A qualitative study on the experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) from the perspective of male victims

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to get a deeper understanding of male victim’s experiences when exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by a female partner. Two men who had been exposed to IPV were interviewed through email correspondence regarding their experiences. To provide a general understanding of the specific difficulties male victims may face from a Western perspective, we have over email and telephone also interviewed three people who work with the issue. The results of this study were analyzed using theories of social psychology and hegemonic masculinity theory. What was stressed throughout the interviews was the importance of abused men to get recognition for being victims of IPV. Our findings showed that stereotypical perceptions of masculinity may affect male victims of IPV in many ways, such as affecting the self-image and hindering help-seeking as well as receiving the proper help services.

Keywords:
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), male victims, masculinity, stereotyping
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Emelie & Jennifer
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1. Introduction

The issue of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is as complex as it is emotionally charged, often revolving around discussions of patriarchal structures and gender dichotomy. Yet thus far the public discussion is only beginning to open up for stories of male victims and their experiences often get overlooked. In Sweden the issue of male victims of IPV was not mentioned in reports by the Crime Prevention Council before the year of 2009 when Hradilova Selin conducted a study on victims and perpetrators of all genders.

”... intimate partner violence should be regarded as a behaviour where both structural and individual circumstances interact and where gender-power is one out of several dimensions” (Hradilova Selin, 2009:12, p7).

Here she points out gender structures as a factor to be considered when examining intimate partner violence, but in her final results also states that the common belief that such violence towards men is a marginal occurrence is questionable. In addition, Stewart et al. (2012), state that;

“The public is more accepting of a female’s use of force against a male intimate partner relative to a male’s use of force against a female intimate partner” (p3750).

Increasing public intolerance to violence towards women is a positive progress, while a simultaneous acceptance of violence towards men is in many ways concerning. Stewart et al. (2012) argue that the public opinion is “fairly accurate” (p3748) in the sense that men’s violence may often lead to more severe physical harm. However the same view is also in many ways problematic. The concept of a “typical victim” and a “typical abuser” can result in gender-stereotyping that perpetuate the traditional male/female roles as well as hinder help-seeking for both victim and perpetrator. According to Hradilova Selin (2009) male victims of IPV have no “natural places” to go to get help services nor are they, according to Tsui et al. (2010) as likely to seek it. In their study Help-seeking among male victims of partner abuse the results indicate that men are reluctant to seek
help because of traditional perceptions on masculinity. Tsui et al. (2010) found five themes on why abused men did not seek help; *service target perception, shame and embarrassment, denial, stigmatization, and fear.* They argue that;

“.... based on this perception that partner abuse often involves physical violence, abused men typically do not report their problems fearing that they would be laughed at, humiliated, or reversely accused of being the abuser due to a belief that men are physically capable of fighting back when challenged” (O’Brien Hunt, / Hart, 2005, as quoted by Tsui, Cheung & Leung, 2010, p770).

This research aims to shed light on what the situation for the unlikeliest victims of IPV may be like. Thus we decided on doing a qualitative research on C-level, to get deeper understanding of some personal experiences of male victims of IPV by a female perpetrator.

**Aim**

The aim of this research is to get deeper knowledge and understanding of male victim’s experiences when subjected to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by a female partner. We intend to answer the following research questions:

- What is the understanding and experiences of males who become victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) exerted by women?
- How did the men experience reaching out for help concerning their violent relationship?
- How was their self-image affected by living in a violent relationship?

**1.2 Background**

“Brå’s [the Crime Prevention Council] conclusion is that violence within intimate relationships should be considered as a behaviour where both structural and individual circumstances interact and where gender-power is one of several dimensions” (Hradilova Selin, 2009, p7).
According to the Crime Prevention Council there are many gaps in the research of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) overall and the issue of male victims in particular. The issue of violence towards women is such a massive one, that the issue of male victims has being given very little attention. Behind the hidden statistics regarding men’s exposure to IPV, are the stereotypical conceptions of gender roles that influence how we view victims and abusers (Hradilova Selin, 2009). Not only does society trivialize and question the issue of male victims of IPV, but many abused men themselves trivialize their experiences. According to Courtenay (2000):

“Men’s denial and disregard of physical discomfort, risk and health care needs are all means of demonstrating difference from women, who are presumed to embody these “feminine” characteristics”

(p1390).

There are studies that suggest that violent crimes tend to be reported depending on the perceived degree of severity. Male victims of IPV seem to report less physical injuries than female victims of IPV do (Hradilova Selin, 2009). One can assume that psychological abuse and “lighter violence” such as slaps, punches and pushes towards male victims, then goes unnoticed and unreported. Nybergh (2013) notes, which is important to stress, that the type of results you get when conducting research on IPV, depend on the type of questions you ask. She argues that:

“Crime victim studies generally find a lower incidence of intimate partner violence than population studies do. One reason is that the definition of what counts as violence is usually narrower and based on the criteria of what constitutes a crime” (Nybergh, 2013, p4).

The importance of detecting abused men can be looked at not only from equality- and justice perspectives, but also through a health perspective, as victims of IPV are at risk when it comes to developing “anxiety, depression and pain conditions – disorders that could become chronic (Stolt, 2010, p3). Further on the character of the violence, Stolt (2010) argues that:

“It can manifest as verbal infestation (ridicule and bullying), isolation (social or economic), jealousy, threats of physical violence and torture-like abuse, threats of divorce and destruction of personal property. It is also common with threats arising associated with divorce. This may involve, for example, threatening to deny partner visitation rights in a custody battle and sabotaging spending time with the kids by vilifying the abused partner” (p6).
For the men who do get exposed to IPV in Sweden, the resources and services offered are few. Most men therefore tend to seek help through their own social networks (friends and family), the somatic- and psychiatric health care, as well as calling national help-lines (Nybergh, 2013).

The research concludes that the issue of male victim’s of IPV regards more aspects than merely structural ones. It also raises questions on why women are denied the role as aggressors and whether this in turn indicates further gender stereotyping on behalf of the female abusers.

1.3 Limitations

This study will mainly be focusing on adult, male victim’s experiences from when they were being exposed to violence by a female partner. Therefore we will not bring up issues such as the child perspective or women offenders; neither will it focus on the cases of same sex relationships and intimate partner violence. Due to the fact that we are taking traditional gender roles into consideration we wish to exclude culturally different interpretations on them by only interviewing men who have been socialized in Sweden and are likely to be familiar with what they generally imply in a Swedish context.

1.4 Explanation of Concepts

In this study we are making use of some terms and abbreviations related to our area of research and those will be presented below in order to clarify for the reader what meaning and value we have assumed for each of them.

*Intimate Partner Violence - IPV*

We have chosen to assume the definition presented by the World Health Organization where “Intimate partner violence refers to any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in that relationship” (WHO). Examples of such can be hitting, kicking, insulting, humiliating or sexual coercion.
top of this we would also like to add that within this study we also considered acts that intend to achieve similar harm as was previously presented, to be IPV.

Self-image

According to Kurtén (2013), the self-image is the internal image one has of her/himself. This image can be influenced by upbringing, experiences, temperament and values amongst others. The self-image does not necessarily determine how we interact with other people but may on the other hand get impacted by how we believe that others view us. If we realize that other people view us differently than we view ourselves it may cause some internal conflict. Further the self-image may change with age or depending on our environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section will present and shortly describe the theoretical framework used in this thesis paper. We have chosen to use theories of social psychology and masculinity theory.

2.1 Social Psychology

Besides being linked to phenomenological ideas, social psychology is, as stated by Payne (2005); “...concerned with understanding how group relations construct social identity...” (p161). The relationships and interactions between people and groups contribute in the creation of our perceptions of reality and influences the way we feel and act outwardly. It is closely related to social constructivism in the sense that it claims that reality is socially and culturally created (Payne, 2005).

According to Stevens (1998) there are within social psychology three ways and levels of analysing social processes. The first level focuses on the person perceptions, which concerns what goes on within a person’s self, like forming impressions of others, which require cognitive abilities like thinking, feeling and categorizing. The second level is the interpersonal one and it concerns the social interactions between people and includes
concepts of self-representation. On the third level we have the societal level, which focuses on the understanding of societal and cultural processes and the consequences and impact that they have on the other mentioned levels. As further quoted by Stevens (1998); “All three levels of analysis are relevant for our perceptions regarding social psychology and our image of the interpretive self”, (p103).

We have chosen this theory because, through using the type of sectionalized analysis, as mentioned above, a relationship can be viewed as being a personal creation, as well as a relational togetherness and interaction between two individuals. Lastly, by adding the third level within social psychology, one might even look at a relationship as an institution that is influenced by and reflects the social- and cultural norms. What happens on the individual basis may in that way also be related to what society as a whole reflects. Another reason for choosing it, is that it provides a great knowledgebase in regards to the social factors such as marginalisation, stereotyping and as quoted by Payne (2005), it; “generally has a lot to say about oppression and discrimination between groups” (p162).

