motives for recalling the abuse, questioning why anyone would want to “*recall abuse? Battery? Hitting a women (sic)?*”. Evan is the only survivor who achieves accepted victim status within the data reviewed. Some participants demonstrated this acceptance by declaring their belief in her account, with one participant referencing the “*multiple sources*” who made similar allegations against Marilyn. Other participants called on the public to support her, with one stating that those questioning her “*need serious help*” and another stating that those people are “*part of the problem*”.

Notably, Amber was not referred to as a victim or survivor in any of the Tweets, despite the article indicating that she used the term “*victim*”. Similarly, other than one participant labelling Johnny a “*thug*”, no other participant used any language to indicate a perception that he was an abuser. This supports the above exploration of the rejected victim and the ideal offender. In responding to the article about Evan, only one participant used the term “*survivor*”, whereas six used the term “*victim*”, despite the article demonstrating that Evan self-identifies as a “*survivor*”. Additionally, there were references to both “*victim blaming*” and “*victim shaming*”. Some participants referred to Marilyn as an “*abuser*”, in line with Evan’s terminology within the article. There was one reference to Rhianna as a “*victim*” and no description of her as a “*survivor*”; the article had not used any such term to describe her. Chris was labelled an abuser three times, and reference was made to “*domestic violence offender*” as a more general comment. The choice of language may be reflective of the legal terminology that the public are likely more familiar with. Additionally, the fact that only one article suggested self-identification as a survivor may be indicative that it is not a widely used term outside of academia and feminist support services. Despite the serious nature of the topic, evidence of humour and sarcasm were identified across the case studies. One participant referred to Johnny as behaving like a “*pirate*”; a reference to a character he famously played. Referring to Rhianna and Chris, a participant commented “*and they say romance is dead*”. There were multiple sarcastic comments about Marilyn’s behaviour, which are explored in depth below.

Victim Blaming

Whilst there were multiple references made by participants indicating that Amber is “*mad as a box of frogs*”, a “*sociopath*” and a “*crazy nutter*”, these were not presented in a way that explained why she might have been victimised, but as a reason not to believe her allegations, as “*she doesn't know the difference between fantasy and reality*”. As previously explored, the notion of victim proneness stems from anecdotes as opposed to evidence (Tapley & Davies, 2020). The notion of culpability was somewhat evident in respect of Amber, albeit the general refusal to recognise her as a victim meant there was very little recognition that there had been any victimisation that she could contribute to. It was reflected that she was “*no saint*”, indicating that her behaviour was under scrutiny, however it was not explicitly acknowledged that this contributed to any abuse. In the cases of Amber and Rhianna, a sub-code of “*toxic relationship*” was identified which included the mutual engagement in bad behaviours and the failure to leave their abuser. One participant speculated that there was “*a strong possibility*” of Amber and Johnny being as “*bad as each other*”, while another stated that Rhianna used to “*beat [Chris] and scratch him all the time*” before this incident. The case study of Rhianna is the one in which abuse is most readily acknowledged, due to Chris admitting to it. This research found that some participants commented upon how Rhianna had precipitated the abuse, for example reflecting that their suspicions that she “*must've done something to be punched like that*” were correct.

Traditionally, theories concerning risky lifestyles focus on the public space, which renders the theory problematic when trying to understand IPA (Pratt &

Turanovic, 2016). By looking instead at risky lifestyles as an umbrella term to encompass the survivor's choices, actions and patterns, this research identified a sub-code of the *"obvious offender"*. This applied specifically to Evan and was not present amongst the other case studies. Comments that fell within this code included derogatory descriptions of Marilyn, for example as *"a creature who looks like an undead monster"* and a *"big evil rock star"*, and statements indicating that Evan should have suspected the abuse. These comments were often written in a sarcastic tone, for example, asking *"How could anyone possibly expect trouble"*, *"what do you expect"* and *"is she thick as shit? You get with someone like that for the abuse"*. One participant concluded *"ur (sic) vice sucks hence you suffer"*. Whilst this overlaps somewhat with the notion of the ideal offender (explored below), these comments demonstrate a view that Marilyn is so obviously a bad person, that Evan can be blamed for the abuse because she took what is seen as an obvious risk in engaging in a relationship with him. This particular viewpoint offers interesting insight in relation to the potential shortcomings of Claire's Law; as Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate (2017) highlighted, the potential of receiving support is less if it is perceived that the survivor is aware of the danger, as they are expected to protect themselves.

DV myths were explored within the literature review as beliefs which effectively serve to minimise IPA, and ultimately influence any help-seeking behaviours of survivors due to their impact on the CJS and the media (Harne & Radford, 2008, Peters, 2008). There was no explicit evidence of IPA myths in the content relating to Amber, however, the posts highlighted widespread disbelief that she had suffered IPA. Whilst it is possible that this denial of the IPA is a result of an

unconscious influence of IPA myths, it is not possible to analyse this further. As discussed above, participants demonstrated an acceptance that the abuse of Evan was justified as she ought to have known the danger she was putting herself in and taken the necessary precautions to keep herself safe (Monckton-Smith, 2021). Interestingly, the article about Chris could be considered as perpetuating DA myths through the voice it has given to the abuser, allowing him to attempt to justify his actions. Several participants expressed outrage about this, as explored above in the sub-code of *"frustration at reporting"*.

Race

The final topic of interest that was identified through the data was the reference to race. This was only mentioned by one participant, in one case study: Rhianna. The participant identified himself as a black male and commented *"we love to beat our women it's cultural and its (sic) got to stop....."*. This did not prompt any debate, therefore there is insufficient data to draw any meaningful inference.

Discussion

Having reviewed the findings of this research, there are several key themes worth further exploration. The data indicates that IPA is considered to be a CJS matter to some extent, however the CJS is not necessarily seen as being the most effective, or desired, response to it. Other than referring to Amber's evidence, the content relating to the CJS failed to consider the survivor, with no consideration given as to how

survivors experience the process, or how it can better support them. The data relating to the media indicates conflicting views amongst the participants as to what constitutes an appropriate balance when reporting on IPA so as not to appear biased towards either party. Overall, the data supports that there is some recognition that IPA is a criminal matter and something for the public to respond to, however, there also remains a reluctance to accept this.

The data indicated that whilst fourth wave feminists are prominent online and are attempting to educate others about IPA through a variety of methods, they do not necessarily represent everyone. Amber was left unsupported and almost entirely blamed for her abuse within this data. Further, there is an indication that some of society disapprove of the notion that men are being generalised as “*bad*”. Whilst feminists seek to expose the power and negative impact of the patriarchy, with radical feminists highlighting that the subordination of women serves the interests of all men, such reductionalist views as portraying all men as bad can be problematic for the reputation of feminism (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2018, Walklate, 2013). The data represents a division in those who understand the complexities of IPA and those who simply see survivors as to blame for their experience. In line with other research, some participants indicated that survivors gained something by “*playing the role*” of a victim, for example improving their finances or increasing their status (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016). This suggests that there is work to be done to improve the public perceptions of, and responses to, IPA survivors, to facilitate their access to appropriate support.

Overall, the data supports the theories that victim status is not readily available to all those who suffer IPA (Christie, 1986, Strobl, 2010). It indicates that the intimate relationship a survivor has (or had) with their abuser, makes it incredibly difficult to obtain this. The data indicates that even if the abuser can be considered the ideal offender, this is not in itself sufficient to secure ideal victim status (Christie, 1986). This was particularly evident for Evan, as Marilyn was judged as too obvious an abuser, and so Evan was held to a higher level of account for engaging in the relationship. That being said, her status as a child at the commencement of the relationship did cause some participants to assign accepted victim status to her (Christie, 1986, Strobl, 2010). The choice of language indicates that IPA remains an uncomfortable and conflicting topic for the public (Harne & Radford, 2008, Wiper and Lewis, 2020).