2.2 Hegemonic Masculinity theory

The Hegemonic masculinity theory claims that what is considered "manly" can vary from place to place and time to time. There exists no universal "manliness" and neither is there a single view on manliness implying characteristics that all men can identify themselves with. However Courtenay (2000, p. 1388) explains hegemonic masculinity as being "...the socially dominant gender construction that subordinates femininities as well as other forms of masculinity, and reflects and shapes men's social relationships with women and other men; it represents power and authority". This means that the hegemonic masculinity is considered an ideal image of a man that other men may live up to, strive to live up to or chose not to support, but are somehow influenced by in their social relationships. This masculinity is related to power and authority and is therefore considered socially superior to other forms of masculinity. Femininities are also believed to be treated as inferior to the hegemonic masculinity suggesting that a society where the theory of hegemonic masculinity can be successfully applied is of a patriarchal structured nature.
Courtenay (2000) describes denial of emotional or physical weakness and vulnerability along with other criteria to be considered especially manly (referring to its hegemonic ideal) and can thus identify denial of help seeking along with putting up a tough front outwards to be strategies potentially used by men to achieve "manhood". The hegemonic masculinity is thus considered as something that can be perceived as desirable to embody.

We chose this theory as it acknowledges the existence of gender stereotyping and critically examines its impact on people, claiming that indifferently of how we value them we are largely affected by them in our daily life and social relationships. Since this theory in specific focuses on masculinity it made it especially applicable for analysing the results of this particular study.

3. Earlier Research

Swedish research regarding the situation for men exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is described as still being limited. In general there are a lot of hidden statistics and information gaps when it comes to issues like IPV (Hradilova Selin, 2009). During recent years, the issue of men subjected to IPV has gained more attention and acknowledgement and it is becoming easier to find research regarding the subject.

Described below are the gathered articles and reports deemed suitable for this particular student thesis. They have been collected with the intent to create both an overview of the abused men’s situation in Sweden, as well as to give more detailed information in regards to the abused men’s reported personal experiences of it.

We have found the report on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) conducted by the Swedish Crime Prevention Council, by Klara Hradilova Selin (2009:12) to be of interest for creating an overview of the situation of abused men in Sweden. It explores the character of the violence from the victims’ point of view and it especially focuses on the contacts that the victims have had with the judiciary and whether or not they have confidence in the judiciary. The study also explores reasons as to why so many victims of IPV refrain to report, as well as it explores “the consequences of the violence, such as anxiety and fear” (Hradilova Selin, p5). The report caught our interest as it is the first one the Crime Prevention Council has made on IPV that also included the group of abused men.

The data presented in the report is based on the gathered information from BRÅ’s National Security Investigation (Nationella trygghetsundersökningen) during the years 2006, 2007 and 2008. Out of the 304 people who reported being exposed to IPV to the National Security Investigations, a fifth of them were men. It seems as if the men who participated in the study, report being psychologically abused and harassed, more so than being physically attacked by their partners, although that also exists (mentioned in the study as “beatings”). Hradilova Selin (2009) argues that the results you get when conducting research on IPV, depends on the questions that you ask. She argues that if;

“... the aim is to study violence or crime, the results show that women are more exposed to partner violence than men. Studies that focus on conflicts, however, show little difference between women’s and men’s exposure to intimate partner violence” (p6).

In the concluding notes, Hradilova Selin (2009) argues that there are hidden statistics in regards to men subjected to IPV and that it is therefore hard to get a good overview of the situation in Sweden. She further states that there are not enough studies made in regards to what extent men are exposed to IPV, but that some studies have suggested that “this exposure may be relatively high” (p6).

(English: Crime victims contacts with the judiciary: an in-depth study based on the
As a further addition to first report, we also chose to include the in-depth report conducted by the National Security Investigations (Nationella trygghetsundersökningen) on crime victim’s contacts with the judiciary. It contains both quantitative analyses of the public’s opinion and experiences with the judiciary, as well as it contains qualitative sections consisting of material collected through interviewing focus groups (of crime victims). There are three authors in this study; Madeleine Blixt, Klara Hradilova Selin (the author of the 1st report as well) and Olle Westlund, and the report was published in 2010.

The help-seeking experiences of abused men create an important outline for our research and it also builds a basis for one of our chosen themes. We will be focusing on the section in the report which highlights the situation and experiences that abused men have in their contacts with the judiciary. The report points out that many crime victims believe that perceptions on gender roles influence the judiciary and that it fails in its duty to act in a gender-neutral way. Many abused men felt mistreated and discriminated against. The men further tell experiences of being treated with disbelief not only from the judiciary but also the social services. Many abused men felt powerless in their situation.

“The men are aware of how the outside world views men who get abused by female partners. This awareness pervades throughout the whole conversation and can be described as an equation that the outside world solves by making assumptions on lack of manliness. For these men, however, it involved choosing to protect the children, not hitting back, thinking they had no right to hit back, not daring to protect oneself because of the risk of being reported, not wanting to or not daring to leave home because the children were there” (Blixt, Hradilova Selin & Westlund, 2010, pp52-53).

The report further explores the aspects of the preconceived ideas of what the “ideal victim” looks like, and that a man has a hard time fitting into that role. It is also argued that abused men seem to receive help-efforts to a lesser degree than abused women do.

3. Slagen Man - Fyra Former av Mansmisshandel (English: Beaten man - four types of male abuse).
“Beaten Man” (Swedish: Slagen man) is a qualitative research on men who have been exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by a female partner. The thesis was conducted in 2003, by two sociology students at Stockholm’s University; Camilla Palmberg and Heidi Wasén. Palmberg and Wasén have conducted deep interviews with seven men suffering from IPV. Through the deep interviews, four different kinds of patterns of abuse emerged; *physical abuse, psychological abuse, psychological abuse in connection to children in common* and *economical exploitation*. It should be noted that this is a student thesis from the University of Stockholm.

A distinguished pattern found in the study was that men can experience psychological abuse while it is ongoing (insults, threats or controlling behaviours, etc) to be worse than physical (slaps, kicks, spitting, etc). The psychological abuse in connection to the common children can also be especially difficult as most of the men in this study did not have custody of all of their children. Not being allowed to see or speak to the children over phone, experiencing a fear of the previous and getting their character talked bad about to the children are situations that the men in this study had experienced. A pattern that was found was that the men often experienced a deep hurt and powerlessness as parents and may have felt disadvantaged in the custody battle as the perceived the mother to commonly be viewed as the primary care-taker.

Ultimately economic violence was presented as a type of abuse where the woman could exert any of the previously named types of abuse if she was not allowed to buy whatever she wanted or that relatives of the woman could borrow huge amounts of money without repaying. For a few of the interviewees the economic exploitation had led to personal bankruptcy. In this study Palmgren & Wasén (2003) also found a pattern consisting of that the men in their research showed a lot of understanding to the reasons behind the behaviour of their previous partner, excusing it with experiences from childhood, mental illness or a immaturity stemming from her upbringing.

This is a study conducted by Eleonora Stolt for the Swedish organization NCK; the national center for knowledge on men’s violence against women. In this report Nordic as well as international research has been reviewed to determine the situation for male victims of IPV and their meeting with health provision services. Firstly Stolt concludes that men is the group within society that is the most exposed to violence, mainly from other unknown men. Thus, indicating the need to examine the consequences of violence that men get exposed to. IPV is also a part of the violence that men suffer and can besides physical damages cause conditions such as depression and anxiety are common consequences.

Different studies can have various different results regarding the occurrence of violence towards men, often depending on how the survey or interview questions have been asked. In the studies were fewer men identified as victims of IPV the violence has often been portrayed as a criminal act. In cases where the violence has been portrayed as part of a conflict more men are usually found having been subjected to IPV. Men may more often under-report IPV they have suffered due to difficulties reflecting over it in terms of criminal acts. A study conducted in Sweden on 1800 men showed that a large percentage of them had experienced psychological abuse by a female partner but very few had experienced sexual abuse or harassment by a partner if she was female. However 4 % of them men had experienced sexual abuse by a male acquainted. Most of them had suffered such abuse under the age of 18.

Regarding male victims of IPV psychological abuse appears to be the most common type of violence. Such abuse include verbal insults, bullying, torture-like treatment, economic or social isolation and threats of violence. Such violence may result in the victim experiencing depression, anxiety, a fear of new acts of violence, PTSD, suicide attempts amongst others. In relation to sexual abuse male victims may experience difficulties in understanding or verbalizing their experiences in relation to terms referring to abuse. Usually male victims of any kind of violence tend to seek out help if they have received severe physical damages from the abuse. Stolt concludes that fears of not having their experiences believed may be a large reason to why many men refrain from seeking help or filing complaints about the violence they suffer.

Regarding the type of help male victims of IPV ask for a Norwegian study concluded that the main type of assistance they typically desire relates to getting help to get out of
the violent relationship. Receiving assistance with working through traumas were seen as of secondary importance.


Within this study Lotta Nybergh presents the results of contemporary studies on Men's experiences of IPV. Nybergh found that most studies on the subject were qualitative and presented very different estimations on the extent of IPV in general. Further the majority of the studies conducted in Western countries and focused on male victims of intimate partner violence within heterosexual relationships. She believes this to partly be due to hetero-normative assumptions within the Western world of research.

Regarding violent patterns she brings up the research by the American researcher Michael Johnson. He defined four different types of violence patterns within IPV. Firstly, *situational violence* is described as when both partners can exert violence on occasions without any patterns of control. *Intimate terrorism* on the other hand involves one partner using violence as a means of suppressing and controlling their partner. Thirdly, *violent resistance* is defined as when one partner uses violence as a response to a pre-existing violent act by their partner. The act of self-defense is a type of violent resistance but not the only type. Finally, *mutual violence and control* is when both parties use violence as part of a larger pattern of control and oppression.

Different studies evaluating the health consequences of violence and apart from physical damages, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and addiction can follow in the wake of IPV.