Within the literature review, a number of positivistic theories were reviewed, and their influence was anticipated to be evident within the data. Analysis, however, identified that victim proneness did not feature within the discourse about these case studies. The focus on how the survivor, specifically Rhianna, behaved before the abuse is in line with Wolfgang's (1958, as cited in Francis, 2017) culpability theory, supporting that its influence continues, despite the better understanding of the power imbalance within abusive relationships (Walklate, 2013). The data did not explicitly support the just world theory (Mancini and Pickett, 2017); whilst the observations around the "*obvious offender*" sub-code appear relevant here, no Tweets provided any insight as to the participant's motivation. There is the potential that any, some, or none, of the victim blaming content was influenced by the participant's attempts to distance themselves from the perceived risk of being an IPA survivor, however, it is not possible

to ascertain this from the data obtained. The data indicates that victim blaming is still very much occurring, despite the academic discrediting of the early victimological theories from which these myths originate (McGarry & Walklate, 2015). The way survivors were blamed by participants varied between the case studies, but ultimately, culpability, precipitation and risk-taking were identified as being barriers to achieving victim status (Christie, 1986, Davies et al., 2017, Francis, 2017). Due to the data collection methods, it was not possible to ascertain any gender differences in the extent of, nor the reasons for, victim blaming (Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016, Peters, 2008). In line with Eigenberg and Policastro's (2016) findings, those participants who stated that they were IPA survivors did not express victim blaming attitudes.

There was one reference to race amongst the data. Whilst more data on this topic would have been useful to facilitate meaningful analysis, this is not an unexpected outcome. Twitter does not allow racist Tweets, therefore it was unlikely that any such content would have been identified. The lack of conversation about the impact of race also supports Crenshaw's (2006) assertion that the interplay between race and gender is rarely recognised or addressed when considering VAWG.

The following chapter concludes this research by exploring how these findings fit with the current social climate, and by providing suggestions as to how this particular study fits in with the current academic understanding, and how its findings can be progressed.

Conclusions

This research aimed to answer *“What does social media content reveal about public perceptions of female celebrity victims of male perpetrated IPA?”*. It had two main aims: *“to explore whether victims of IPA fit into key victimology theories”* and *“to gain a better understanding of the public’s perceptions of celebrities that have suffered IPA through analysis of social media content posted in response to such disclosures”*. The six objectives that were set to achieve this have been grouped and explored below to ensure that the outcomes of this dissertation are clearly set out.

Objectives 1-3

- To examine how the E&W CJS have historically defined and responded to IPA;
- to put IPA into a modern-day context by clarifying the current legal position;
and
- To conduct a thorough literature review which explores key theoretical perspectives concerning the process of obtaining victim status.

This research began with a thorough literature review, which explored positivistic and revisionist victimology theories, and provided historical context as to the social and legal responses to IPA in E&W. This review highlighted that, particularly because of feminist research and activism, there have been significant changes in E&W legislation since the positivistic theories were introduced, with IPA being recognised as a criminal offence, as opposed to a private, tolerated, act (Centre for Women’s Justice, n.d, College of Policing & National Police Chiefs Council, 2021). Based on this review, a

set of codes were identified that were anticipated to be found within the data. Data was collated and analysed for three cases, which ultimately resulted in the recognition of new sub-codes. Exploration of this data highlighted the persistence of victim blaming attitudes and the complexities around being accepted, or rejected, as a survivor by others. The data indicated that concepts from the now discredited positivistic theories remain influential within public perception, however, the research found differences in how these concepts applied between each case study (McGarry and Walklate, 2015).

The literature review highlighted that much academic interest in IPA falls outside of victimology, for example, sitting within psychological or criminological theory. It was evident that there was significant interest in the abusers, often more so than the survivors. As demonstrated by the changes in the legal and social response to IPA, traditional victimology theories are based on outdated notions of who can be a victim of crime. This research has sought to establish the extent to which these theories apply in modern day context, with the results indicating that their influence continues to apply.

Objectives 4-6

- To interpret how these key victimological theories apply to victims of IPA,
- To critically analyse three case studies regarding celebrities who have disclosed IPA victimisation; and

- To collate and analyse Tweets made in response to the articles about IPA victimisation using qualitative content analysis to identify any key themes in public perceptions towards IPA victims.

Through qualitative content analysis of Tweets posted in response to BBC articles about celebrity survivors of IPA, this dissertation provided an insight into the influence of traditional victimology theories on the public's perception of IPA survivors. It identified mixed views about whether IPA is a CJS matter, or something better dealt with as a health issue (i.e. through rehabilitation), or even something that should be responded to with violence. Similarly, there was a mixed view on the media reporting of IPA. Some tweets expressed a "*who cares?*" attitude, stating that there were more important things going on in the world. Other tweets, however, demonstrated a feminist ethic and took the opportunity to educate other participants about IPA. This was not widespread however, and not all survivors benefitted from this support. This research found that victim blaming was widespread amongst participants and appeared to influence whether survivors were able to obtain accepted victim status. The data indicated that this was influenced by their relationship with the abuser, and whilst childhood was offered as a mitigating factor (in respect of Evan), being a woman, a key attribute within Christie's (1986) notion of the ideal victim, did not increase the likelihood of achieving this status.

Case Study Updates

It would be remiss of this research not to reflect on the impact of the subsequent proceedings involving Amber and Johnny which concluded in June 2022 (pending any appeals) with the jury finding Amber guilty of defamation for her claims that Johnny abused her (Levinson-King, 2022). These proceedings were broadcast on the television and have been described as a “*trial by tiktok*” due to the significant attention they received across social media (Sillito, 2022). The impact of Johnny’s victory, and the public perception of Amber as a liar is yet to be fully understood, however, it has been claimed that survivors have since sought to retract public statements made about their abuse, pulled out of court cases and expressed a reluctance to confide in their friends if they have shown support for Johnny (Dickson, 2022). Charlotte Proudman (2022), a barrister specialising in VAWG has described the outcome of this case as a “*gag order*” for women and has spoken out about the proceedings, highlighting the misogynistic methods used to blame Amber for not leaving Johnny and for not having enough evidence to back up her allegations.

All data collated for this study was shared online during the previous proceedings, which concluded there had been sufficient evidence that Johnny had abused Amber. As a result, the data is representative of the information known at that time, and not influenced by the more recent hearing. Amber’s legal team have since requested that the jury’s verdict be “*tossed*” on the grounds that it was not supported by the evidence (Helmore, 2022).

Further, earlier this year, Marilyn initiated a defamation lawsuit against Evan. It is of note that Marilyn and Johnny have been close friends for decades, and there has

been speculation that Amber and Evan have conspired together in making false accusations (Court, 2022). Whilst the proceedings are yet to commence, Evan has spoken publicly about this, stating that she is not scared, and describing his actions as an expected retaliation by her abuser to keep her quiet (Grow, 2022).

Study Limitations

This research was qualitative in nature, as it was designed with feminist methodology in mind. Its aim was to explore relevant theories, as opposed to testing any hypothesis. Whilst a great deal of thought went into this design, its methodology means that its analysis was subjective to some extent, and as opposed to quantitative methodology, any attempts to recreate this research could result in different outcomes or interpretations.

Due to the resources available, this study included a relatively small sample and could be improved upon through the inclusion of a greater number of case studies, or greater number of articles per case study, to increase the available data. Further, the limited resources meant that it was not possible to ascertain and analyse the demographics of the participants. Analysis based on gender, age and race, in particular, would be interesting and would feed into research that indicates that such demographics can influence victim blaming behaviour (e.g. Peters, 2008).

This study focused on responses to articles that were shared within British media, relating to American celebrities. All collated Tweets were written in English.

Whilst people from anywhere in the world have access to these articles on Twitter, it is likely that this data predominantly represents western populations and their values.

It was the intention of the researcher to obtain data from social media, as opposed to through such methods as interviews or questionnaires, for a couple of reasons. One being that this was considered an appropriate way to approach a sensitive and distressing topic, by not asking direct questions of participants, but also as a way to minimise the likelihood that participants would provide answers that they thought the researcher wanted to hear. Effectively, this was determined as a method through which to avoid bias. It is not possible, however, to know for certain whether the views expressed by participants are their real views, or whether participants are attempting to “*troll*”, perhaps as a source of entertainment for themselves (Buckels et al., 2014). Whilst this research cannot say for certain that all the content analysed is representative of participants’ genuinely held beliefs, it can comment upon the public opinions that participants chose to express, which ultimately will be seen by, and influence the views of others.

Due to Twitter’s settings. Tweets that contain overtly offensive content tend to be deleted, and accounts that breach the platforms conditions can be suspended. Additionally, Twitter users may decide to delete their own Tweets. These actions result in the content of some Tweets being hidden. This was the situation within this study, meaning that it was not possible to review the content of all Tweets posted in respect of the case studies. It is not possible to determine whether Tweets had been deleted due to their content being particularly offensive in relation to the survivor or abuser, or whether there was another reason altogether for its removal.