Some qualitative studies regarding how male victims experience IPV are mentioned within the report by Nybergh. The results are very different and in an American study on teenage boys patterns were found that suggests physical violence conducted by teenage girls was viewed as tolerable or even endearing. However another American study focusing on adult men who were subjected to violence by their spouses found that some of them showed difficulties in identifying as victim as that was understood as
something that mainly concerned women in regards to IPV. Yet another study that was reviewed focused on sexual coercion and how men may develop trust issues within the relationship as a consequence of it. The main part of sexual coercion that they experienced was verbal, psychological or in terms of threats.

Further the study evaluates research male victims of IPV within same-sex relationships and found that an issue such as minority stress was of significance when discussing such cases.

6. Help-seeking among male victims of partner abuse: men’s hard times. (Swedish: Hjälpsökande bland manliga offer av partnermisshandel; mäns svåra tider)

This is a study conducted in 2010 by Tsui, Cheung & Leung focusing on health-searching patterns for male victims of intimate partner violence. Electronic surveys were sent out to 960 organizations working with victims of intimate partner violence throughout the USA. Due that it is an understudied subject only 68 participants had any previous experience with male victims of IPV.

The study concludes that men are less likely than women to search out help for situations where they are victims of IPV. Different reasons for this are believed to be that there currently is not enough available support for men as many organizations directly target helping women. The help that does exist may be overlooked by men due to an unawareness of its existence or a perception that such help is irrelevant as it has traditionally mainly been used to assist women. Men may also desist seeking out help as they may experience high expectations on being capable of dealing their own problems.

Stigmatization and discrimination of male victims may also prevent them from searching help and may derive from their own view of male victims of IPV or that of the society at large. Firstly men may experience a fear of that others will not view them as victims if they come out with their experiences, secondly they may not view themselves as victims either. Feeling that their masculinity is threatened is a factor that may cause some men to hide or deny the fact that they are subjected to IPV. Another reason to choose to hide the situation instead of confronting it may be due to a fear of being perceived as the aggressors of violence if they resist the IPV. Further 43 of the
respondents offered their take on what could be done to facilitate a help-searching process for male victims of IPV. The most common response was that public education should take place in order to create awareness of the issue along with including male victims in the service provision.

4. Methodology

In the following section, the research design, philosophical science perspective and the method used in the thesis, will be presented. Also the different aspects of the data collection will be presented and discussed. Under the data analysis section, we will provide with an explanation of the reasons behind choosing the specific interpretation technique for this thesis. The chapter will then present the credibility aspects of the research, such as validity, reliability and generalization, and after that also give a description of the ethical considerations for this study.

4.1 Philosophy of Science: Positions

As discussed earlier, the objective of this thesis paper is to get a deeper understanding of the experiences of the men who have been exposed to intimate partner violence. Therefore we have chosen to focus on the abused men themselves and their own words regarding perceptions, experiences and emotions in regards to the violence they were exposed to. We also did not want to lose the coupling of the interviewee’s experiences to the issue itself in a broader sense. It was therefore deemed that the philosophical standpoint ought to be a combination of the phenomenological- and the hermeneutic perspectives, which will be further explained in this section.

Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Initially we found ourselves leaning towards using a pure phenomenological approach, as our main focus for this thesis is to get a deeper understanding of male victim’s experiences of intimate partner violence. However, early on through the research
process, we realized that to get that deeper understanding of meaning, we needed to combine the perspectives of phenomenology and hermeneutics. The phenomenological perspective would give us the focus that we wanted on the interviewees own, lived experiences, while in combination with the hermeneutic perspective, it would facilitate the analysis process, as it would give us the opportunity to section the material and look at “the parts and the whole” separately as well as getting a better understanding of the connections between them (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). We will briefly go through the main themes within each philosophical perspective below.

Within the philosophy of phenomenology (which was founded around the 1900’s) the matter and meaning of a person’s experiences and life world are emphasized (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The intent is to study the person from without his/her expressions of personal-, emotional and social reality and the essence is what the person himself/herself sees as important (Stevens, 1998). According to Robson (2011), the phenomenological approach also states that since every researcher is biased with preconceptions and assumptions about the phenomena that he or she is studying, this bias can, instead of being simply set aside, be a useful tool in bringing about a “deep insight and understanding of the concealed meanings of everyday life experiences” (p151).

Within hermeneutics on the other hand (which has its roots in the Renaissance), there are many different approaches, although the collected idea is that truth can only be found through interpretation of meaning and using intuition (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Our personal views and ideas about the world are central and by looking between “the parts and the whole” one can find the “truth” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Commonly used, as in this thesis also, is the Hermeneutic circle, which gives the idea that a researcher needs to go back and forth between the parts and the whole, as “the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p92).

4.2 Research Design
As within qualitative research we used a flexible research design and collected our data through interviews, mainly email interviews but also a complementing phone interview. A flexible research design was deemed suitable as it would allow for changes during the research process, as quoted by Robson (2011, p75); “A flexible design evolves during data collection”. The interviews were semi-structured and as they were mostly through email, they were self-transcribing and the only interview we transcribed was the phone interview.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) explains that it can be advantageous to use the method of email interviewing when researching sensitive areas, as we perceived the issue of male victims of intimate partner violence to be. They argue that email interviews may create a more relaxed interview-setting that may make the interviewees feel more comfortable to express themselves freely, as the presence of a researcher is sometimes experienced as limiting is this sense. However, as will be mentioned later as well, that since all of our interviews were conducted in Swedish, the interview-material has been translated by the researchers.

Below we will go more into detail of the methodological aspects and reasoning of this thesis.

4.3 Sampling

As finding interviewees willing to participate in a study regarding their experiences of being exposed to intimate partner violence, proved difficult, we have only managed to interview two men. The aim was to get at least three. As we anticipated some difficulty finding willing participants from our target group, we also collected three interviews from professionals working in different ways with the issue of intimate partner violence and male victims. We reasoned that this would give us different perspectives on the issue and hopefully give us a more holistic understanding of the problem. Apart from broadening our collected material it would also be beneficial to the aspects of validity of our findings.
The focus for analysis will however lie on the interviews with the male victims, as they are our main target group and we are conducting a study with a phenomenological approach, which aims to get a better understanding of their personal experiences.

The type of sampling method used was a purposive sampling. As Robson (2011, p530) argues, purposive sampling is “...based on the requirements of the research questions or theoretical considerations”. For our main target group, the criteria were men from 18+ who had been in a violent relationship with a female partner. And considering the other group of interviewees, we were looking for professionals/volunteers who were currently working with abused men. To find interviewees we contacted men’s shelters and asked them to advertise our study and organisations dealing with intimate partner violence, as well as asking around in our own social networks.

4.4 Data Collection

4.4.1 Conducting Interviews

The data for this study has been collected through semi-structured e-mail interviews with two men who have been in abusive relationships and three professionals (volunteer, social worker and therapist) who work with abused men. A qualitative approach seemed like the best way to get deeper knowledge of the subject and better understand the personal experiences and nuances (Robson, 2011).

The initial idea was to do semi-structured face-to-face interviews, but due to geographical circumstances as well as taking regards to the sensitive nature of the subject chosen, we were also open to doing e-mail interviews. In our information letter to our interviewees, we gave them the option to choose the interview method they were most comfortable with. This resulted in five email interviews, with a complementary phone interview.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argue that apart from email-interviews being appropriate when researching sensitive information, another advantage is that the data is self-transcribing. The negatives when using computer-assisted interviews are, as mentioned by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), that the quality of the data depends to a higher extent on
the interviewers and the interviewee’s writing skills. They further argue that a computer-assisted interview may create an unwanted distance between the interviewer and the interviewee.

After receiving the e-mail answers to our questions, we decided that due to essay credibility we needed to send follow-up questions to clarify and make sure that we understood the responses as correctly as possible. One interview was complemented over the phone, with a recorder and both researchers present, and later transcribed.

4.4.2 Data Transcription

As described above in the sampling section, our method of interviewing was for the most part e-mail interviews, which gave us the advantage of our material being “self-transcribed”, as Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) calls it. Regarding the single phone interview we conducted, we used a recorder (the interview lasted for about 1 hour) and later transcribed the whole interview word by word. Both researchers were present during the time of the interview and had a flexible approach to the interview situation, in the sense that we took turns in asking questions and taking notes, with consideration to the natural flow of the conversation.

To keep the material received during the phone interview true to the oral statements of the interviewee, no changes were made to it during transcription (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, due to ethical reasons (such as confidentiality) the material we chose to present in the results and analysis section has been carefully selected so that it will not pose a risk to the research ethics of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

It should be mentioned that the interview guide was written in Swedish and that the interviews have also been answered in Swedish. In the results and analysis section, the chosen quotes from the interviews have however been translated into English. The different interview-guides used in this study are presented lastly as appendixes and they are accounted for in both Swedish and English.
4.4.3 Data Analysis

During the process of analysis, the texts were interpreted with the help of the hermeneutic circle, which describes a process where the researcher goes back and forth between “the parts and the whole” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009) argue that the main theme within hermeneutics have been “…that the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (p92) and it seemed appropriate to our research aim to connect the lived experiences to the entirety of the situation. Therefore, once the interviews were collected and the phone interview was transcribed, they were read in their entirety by both researchers separately. Later we discussed our interpretations back and forth to get a clearer overview of the material we had, what patterns we had found and how it would fit into our themes. All the while through the analysis process we kept going back and forth using the hermeneutic circle, to get a deeper understanding of the parts and the whole and how they were connected.