Whilst efforts were made to select case studies in which the survivors, abusers and circumstances differed, it was not possible to identify a case study in which the abuser was not publicly known, due to the lack of media and public interest in such cases. The fact that all abusers were well-known allowed for interesting analysis of the notion of the ideal offender, however, this focus was often at the expense of the survivor. Whilst the choice of celebrity IPAs was a deliberate one, to ensure higher public engagement, this decision resulted in a narrower option for case studies to choose from. One impact of this is the time difference between the chosen case studies. Social media use has increased over the years, and therefore there is the potential that older articles would naturally have received less attention, potentially from a less representative sample of participants (Backlinko, 2022).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has highlighted that it would be beneficial to conduct more research into this topic, as public perceptions and responses to IPA survivors can impact on the support options for survivors (Mancini & Pickett, 2017, Peters, 2008). It provides insight into the public opinions concerning celebrity survivors of IPA. As mentioned above, this topic is particularly relevant at this time as society waits to see the wider impact of Johnny's successful damages claim against Amber, and Marilyn's upcoming proceedings against Evan (Grow, 2022, Sillitio, 2022). This research has identified that the public apply principles of traditional victimology theories to IPA survivors in different ways, with the main impact being victim blaming rather than support.

A key area of interest for further research would be a more in-depth review of the impact of perceptions of the offender on the acceptance or rejection of victim status. This research found that it is equally as problematic if the public consider it obvious that a person would be an abuser as it is if they consider it unlikely, resulting in victim blaming and disbelief respectively. Further, this research highlighted that even when the abuser admits their actions, this does not automatically result in the granting of victim status. Research into a larger number of IPA cases looking specifically at this relationship would be incredibly interesting. As per this research, it would create a useful tool to educate the public about IPA, which could ultimately impact on help-seeking behaviour and reporting.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to establish the influence of the '*just world*' theory, as the data did not present the participants' motivations for their comments. This is a key theory, and its application to IPA survivors should be studied in more detail. The results of this study would be a useful starting point for a detailed review of how this theory applies to IPA, as researchers would have an idea of the attitudes likely to be expressed by participants and could focus their efforts on establishing motives.

This research has provided insight into the ongoing influence of victimology theories and how they continue to influence people's perceptions of IPA survivors. It has demonstrated that, whilst there have been legislative and political demonstrations of an intolerance to IPA, there remains a need to provide better education to the public about IPA and its impact.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature Review Search Strategy

Broad Topic Area

- Review of public opinions shared on social media in response to disclosures made by celebrities that they have suffered Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA).
- Exploration of the relevance of traditional victimology theories in understanding these opinions.

More Specific Focus

This research sought to analyse social media posts relating to female celebrities' disclosures that they have suffered IPA. It endeavoured to establish how seminal theories within victimology apply to public perceptions in modern society. It investigated whether any of these theories can explain why some celebrities appear to struggle to obtain "*victim status*".

Seminal Texts and Key Authors

- Christie (1986)

The below academics provide key summaries and critical analysis of victimology theories¹¹:

- Davies et al. (2017)
- Davies (2018)
- Francis (2017)
- Rock (2018)

¹¹ These have been utilised to explore those early theories if the original texts were not readily available.

Key Search Terms Used

- Domestic AND abuse OR assault OR violence
- “Intimate partner” AND abuse OR violence
- Partner AND abuse OR violence
- Celeb*
- “Social media”
- Public AND opinion OR perception OR reaction
- Twitter
- Victim blaming
- “Ideal victim”
- Feminist victimology
- Positivist victimology
- Radical victimology

Timescale

As this research focused on traditional victimological theories and how they apply to modern day society, it was necessary to review literature from the 1940s onwards.

Appendix 2: Coding Frame Based on Literature Review

Main code	Sub-code	Key features of content
Influence of institutions	CJS focus	Reference to CJS processes, outcomes or experiences with professionals.
	Influenced by media narrative	Reference to the impact of media on the public and political response to IPA.
Victim blaming	Proneness	Reference to survivor’s characteristics.
	Culpability	Reference to survivor’s general behaviour.
	Precipitation	Reference to survivor’s behaviour prior to the abuse.
	Risky lifestyles	Reference to survivor’s choices, actions and patterns.
	DA myths	Reference to stereotypical beliefs which serve to minimise, deny, or justify IPA.
	Just World theory	Participant blames the incident on the survivor’s behaviour to alleviate own fears of being victimised.
Feminist challenge	The impact of patriarchy	Reference to the role of patriarchal institutions in enabling the ongoing MVAWG.
	Sexism and misogyny	Content aims to challenge sexist and misogynist views expressed either within the article or by other Twitter users.

Victim status	Ideal victim	Reference to whether the survivor is female, a child, and/or weak, and/or whether they act as expected, for example by putting CPS needs ahead of self.
	Ideal offender	Reference to the offender's attributes.
	Rejected victim	Content seeks to deny the survivor's " <i>victim status</i> ".
	Accepted Victim	Content expressed acceptance that the survivor is a " <i>victim</i> ".
Private vs. Public		Content includes opinions as to whether IPA is something that should remain a private matter, or is something to be discussed by others.
Intersection-ality		Reference to the impact of race and/or class and how this interacts with gender.

Appendix 3: Unused Case Study – Ruth Dodsworth

Ruth Dodsworth (hereafter referred to as Ruth), born 1975, is a British journalist and weather presenter at ITV Cymru (Rathor, 2022). Details of the IPA she suffered came to light when her husband, a nightclub owner, was sentenced to three years, and given a restraining order, after pleading guilty to coercive control and stalking in April 2021 (BBC News, 2021, BBC News, 2021a).

Ruth disclosed that her husband had stalked and harassed her for nine years during their marriage, refused to let her attend filming locations alone, attended her workplace unannounced, insisted she spend her lunch breaks with him in the car park, constantly called her, attended all medical appointments with her, opened her mail and even waited outside the bathroom door for her (BBC News, 2021a). Further, she disclosed that he used her fingerprint as she slept to gain access to her phone, paid their children to access her phone and put a tracker in her car (BBC News, 2021a). She also disclosed physical violence, some of which was witnessed by family, including a push resulting in a fractured rib as well as him grabbing her by the throat (BBC News, 2021a). Her disclosures were not reported on until the conclusion of a criminal trial. She did not seek to share her story but reflected that, in hindsight, it was the best outcome as it had enabled her to share her voice to help other survivors to speak up (BBC News, 2021). In 2022, it was announced that she had been shortlisted for the St David Awards, which recognises everyday heroes (BBC News, 2022).

Unfortunately, there was insufficient media interest and Twitter engagement in respect of this matter and therefore it was not suitable to be used as a case study. Using the established search strategy, only one relevant article was identified. Whilst it was not possible to use this case, or analyse any data relating to it, the lack of interest from the BBC and from those Twitter users that engage with the BBC is worthy of note. The single comment that was posted in response to the relevant article was one of support, indicating a belief in Ruth's allegations (which had been found proven at trial). It was beyond the scope of this research to establish why this case attracted such little attention, however it is possible that this was influenced by Ruth being a lesser-known public figure, and the abuser not being a public figure at all (which is in direct contrast to the other selected case studies). Whilst Ruth has been celebrated for her bravery and '*community spirit*' (Jones, 2022), her abuser, unlike the other case studies, had not been given a stage from which to share his story, which effectively minimised the opportunity for people to take sides and argue their conflicting views.

Appendix 4: Coding Frame Created During Data Analysis – Influence of Institutions

Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2	Key features of content	Literature review	Amber	Evan	Rhianna
CJS focus		Reference to CJS processes, outcomes or experiences with professionals.	/	/	/	/
	CJS should punish	Content includes expectations that the CJS should punish the abuser.			/	
	Evidence based	Content directs other participants to sources of evidence, whether they are in the survivor’s favour or not.		/		/
Public vs private		Content includes opinions as to whether IPA is something that should be known by others.	/	/		/
	Lack of interest	Content includes indication that the participant does not consider this to be “newsworthy”.		/		/
	Entertainment	Content includes indication that the participant partakes in discussion about this topic as a source of entertainment.			/	