4.5 Essay Credibility

4.5.1 Reliability

As stated by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), reliability refers to trustworthiness and consistency of the results and whether the study can be “replicated at other times and by other researchers using the same method” (p327). As further argued by Robson (2011, p159), reliability requires on behalf of the researcher, as being; “... thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research, but also being able to show others that you have been”. It is therefore of essence that all phases of the study are clearly accounted for, which we have tried to do to minimize any vagueness in regards to the process of conducting this study.

As the interviews in this study are mainly email interviews, they have already been transcribed; however, we have had to translate them into English to fit the requirements of the course. The aim was always to translate the texts as accurately as possible and no commas or anything have been changed. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p185), mentions that “depending on how the transcriber chooses to insert periods and commas” the
meaning of the text might be interpreted differently, but since most texts were self-transcribing, this could be avoided. The phone-interview has been transcribed though and this was an issue we were quite aware of during this time. Through the usage of semi-structured interviews we have also tried to avoid “controlling” the interviews too much, leaving room for the interviewees own voices and experiences to be heard. We had an “open question” at the end of each interview-guide were the interviewees could decide what and if they wanted to add something. As no face-to-face interviews were made, we had no reliability-issues in terms of our physical presence influencing the outcome of the interview. However, we were still aware of the fact that we are two young girls, conducting a study on men’s experiences of being exposed to violence by a female partner, and that this may pose a threat to the power-balance. We have tried our best to be mindful and counter this aspect during the contacts with interviewees.

The initial goal was to interview 3-5 men who had been exposed to intimate partner violence by a female partner, but due to time constraints and the sensitivity regarding the issue, many men felt uncomfortable to participate, so the end result was that we interviewed 2 men. As we had somewhat foreseen that this might happen, we also made complementary interviews with three professionals within this area (and follow-up interviews with them) to increase the data and improve the reliability of the study on this account. The men’s personal experiences are however the core of this study and therefore it was necessary to do follow-up interviews to increase reliability.

4.5.2 Validity

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argue that the validity of a research depends “... on continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (p.249), and that it refers to whether the study has fulfilled its research aims. The researcher needs to examine whether the research questions that were set out to be answered at the beginning, have been fully answered at the end. Robson (2011) argue that researchers must also be aware of that interviewees sometimes answer in a way that it perceived to be “desirable” by the researcher and that issues of bias must be considered in this regard. He further states that: “Indeed the notion of the ‘researcher-as-instrument’ central to many styles of qualitative research emphasizes the potential for bias” (p157).
By mainly doing email-interviews, this type of bias could be avoided to some extent. The interviewees have been asked to clarify certain statements through follow-up interviews as a means to avoid researcher bias as well (Robson, 2011). As our aim was to be true to the statements and experiences of the men who have been exposed to intimate partner violence, this seemed particularly important. However, as most of the questions were semi-structured, they were still controlled by the researchers, although the attempts were to make the questions and follow-up questions open-ended at all times. Through the follow-up interviews (both through email and phone) the material became richer and more nuanced which also improved the validity requirements for the study.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argues that validity is in many aspects a form of “quality of craftsmanship” (p.248). As we are inexperienced there are surely some regards of this that are missing, in terms of how an experienced researcher would have advanced in terms of research design, interview-guide etc. To counter our inexperience we were both involved in each part of writing and conducting this study. All interview-questions were thoroughly discussed and sent to our supervisor for clearance before sending them to our interviewees. During the follow-up interview over the phone, both researchers participated and helped each other with asking questions, keeping the natural flow of the conversation as well as taking notes.

4.5.3 Generalization

Generalizability refers to, according to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p324) “The extent that findings in one situation can be transferred to other situations”. The intent of a qualitative research is seldom to generalize results and our humble sample size makes any attempt of generalization difficult. In accordance with Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) one way of examining the generalizability of this study is to look at the “naturalistic generalization” (p262) which hold implications for studies concerning personal experiences. This they argue “...derives from tacit knowledge of how things are and leads to expectations rather than formal predictions” (p262). What can be said regarding the generalizability of the research results, is that we have come across several
commonalities regarding the phenomenon, in both the earlier research and the data collection.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

At a very early stage in our research our supervisor advised us to read through the research ethics stated by the Swedish Science Council (Swedish: Vetenskapsrådet, www.vr.se, see link in reference list), as we as researchers have the ultimate responsibility to follow the four ethical requirements. It is required that all participants within a study make an informed consent to participate in the study. In order to fulfil the ethical requirements, we designed letters of consent which contained the following information, based on the four requirements (which have here been translated from Swedish into English) stated by the Science Council (VR):

*The information requirement (Swedish: Informationskravet)*

Though the “letters of consent” we informed the interviewees of the aims of the study, the requirements of participation as well as their rights concerning participation and what the questions would concern. Due to ethical reasons we did not include minors, so the first requirement was that the interviewee must be over 18 years of age. We also stated that the abusive relationship must be over, as it was important due to ethical reasons towards the participants that it was, as a research must never pose harm to those participating. It was also stated that once the study was completed, they would all receive access to it.

*The consent requirement (Swedish: Samtyckeskravet)*

After sending out the “letters of consent”, we asked each participant to write back if they agreed to the requirements for participation, before we would proceed with sending the interview-guides. The interviewees were given several choices for participation were they could choose whether they felt more comfortable doing face-to-face interviews, phone-interviews or email-interviews. We made sure to clarify that all participation was voluntary and that the interviewee could at any time choose to terminate their participation without giving us any reasons as to why.

*The confidentiality requirement (Swedish: Konfidentialitetskravet)*
It was explained that the information given by the interviewee would remain confidential in terms of that only the researchers would have access to it during the research process and that the interviewees’ name or other telling information would never be mentioned in the thesis.

The use requirement (Swedish: Nyttjandekravet)
It was stated that the information they gave would not be used for any other purpose than this study. As soon as the collected material would no longer be needed, it was also explained that it would be destroyed.

5. Results and Analysis

In this section we will present the results from the collected interviews and analyse them through the perspectives of the chosen theories (social psychology and masculinity theory) as well as referring to the earlier research mentioned in a previous chapter. Noteworthy is that we will not divide the results and analysis section into two different parts, but instead we have decided to present the findings in the same section. Based on earlier research and the data material collected during this study, we chose the following themes; Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Emotional impact of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Under each theme we have sectioned the specific patterns that emerged.

Before presenting the results and analysis of the collected data material, we will give a short presentation of the five interviewees that participated in this study. Considering the ethical standpoint when conducting a research, the names of the interviewees, which are used throughout this study, are not their real names.

Presentation of Interviewees
When conducting our interviews we divided the respondents into two groups; Group 1 and Group 2. Group 1 was made up by two men who had previously been victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) within a heterosexual relationship. The data gathered from that group will be of main focus for answering our research questions. Group 2 was made up by three individuals who in their daily work meet men who are victims of IPV. Their interview answers were mainly used to get a fuller understanding of how such violence may affect men in specific. Following an introduction of each interviewee will be presented beginning with Group 1, followed by Group 2.

**Group 1: Men exposed to IPV**

**Daniel**

One of the interviewees was a man in his early 20s who had previously, during almost a year, been in a violent relationship with a woman. The type of violence that he got exposed to was both psychological and physical. The physical violence mostly consisted of slaps in the face but on a few occasions punches to the head and the rest of the body. His girlfriend had explained to him that she was used to violence from previous relationships and that her ex boyfriend hadn’t had any problems with taking a few punches. The psychological and physical violence mostly took place in private but on one occasion she had punched him in front of his friends. Following that event his friends reached out to him about their concerns and he decided to end the destructive relationship shortly after. Due to ethical considerations regarding anonymity, we have chosen to use the fictional name **Daniel**.

**Martin**

The other interviewee in Group 1, was a man in his early 40s who had earlier, during three years, been in a violent relationship with a woman. The character of the violence he was exposed to was mainly psychological, although physical violence also occurred. Martin says that his ex girlfriend often started arguments that lasted for hours. Even when he tried to escape them by locking himself into a different room, she stood outside the door, harassing him. Sometimes she also insulted his family members, which Martin believes was a way to provoke him into engaging in the argumentation. In the end he started checking into hotels to get out of such situations but due to the escalating frequency of the arguments, he finally started renting an apartment to use for retreat.
Martin says that he believes her heavy alcohol consumption and possible borderline diagnosis, to be likely reasons for her violent behaviour towards him. Due to ethical considerations regarding anonymity, we have chosen to use the fictional name Martin.

Group 2; People working with male victims of IPV

The Therapist
One of the interviewees was a man who had been working as a therapist at a crisis centre for men in a larger Swedish city since 1988. Men voluntarily apply for help at this centre for different types of problems within close relationships, some of them having been exposed to IPV. The Therapist describes the violence that his clients have been exposed to by their female partners, as everything from getting spat or clawed in the face, getting kicked towards the groin or punched towards the body and face. There is also the issue of psychological violence. When mentioned in the research, this interviewee will be referred to as The Therapist.

The Social Worker
One of the interviewees was a woman who was working in a smaller Swedish city at a shelter for men and women who have been exposed to IPV. The people that come to this shelter have been placed there by the police and as a licensed social worker she has rich experience of working with both male and female victims of IPV. She says that the violence men are exposed to in intimate relationship, is both psychological and physical. Examples are that their female partners are extremely jealousy and controlling, monitors their social contacts with other people, as well as constant exposing them to constant harassment. If children are involved the psychological violence can relate to getting kept from seeing their child. This interviewee will throughout the research be referred to as The Social Worker.

The Volunteer
One of the interviewees was a man who has been working for eight years at a volunteer-run organisation for men, in a larger city Swedish city. Men can turn to this organisation to talk about various problematic life-situations, for instance that they are victims of IPV. The type of IPV his clients may have suffered from can vary; it includes psychological as well as physical violence. Some stories the men have shared relates to
getting hit with objects, e.g. frying pans, or getting threatened with knives. Another example relates to a woman bruising herself before attacking the man. Throughout the research this interviewee will be referred to as The Volunteer.

5.1 Theme 1: Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

The first theme is called “Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)” and it reflects our study aim. Through semi-structured email-interviews with the two men and the three professionals, we found three patterns matching our research questions. We have named those patterns; Trivialization of the Violence, Telling family and friends and Contacts with the judiciary.

5.1.1 Trivialization of the violence

Physical violence was prevalent during the majority of the time in Daniels former relationship. He states that the violence he experienced was mostly slaps in the face, but at occasion also punches to the body and head. He argues;

“The first time I told her not to hit me, she said that it wasn’t that hard. And that I shouldn’t be such a wimp that got hurt by a mere slap in the face. I then explained that it’s not about the pain, it’s about not hitting someone you care for”.

Although Daniel’s former girlfriend tried to normalize her violent behaviour and blame him for feeling hurt, he initially refused to internalize the accusations. Her reaction to being confronted by Daniel was to legitimize her own behaviour by accusing him of being “a wimp”. Stevens (1998) explains that when we are children it is very common for us to legitimize feelings of anger by blaming another person for them. By blaming another we trivialize our own responsibility and guilt which in turns helps to protect our self-image. When the girlfriend of Daniel called him “a wimp” instead of recognizing her violent behaviour as being the problem, her self-image was kept intact. By doing this she not only trivializes Daniel as a victim, but also herself as an abuser;
“The whole time she made me think that I was an overly sensitive guy and that I was very wimpy. Not just with the violence but overall”.

Daniel states that he used to be madly in love with his former girlfriend. In the beginning their relationship was very good, he argues, and they were both very open and outgoing. Although he says that he knew that her violent behaviour was a problem, he was so in love that he did not want to leave. He says that although he initially confronted his girlfriend several times about her violent behaviour towards him, he resigned and stopped telling her off after a while. This can be explained by both trivializations- as well as part of a normalization processes. As stated by Palmberg & Wasén (2003, with references to Straus, 1993), women tend to use “publicly accepted violence” towards men. Examples of ’publicly accepted violence’ may be slaps, pushing someone and throwing (lighter) items at someone. This ’publicly accepted violence’, they argue, functions as a way of normalizing what is happening. It leads to the abused gradually accepting the violence. At a further stage the normalization process typically breaks down the resistance towards the violence. The abused accepts what is happening as a normal occurrence and believes it to not be as bad is could seem from an outside perspective. These two processes of trivialization and normalization can be found in several of Daniels quotes, for e.g;

“I didn’t understand how bad this was until my friends brought it up, when she had hit me in front of them”.

Martin’s experiences of his ex-partner trivializing her violence are different to those of Daniel. Martin says that his ex-partner both apologized and trivialized the abuse at the same time;

“Sometimes she didn’t remember that we had argued the night before (probably because of alcohol). Otherwise she usually blamed it on me, one way or the other. Although she often apologized and showed several times that she was deeply sorry. That was probably the reason as to why one hoped that it would change some time...”.

Martin, as he states above, hoped that the relationship would get better eventually. This belief was further encouraged by his ex-partners habit of occasionally apologizing for her behaviour and showing remorse. However, the abuse continued. Martin explains
being certain of that the IPV his girlfriend subjected him to was a result of her high consumption of alcohol, eating disorders and what he believes to be a possible borderline diagnosis. Martin argues;

“I am pretty sure that she suffers from some sort of borderline [diagnosis] as she finds it very hard to deal with emotions. It’s also what I believe to be the reason behind her sudden outbursts towards me – her difficulties of dealing with emotions. Which of course escalated a lot when she abused alcohol”.

Palmgren & Wasén (2003) found in their dissertation that all of the interviewees (abused men) tried to find psychological explanations for their partner’s violent behaviours. The interviewees all explained that their partners had lived through troublesome childhoods in some way. By connecting the IPV to mental instability or a troublesome childhood affecting their partner, the sense of overview and control over the situation can be maintained by the victim. According to Tsui et al. (2010);

“A majority of the male victims do not report their incidents because they do not think that outside people can help them resolve their internal conflicts. They may think that their problem is too personal to handle. As a result, men choose to minimize their abuse and try to avoid social stigma against their inability to protect themselves; therefore, they generally hide or deny having been abused.” (p777).

In relation to this, many abused men refer to their female partner’s use of violence as being “irrational” (Nybergh, 2013). Both these aspects, the trivialization of the abuser and the sense of necessity to manage their lives without outside interference or assistance may derive from gender stereotyping. In specific this is related to their understandings of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. As argued within hegemonic masculinity theory, the ideal man is expected to stand on his own in handling difficult situations. Courtenay (2000, p1397) argues, that we as a society withhold gender structures and power-relations, by stereotyping and labelling certain characteristics as being either masculine or feminine. He further states;

“[...] we all work diligently at maintaining constructions of women’s health as deficient, of the female body as inferior, of men’s health as ideal, and of the male body as structurally efficient and superior” (p1397).

Therefore, the act of subordinating a woman’s use of violence as not being intentional but instead ‘irrational’ may be indications of gender stereotyping and unbalanced
power-relations. When asking the Volunteer whether men exposed to IPV by their female partners, viewed themselves as crime victims, he states;

“Nah, they probably don’t look at themselves as victims of a crime as much as they see themselves in difficult situation that they wonder how to put an end to”.

So in a sense, by protecting their abusers, by not reporting or otherwise trivializing the abuse, abused men also protect their sense of manliness. Male victims of IPV often feel as if they are somehow less manly and masculine than others. Female abusers often target the manliness in particular. As in Daniel’s case, he states that his ex-girlfriend constantly called him “overly sensitive” and “a wimp”. Because of these constant remarks, he tried to change and “toughen up”, to fit into what his girlfriend perceived as being manlier.

5.1.2 Telling family and friends

Similar to the findings of Tsui et al. (2010), both Martin and Daniel were reluctant to talk to family and friends about the intimate partner violence (IPV) and state that they avoided telling family and friends about it until it had become inevitable. Below Daniel elaborates on the reasons why he during some time kept the IPV secret from his family and friends;

“I chose not to tell what happened in private to friends and family because I believed in what my girlfriend was saying, what I was a wimp and sensitive. Even if I’ve never cared about being dorky or girly it’s not the easiest thing to tell your guy friends that my girlfriend hits me. I thought that they might just say that I was a dork and that I should get a grip and man up.”

Daniel’s statement reflects a fear of not getting believed by family and friends due to the negative influence that his girlfriend had on his self-esteem. He argues that he is comfortable in his role as a man and has no problems being perceived as ’dorky’ or ’girly’ but that it is still a very difficult thing to admit to being abused by your girlfriend. The reasoning regarding the male-role both reflects the uncertainty that he states was instilled within him by his abusive girlfriend on what it means to be a man, but also in what others perceive that role to be. There may be a difference between
feeling masculine enough to be ‘dorky’ or ‘girly’ when one chooses to be in comparison to having similar labels imposed by someone else as synonymous to ‘weak’. As argued by Courtenay (2000, p. 1387), research has shown that men, due to social pressure, tend to be more prone to gender stereotyping than women. He argues that one of the strongest stereotypes in regards to masculinity are “[...] the beliefs that men are independent, self-reliant, strong, robust and tough” (p1387). This indicates that the choice of not telling his family and friends may have been an unconscious attempt by Daniel to re-establish the sense of identity and masculinity.

Martin had also been reluctant in telling his family and friends. He states that he only talked about the violence with his parents and siblings when he realized he couldn’t hide it any longer. Choosing to not talk about the abuse may be a defence-mechanism, as it not only protects a sense of self dignity but also the self-image in front of others. Stevens (1998) explains defence-mechanisms in the following way;

“We are rather defence-driven creatures that twist reality because we can’t endure the psychological pain that the truth brings. We construct versions of the outside world that make up a compromise between a good enough accuracy (to physically survive) and enough distortion to lessen the psychological pain that life and our existence creates to an enduring level. This is the psychological reality for all human beings”, (p266).

The Therapist states that since abused men do not find it easy asking for help in general, they are especially sensitive towards negative reactions once they come forth and seek help. They have a fear of not getting believed and feeling embarrassed or judged by others. In relation to the Therapists arguments, the Social Worker also states that getting subjected to violence by a female partner is often strongly connected to the sense of manliness which makes it “shameful” to talk about. Tsui et al. (2010) also argues that men deny being victims at all as a way to protect the self-image; “Men do not consider themselves victims because they see complaining about being abused as a major weakness in themselves” (p777).

Regarding the time when Daniel told his friends and family he says that:

“The first who found out were 2 of my friends which I had the conversation with. Then I talked to my sister, mostly just to see if she agreed with my friends and thought that this was as wrong as they did. I
don’t think I’ve ever seen my sister that angry and she said that she would never forgive me if I didn’t break up with this girl. Later I also talked to my parents. I got so much help the entire last summer, from both friends and family.”