Influenced by media narrative		Reference to the impact of media on the public and political response to IPA.	/			
	Frustration at reporting	Content includes indication that the participant is frustrated with the way the matter has been reported on		/		/

Appendix 5: Coding Frame Created During Data Analysis – Feminist Challenge

Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2	Key features of content	Literature review	Amber	Evan	Rhianna
The impact of patriarchy		Reference to the role of patriarchal institutions in enabling the ongoing MVAWG	/			
Sexism and misogyny		Content aims to challenge sexist and misogynist views expressed either within the article or by other Twitter users.	/			
	Challenging victim blaming	Content explicitly challenges opinions that appear to blame the survivor.			/	/
Disappointment		Content includes negative views of how people have responded to the matter within the comments section.			/	
	Downplaying abuse	Content expressed disappointment in the apparent downplaying of the abuse within the articles or other Tweets.				/
Education		Content includes attempts to educate			/	/

		perceived misconceptions or ignorance of other participants. This can form a back-and-forth dynamic between multiple users, and includes questions being posed as well as answers being offered.				
	Personal experience	Reference to personal experience of IPA (or similar abuse) to educate others about the topic.			/	

Appendix 6: Coding Frame Created During Data Analysis – Victim Status

Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2	Key features of content	Literature review	Amber	Evan	Rhianna
Ideal victim		Reference to whether the survivor is female, a child, and/or weak, and/or whether they act as expected, for example by putting CPS needs ahead of self.	/		/	
Ideal offender		Reference to the offender's attributes.	/	/	/	/
	Supporting abuser	Content indicates continued support for the abuser.		/	/	
	Fans of the abuser as the victims	Content focuses on how the abuser's fans, rather than the survivor, have suffered as a result of the allegations.		/		
	Condemning offender	Content portrays the abuser as a "bad" person.		/	/	/
Rejected victim		Content seeks to deny the survivor's "victim status".	/	/	/	

	Disbelieving survivor	Content indicates disbelief of the survivor, with no rationale offered.		/		
	Derogatory terms used against survivor	Content includes offensive terminology and/or presentation of the survivor.		/		
	Focus on a particular incident	Reference to a particular incident or action undertaken by the survivor which is not in-keeping with the expectations of a victim.		/		
	Questioned motive (survivor)	Content includes speculation as to why the survivor is disclosing the abuse or why they engaged in the relationship.			/	
Accepted victim		Content expresses acceptance that the survivor is a "victim".	/		/	
	Believing survivor	Content expresses belief about the survivor's account.			/	
	Disbelieving abuser	Content expresses disbelief about				/

		the abuser's account.				
	Questioning motives (abuser)	Content includes speculation as to why the abuser has behaved in a certain way following the IPA disclosures.				/
Public should support survivor		Content expresses an expectation that the right thing for people to do is to believe and support the survivor.			/	
Language		Reference to those involved as "victim", "survivor", "abuser" or synonyms representing their perceived status within the abusive relationship.	/		/	/
	Humour	Content focused on presenting the survivor, abuser or situation in a humorous way.		/		
	Sarcasm	Content presented in a sarcastic tone.			/	/

Appendix 7: Coding Frame Created During Data Analysis – Victim Blaming

Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2	Key features of content	Literature review	Amber	Evan	Rhianna
Proneness		Reference to survivor’s characteristics.	/			
Culpability		Reference to survivor’s general behaviour.	/	/		
	Toxic relationship	Reference to the relationship being equally toxic for both parties.		/		/
Precipitation		Reference to survivor’s behaviour prior to the abuse.	/			/
Risky lifestyles		Reference to survivor’s choices, actions and patterns.	/		/	
	Obvious offender	Reference to evidence/opinions that the abuser is a deviant, suggesting the survivor ought to have been aware. This is often written in a sarcastic manner to emphasise the failure of the survivor to protect herself.			/	

Just World theory		Participant blames the incident on the survivor's behaviour to alleviate own fears of being victimised.	/			
DA myths		Reference to stereotypes that serve to minimise or justify IPA.	/			

Appendix 8: Coding Frame Created During Data Analysis – Race

Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2	Key features of content	Literature review	Amber	Evan	Rhianna
Intersection-ality		Reference to the impact of race and/or class and how this interacts with gender.				
	Racial	Reference to violence within black culture.				/