Stevens (1998) argues that “the social world” functions as a medium for us in the world much like the way our physical bodies can be viewed as mediums for our existence. The social practice, ways of thinking and communicating are all attributes that we collect from our social surroundings and they highly influence how we view ourselves and the image we put out to others. During the interview Daniel explains that the conversation he had with his friends was the result of them witnessing his girlfriend punching him in the back of the head at a party, which probably made the initiation to tell others what was really going on feel more inevitable. Our social networks are crucial to our sense of self and well-being, and they are therefore something that we are keen to protect. This explains the fear of exclusion that both Martin and Daniel seem to have experienced.

“To many, concepts of victimhood have negative connotations and are seen as the opposite to being strong and able to defend oneself. Especially taboo is being subjected to violence by a female partner” (Stolt, 2010, p8).

Stolt (2010) continues to argue that abused men need to get recognition for their situations and confirmation that their experience of intimate partner violence is real. The strong reactions and support that Daniel received, confirmed that it was legitimate for him to end the abusive relationship. “After the conversation with my friends I simply decided not to take any more shit from her”, he says.

5.1.3 Contacts with the Judiciary

Some studies suggest that men’s exposure to violence in intimate relationships may be relatively high, but since men oftentimes avoid help-seeking the statistics are still hidden (Hradilova Selin, 2009). According to Tsui et al. (2010), the reasons behind the hidden statistics may be that;

“[…] men are unlikely to seek help because of shame, humiliation, embarrassment, threats to their masculinity, and fear of losing dignity, respect and acceptance.” (p777)
On the question of whether he sought help or not, Daniel argues, that he didn’t find it necessary as he has a “rather strong mind” and that friends and family were enough support for him. For Martin on the other hand, struggles with getting believed by the judiciary proved difficult;

“I am not trying to frame my ex-partner, absolutely not. We actually have a rather good relationship today and I try to support her in her struggles with her eating disorders. What I would like is recognition for what I have been through. That it is not okay. But instead it feels like if you are not getting believed – and that is probably the worst. My confidence in the judiciary does no longer exist.”

Martin’s statement reflects his deep disappointment with his experiences of the Swedish judiciary during his time in the violent relationship. Their lack of recognition to his situation seems to have been cause of feelings of marginalisation, which resonates still in terms of negatively affecting his health and well-being; “A major reason as to why I started with anti-depressants was because of the legal aftermath that this had”, he says. He further argues that he had called the police on several occasions but that the documentation of the IPV had been inadequate. As a result, all of the charges but one was dropped;

“A single one of all my charges went further, and that was regarding unlawful threats. I had managed to record one of her outbursts where she threatens to kill me if I don’t get out of the house. The district court managed to conjure away it by stating that it was a common occurrence and that it couldn’t have been so bad. So she was acquitted. A strange way of reasoning in my opinion.”

Feeling discriminated and getting unequal treatment, as Martin argues that he did, is something that Hradilova Selin (2009) believes to “mirror flaws in society’s preparedness to treat crime victims equal” (p9). The Therapist further argues that the most commonly described emotion the abused men express is powerlessness. They fear not getting believed and once they experience discrimination in relation to help-seeking, their faith in the judiciary is gone. He says that;

“Men experience the feeling of powerlessness. We have been given critique because it did not say on our webpage a few years ago that we also worked with men. Because one man who came to see me, and he was also looking at our webpage and said ‘Am I here in secret? The webpage doesn’t say I exist’. And that is somewhat of a parallel to how men can so to speak feel unequal then, in this matter. That ‘Is there room for me?’ Because men, remember this, men in this situation say the exact same things as women who are exposed to violence: they think that they are alone in this.”
In relation to this, the report from the Crime Prevention Council states that the sense of confidence in the judiciary is strongly connected to the sense of “experienced discrimination” (Blixt, Hradilova Selin & Westlund, 2010, p58). This also raises issues of legal security and Martin seems to have been very disappointed in this regard. As his experiences were being trivialized by the ultimate social safety-net, in terms of the judiciary, his view on society seems to have been negatively influenced. According to Payne (2005); “Power relations derive from the use of language to construct a view of the world, which if socially accepted, influences others” (p162). Martin seems to blame the judiciary for having a “man-perpetrator, woman-victim” kind of mindset, which he fought over and over again by continuously pressing charges.

Courtenay (2000) states, regarding hegemonic masculinity, that the view on men and manliness is something that is based on social context. In addition to this, Stevens (1998) explain that a person’s identity is a composition of a personal identity in relation to a social identity. The personal identity revolves around our personal thoughts and experiences, while the social identity regards the characteristics and expectations that others have of us. It also relates to the way in which the 'social reality’ is manifested through us (p24). Martins’ actions suggest that he did not internalize the perceived societal image of what domestic abuse victims ought to look like. He did identify as a victim of intimate partner violence and he was trying desperately to get recognition from the judiciary.

Earlier research on crime victims contacts and satisfaction with the judiciary, shows that the groups that are the least satisfied with the contacts are those who are “[...] exposed to threats, violence and harassments” (Blixt, Hradilova Selin, Westlund, 2010, pp7-8). As the judiciary seems to have been viewed by Martin as having the ultimate responsibility for justice and fairness in this regard, the dissatisfaction with the outcome of his help-seeking efforts reflects a great disappointment. It seems like he initially had high expectations on the judiciary as being just and neutral but that this image was shattered when he was met with such disbelief. However interestingly enough, he does not put much blame of the IPV subJECTED to him by his former partner for his feelings of depression today. He specifically states that he does not want to “frame her”. He explains that they have a “good relationship” today and that he tries his best to support her. It is not uncommon for victims of abuse to sympathize and feel the need to protect
their partner, as is also a behaviour that was described in the earlier research by Palmberg & Wasén (2003). There is no question that he thinks that what she did to him was wrong, but he finds the reasons behind her violent behaviour by explaining that she probably had a borderline-diagnosis, alcohol-abuse and eating disorder. This may have influenced the way he understands her violence, as her not being able to fully be accountable for it.

The Therapist also confirms that by pressing charges on a violent partner, it is not so much about framing your partner as it is about putting your foot down and making a mark that ‘this is not okay’;

“But some women get very surprised that he pressed charges and that they were called in for questioning. One woman who I’ve been in contact with, there, “I am curious”, I said, “what did you think of this getting reported?” “I will tell it like it is”, she said, “I never thought he would do it and that was the most humiliating. I myself do not work in this really”, like she said, “but, being there, it was humiliating. I can agree to it to some extent, but I think that he overdid it”, “Do you feel like hitting him again?” “No, definitely not”. So my interpretation with this is that it was important for him to make a mark, because she did exactly what you have been taught regarding men [who are violent] – that they hit within the framework of the relationship”.

Martins’ repeated help-seeking actions (calling the police and pressing charges) is not only to be viewed from without the perspective of him making a ‘clear mark’ against his partner that “this is not okay”. By getting dismissed by the judiciary his persistent and repeated actions to get recognition for his situation may also indicate that he made a “clear marking” towards the judiciary as a whole, that he did not agree nor share their view of men and victims. Martin sense of trust in the judiciary, by fighting against the perceived societal view on masculinity norms and still not getting the recognition he desired, had been very negatively influenced by these circumstances.

5.2 Theme 2: Emotional impact of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

When consulting our interviewees from Group 1, i.e. The Therapist, The Social Worker and The Volunteer, they mentioned different types of consequences that the men they encountered had suffered from the IPV they were subjected to in their romantic
relationships. However our two interviewees from Group 2 (Daniel and Martin) mentioned the existence of physical violence but throughout the interviews a large portion of the attention was focused on how they had experienced it emotionally. Under this theme we will therefore present how the violence, mainly physical and emotional, affected the emotional state of Daniel and Martin. The three patterns we have encountered are; *The IPV directly affecting the emotional state, The IPV indirectly affecting the emotional state* and *Mutual violence affecting the self-image.*

5.2.1 The violence directly affecting the emotional state

Within Daniel's 10 months relationship with his girlfriend he often became subject to slaps and punches as well as insults on his character. Following he described how the IPV affected him.

“She constantly made me think that I was an overly sensitive guy and that I was very wimpy [translated from Swedish: ‘mesig’]. Not just with the violence but overall. It could be if I stood up for myself if she said something that hurt me to when I told her off about the slaps in the face. Finally I guess I bought it and was constantly working to get ‘tougher’ to become more like she wanted. Finally I guess I just wasn’t myself. Something that my friends noticed and brought up to me several times that they thought I had changed. That I had become cold and boring.”

It appears as if Daniel due to the IPV strived to embody a type of masculinity that early on in the relationship got conceptualized by his girlfriend at the time. He experienced accusations of being too vulnerable when he complained over the physical abuse. He also expresses having been encouraged to accept (specifically) the physical part of the IPV for her to consider him a real man. Courtenay (2000) describes the hegemonic masculinity as containing a certain degree of denial of physical and emotional vulnerability. In order to not be criticized for being weak or “wimpy” that was exactly what Daniel finally chose to do. Thus there appears to be a resemblance between what Daniel believed was expected of him by his former girlfriend and what may be perceived as expected of men by society through the existing hegemonic masculinity. Tsui et al. (2003, p. 777) states that;

“Men do not consider themselves victims because they see complaining about being abused as a major weakness in themselves.”
In Daniel’s case he did occasionally protest towards the violence that was exerted on him. But after being faced with accusations of being weak he finally identified with such a belief and chose to change himself. When his former girlfriend connected his reactions to the violence with his lacking masculinity his self-image may have been characterized by feelings of inadequate in that respect. Such feelings were on occasions further reinforced by her comparing him to her ex-boyfriend’s greater acceptance of the violence. Daniel explains; “Then she blamed it [the physical violence] on being used to fighting from her earlier relationship. And that he sure could take it.” Thus the interest for Daniel to try to conform to a generally perceived male role was not necessarily based on a desire to fit with a greater public but rather to gain acceptance from his girlfriend.

Further in the quote Daniel explained that his friends realized a change in his mood that he connects to his attempts of conforming to become a less sensitive man. That they started perceiving him as cold and boring may, as suggested by him, relate to him suppressing a lot of emotions in order to become a less vulnerable person. However Stolt (2010) explains that being subjected to intimate partner violence typically has significant negative effects on one’s everyday-life throughout. Thus, for Daniel to appear differently to his friends may simply be a consequence of him being continuously subjected to physical and psychological violence.

In relation to different levels of applying social psychology Stevens (1998) argue that there are strong connections between personal- and social constructions and that people try to categorize to create a “simplified” version of reality. He further explains that;

“People react to others in relation to stereotypical images and learnt assumptions about members of a certain group (this can be based on class, ethical background, gender, age or some other form of categorization). That type of socially derived expectations can also impact on how members of such groups experience themselves and how they construct their social identity.” (p26).

The latter part of this quote mentions how the expectations of outside influences may impact on how people view themselves. As already discussed Daniel experienced a feeling of not living up to expectations that got verbalized by his girlfriend on the occasions where disagreed with her violent behavior. However the first part of the same quote can be equally useful in beginning to understand how Daniel reached the point
where his solution became to alter his way of responding to the violence. Daniel he explains;

"Before this happened I honestly didn't have any thought of that it could happen. Now that I've been exposed to it and got through it I feel that I'm not embarrassed at all. Mainly because I know that those around me supported me and didn't think I was a wimp."

In this quote Daniel admits to not having been previously aware of that a situation like the one he experienced within his relationship could occur. Due to the circumstances of the interview one can assume that he specifically refers to being unfamiliar with is the idea of that a woman within a heterosexual relationship can be the aggressor of violence. This judgment is partially made due to that he within the interview provides us with information of having grown up with the understanding that for men to hit women is wrong, thus indicating an awareness of the existence of IPV in general.

Drawing from the quote Daniel’s experiences of being subjected to IPV by a woman were likely as new to him as the overall concept of a female aggressor. If people, as suggested in the quote by Stevens, create expectations on each other based on stereotyping, then the violence that Daniel faced may not only have felt unfamiliar but also rather surprising. Such feelings may have caused a great deal of confusion when personally subjected to it. As earlier discussed feelings of male inadequacy appear to have been detriment to the self-image of Daniel as he actively engaged in suppressing his feelings regarding the IPV. He also appeared to have believed that the values that had become established within the relationship corresponded with the nature of the outside world and that his friends and family were going to perceive him the same way as his girlfriend did. When he realized such was not the case his self-image went through yet another change as his feelings of male inadequacy finally ceased.

The report by Hradilova Selin (2009:12) is the first in Sweden to acknowledge men being subjected to violence. For the Swedish Crime Prevention Council to previously not have publicly raised the issue of male victims of IPV through one of their annual reports may have created unawareness amongst the public of their existence. Similarly Trui et al. (2010) describes coming out shorthanded when searching through internet for places that treat male victims of IPV. Those are likely factors behind how Daniel may have failed to with certainty identify the physical and psychological violence he was subjected to as intimate partner violence. Drawing from the social psychology claims
(Stevens, 1998) that the perception of the group impacts one's perception of reality and oneself it may be particularly difficult to appreciate the existence of a phenomenon that doesn’t openly exist within a society, even if one has experienced it in real life. Such factors may have made Daniel particularly confused regarding how to view violence he was faced with. Confusion regarding how to view the IPV may have caused a certain vulnerability to adopting his ex-girlfriend's perceived outlook on the matter, i.e. that a woman exerting physical violence within a relationship is acceptable.

When interviewing Martin it becomes evident that the IPV did not directly impact on his self-image the same way it did for Daniel. In the interview he doesn’t make statements that suggest that his sense of manliness got heavily compromised or that he suffered from feelings of shame or inadequacy directly related to the IPV. However he points to other negative effects that the IPV directly had on his emotional state.

During the interview Martin explains that the IPV he suffered by his girlfriend was mostly of psychological nature, although physical violence did occur. The report made by BRÅ (2009:12) suggests that men who experience IPV frequently report being subjected to psychological violence and that it mostly takes place inside of the home. Such was also the case for Martin, and below he explains what the IPV within his former relationship typically looked like.

“When my girlfriend started her fights I always tried to walk away, change rooms – but she always followed. Even if I locked myself into the bedroom or the office she could stand for hours (on and off) and continue arguing. She wouldn’t cave, she was like a stubborn mosquito that never gave up.

It appears as if Martin experienced the fights overwhelming in the sense that the only way he believed he could end them was to physically remove himself from them. However that strategy got compromised by her following him around and continuing the fights from outside of the door to the room that he had locked himself into. He uses the simile “a stubborn mosquito” to describe his ex-girlfriend as being on a persistent hunt for a reaction from his side when the fights started. When asked to develop what kinds of verbal attacks he got subjected to he states;

"She was really looking for things that could hurt. That I was cheating, I was disgusting, I smell bad, I walk funny, I was bad at my job, I stole from my workplace, everybody is just laughing at me, I was pathetic, I was a loser etc etc etc. It always went on for hours once she had started.”
However as the interview one gets the sense that was most difficult for Martin to handle in these situations was not necessarily getting verbally abused. Neither does it appear to be the pain of experiencing his partner intentionally trying to hurt his feelings. Instead he continuously emphasizes the length and frequency of the fights which implies that what he experienced being particularly unbearable was the feeling of not getting left alone when he wished to. This gets highlighted when he specifically identifies a need to get to sleep throughout the nights in order to manage his job. Further Martin explains that he resorted to increasingly drastic measures to escape the fights;

“In the beginning I took into a hotel, 1-2 nights at a time. But in the long run it became a little bit expensive since it happened [the fights] at least once a week. During one summer I rented an apartment on a sublease, just to have as a retreat”.

Thus the verbal abuse and getting followed around the house seem to have occurred often enough and endured for long enough for Martin to feel as if locking himself in a room and simply waiting them out was becoming unfeasible. That Martin ultimately resorted to renting an apartment to escape to may indicate that he experienced a sense of being a prisoner in his own home.

Nybergh (2013, p.12) states that violent relationships all have “different kinds of motives, situations, degrees of severity and violent patterns”. Thus how the IPV that Daniel and Martin experienced directly affected both men in different ways. However the Social Worker provides us with a general idea of how men may experience it.

"Men who get subjected to violence don't get as scared in the long run as women get. Men can therefore seem rather unmoved by the violence they meet, oftentimes it is connected to the manliness and that it is shameful to speak about […]”

The Social Worker believes that men tend to not get as scared by a violent relationship in the long run as women, but that feelings of shame can instead be prevalent. For this reason they may appear rather unmoved by the violence as she believes such shame to be connected to a sense of blow to the manliness. This closely resembles what was discussed in Daniels case. Daniel tried to appear unmoved by the violence he was subjected to but internally experienced shame related to feeling inadequate as a man. The shame largely influenced why he kept the IPV a secret from family and friends but finally ceased to exist when he realized that his surroundings did not view him as insufficient. During the interviews with Daniel and Martin neither of them mentioned
being afraid of their girlfriends. However feelings of shame (Daniel) as well as hopelessness (Martin) were mainly described.

5.2.2. The violence indirectly affecting the emotional state

Throughout the interview with Daniel he does not bring up indirect consequences that the IPV had on his emotional state and will not be featured under this pattern. Martin on the other hand suffered great difficulties from how the IPV indirectly affected his life. When asked how the IPV affects his daily life today he states;

"Hard to say. Today it mostly feels like my lack of job is what makes me have a poor self-image and feel bad. But sure I am probably affected by what has been, if not then unconsciously".

The fact that Martin believes his lack of a job to have affected his self-image the most indicates that having a job (in general) or having the job that he ultimately lost (in specific) is something that he values high.

Throughout the interview Martin frequently connects the IPV within his previous relationship with fears of not being able to manage his job. The reoccurring references to how he felt his home situation may come affect his work, along with connecting having a poor self-image to being unemployed indicates having experienced a certain fear of that the IPV may cause him to lose something very important to him and his self-image. Further Martin explains how the IPV indirectly affected his emotional state;

"The last six months I lived with my girlfriend I twice seriously considered taking my own life. I felt like I had tried everything but no one understood the situation. I didn't see any way out. I was stuck in a leg trap it felt like, painted into a corner. The house we had moved in to together, even if my name was on the mortgage and the entire cash deposit. Since we moved in together she could demand half of the house if I threw her out. We had started a renovation so the house couldn't be sold in its current condition without first finishing the renovation. But since we were almost constantly fighting the renovation didn't move forward."

In this quote Martin uses several metaphors to describe what can be understood as a deep sense of powerlessness bordering on hopelessness. He specifically refers to a feeling of being stuck in a situation from which he couldn’t think of a way out. He explains that he on two occasions considered taking his own life, possibly referring to
those events as having considered them means of escaping. In the earlier research section Stolt (2010:04, p. 7) identifies some similarly detrimental effects of IPV when writing that;

“...The violence can also cause more long-term consequences than direct acute injuries. It regards mental illness, fear, nervousness, anxiety and sleep problems, PTSD-syndromes, depression, feeling low, panic disorder, death anxiety, suicide attempts as well as an overall feeling of worry and a fear of getting exposed to new acts of violence.”

Stolt here mentions a wide range of consequences that IPV can have on people aside from direct physical injuries. However even if Martin started to suffer from some of the previously mentioned conditions, the cause may not primarily have been the violence itself. The hopelessness that Martin specifically expresses appears to stem from some of the side-effects that the IPV had on his every-day life (including his ability to manage his work and the house renovation) as well as the threat they posed to his economy. Palmberg & Wasén (2003) defines four types of abuse that men may suffer within relationships where IPV occurs. Apart from physical and psychological violence they may experience having common children used as leverage against them or that they feel exploited financially.

[...] economic exploitation was by the men experienced as abuse and they felt a great sense of powerlessness, helplessness and felt bad about the acts the woman was putting them through.” (Palmberg & Wasén, 2003, p. 32)

In Martin’s case he experienced being trapped in a situation where his economy was greatly endangered due to the IPV and that his girlfriend at the time refused to move out so that the renovation could get finalized and the house sold. Whether Martin’s girlfriend stayed in the house as a means of controlling him or out of any other reason could determine if an alternative kind of economic exploitation was in fact taking place. However the effects of feeling like his financial situation endangered appears to have affected Martin similarly to what Palmberg & Wasén encountered in their study.

In this sense the IPV had both direct and indirect emotional impact on Martin. The frequent fights seem to directly have drained Martin from a lot of energy which in turns compromised his ability to work and go through with the renovation of the house. In turns the potential threats that it posed to his financial situation seem to have caused a lot of fear. Feelings of not being able to escape the situation, neither the fights
themselves nor having her move out so the house could be sold is finally what likely created the hopelessness that Martin experienced.

5.2.3 Mutual violence affecting the self-image

Within a relationship where IPV is occurring the phenomenon of mutual violence is a reoccurring one. In the earlier research Nybergh (2013) refers to the American researcher Johnson's study about violence patterns within IPV. One type of violence that Johnson mentions is called ‘violent resistance’ and is explained as “[…] where one partner uses violence (but not control) as a counter strategy or defense towards the violence that their partner is subjecting them to […]” (Nybergh, 2013, p. 5). The story of Martin’s relationship with his former girlfriend reveals what could be interpreted as such a case.

When asked if Martin on any occasion had used physical violence on his girlfriend he explains that he on 2-3 occasions had slapped her back in a desperate attempt to “try to get her to stop”. The exact behavior that he wanted her to stop in those moments was her verbally assaulting his close family. Martin says that;

“When she noticed that she couldn’t make me angry by attacking me, she often started attacking my parents, siblings, nieces & nephews etc – she was really searching to get a reaction from me.”

According to Martin those moments had always been preceded with her following him around for hours while verbally assaulting him. However during some occasions when the verbal assault got directed towards his family that he had felt that “enough is enough”. To slap her had never been his initial reaction, but rather he describes it as the result of hours of harassment. This description by Martin resembles the conditions normally involved in ‘violent resistance’, i.e. where violence is used to counter violence from the other part rather than a means of controlling the other person. The Therapist offers a reflection of how men may experience mutual violence within a relationship where they have primarily experienced themselves as the victims of IPV;

"Some [men] feel guilty of having been subjected to violence and there exists which is important to point out, mutual violence. There both perpetrator and victim exist in the same person. They feel humiliated and ashamed and believe that they are alone in this problem.”
The Therapist explains that mutual violence for a man who is primarily viewing himself as the victim of IPV can cause a great sense of humiliation or guilt. How Martin’s use of physical violence affected him and his self-image he explains in the following quote.

“For a long time I felt pretty bad when realizing that I was capable of hitting a girl. Like most, I have it in my core not to hit a girl, and I have always looked down on those who do. Now I was “one of those”?! It took quite some time to cope with actually, and you start questioning yourself. I who had never been in a fight in my life before, and who had never had the thought of hitting a girl either. It wasn’t even on the map.”

In Martin’s account of how the mutual violence affected him a sense of guilt comes across. Further it appears as if he became very surprised by the fact that he had been capable of using violence on another person, specifically a woman. His initial attempts of dealing with the fights had been to try to physically removing himself from them. However to react to the situation in a physically violent manner does not seem compatible with how he viewed himself as a person. On these occasions Martin’s actions contradicted his fundamental values which appear to have stirred up a lot of confusion within him regarding his own character. He specifically points out that he had never previously been involved in a physical confrontation which suggests that he does not identify as someone who likes to solve problems using violence. To furthermore (as a man) use violence on a woman is something that he repeatedly mentions that he specifically disapproves of. Not only does he claim to have looked down on men who hit women, but he also expresses negative feelings towards having to reevaluate himself as being “one of those”. This specific choice of words indicates that he viewed male aggressors of violence as a category of its own which any male individual would either fully belong to or not. In his situation however, the person that he thought he was and the person he through his actions had revealed himself to be where very different.

From a social psychological point of view Stevens (1998) claims that a mismatch between one’s perception of reality and the present situation may result in a role-conflict. For Martin a role conflict may have occurred from having viewed himself as a person who would never hit a woman but having realized that he was actually capable of such acts.
However Martin sought out help to come to terms with events of the relationship and elaborates on how his self-image continued to get affected by the existence of mutual violence between himself and his former girlfriend.

“But after consultations with for instance one of the psychologists that my girlfriend had at the moment I realized that everyone is capable of using violence. It's just about the situation. I still think that all kinds of violence is wrong, and in hindsight think that it was wrong of me. But I can still understand my reaction in that situation.”

Consultations with a psychologist, amongst others, helped Martin draw the conclusion that every human being is capable of violence in certain contexts. Further he realized that an action can be situation bound which led him to come to believe that the action does not have to define the person who commits it. This appears to have made him better come to terms with what he had done wrong within the relationship without having to reevaluate his entire identity. Thus outside interaction provided him a new perspective on his view of reality and in turns caused the role conflict to lessen. He still argues that violence is wrong and believes that it was wrong of him to hit her, although he understands his actions better now. The mutual violence likely doesn’t have as strong negative effect on his self-image as it once had.

When asked, Daniel also mentions having slapped his girlfriend on one occasion following that she had hit him. Similarly to Martin he explains that he used a different approach to a very familiar situation but that it in his case had resulted in heavier beating from his girlfriend. Further he does not mention any particular effects that it had on his self-image.

6. Discussion

Summary of results in relation to aim

The aim of this study was to get deeper knowledge and understanding of the experiences of male victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Our chosen theoretical
perspectives have been social psychology and hegemonic masculinity theory, as they seemed appropriate to use for analysing the data gathered.

When answering the research questions one of the most important things that we encountered within this study is that men (as well as women) are not part of a homogenous group. The two men that we interviewed about the IPV they had suffered were shown to have had widely different experiences from the violence. However, through the interviews with the Therapist, the Social worker and the Volunteer additional data was collected which provided a more generalized view based on the male victims they meet within their respective organisations. However different the responses of Daniel and Martin were, it was interesting to see that a lot of the feelings and views on the IPV that they shared also resonated within the responses by our additional interviewees.

To answer our research question of how abused men experience reaching out for help, we can start by stating that the commonality we found in Martin and Daniels statements, was that none of them were initially willing to talk to their families and friends about their situations. However, their reasons for not coming forth were quite different. While Martin was hoping that the situation would change, he also seems to have refrained from initially telling others as an attempt to protect his abusive partner. The main reason for Daniel not coming forth was the fear that no one would believe him. He also states that he had started to internalize the verbal abuse from his girlfriend of him being weak and that this was a reason as to why he thought that others would think that of him too.

Regarding Help-seeking experiences, the Therapist argues that male victims of IPV are generally reluctant to seek help and talk about their experiences. Thus when they finally come forth, they are especially sensitive to any negative response. Stereotypical thinking regarding gender roles may not only prevent men who are suffering from IPV from seeking help, but from feeling as if their experiences are being taken seriously once they do. The Social worker also relates to feelings of shame that these men may have for being subjected to violence by a female. Such shame may stem from the image of masculinity that society withholds that expects men to be able to physically defend themselves in situations of violence exerted by a female, indicating a belief that violence is necessarily of physical nature. Within our study we found that the men we
interviewed had suffered from both physical and psychological violence. The Volunteer in turns shares an interesting angle, stating that he gets the feeling that most men who are victims of violence (of some sort) do not view themselves as victims of crime if the violence takes place within the relationship. Trivialization of the abuse, which both men experienced to a certain degree, also explains why the men were reluctant to talk to family and friends about the IPV. Within our study we found that a male victim of IPV may experience their partner both apologizing for their violent behaviour as well as blaming it on their partner. To Martin the apologies brought him a sense of hope that the situation would improve, which kept him from telling his loved ones. To Daniel on the other hand, the blame caused him to keep quiet about his experiences.

In relation to contacts with the judiciary Daniel did not seek such help during the course of the relationship while Martin, as well as his girlfriend, had extensive contact with the police, social services and the district court. Martin’s experiences from that were mainly negative causing feelings of discrimination and getting discredited. He states that he felt as if the side of his girlfriend was frequently getting favoured on what he expected to be neutral ground. A reason to this is may be that men may still viewed as the automatic perpetrator in situations of IPV within a heterosexual relationship.

Regarding how the IPV emotionally effected the men it appears as if it had a negative influence on them, but in rather different ways. Firstly we found that IPV does not only have negative consequences in terms of the direct violence. Instead the violence itself may create outcomes that affect other parts of the life of the victim that cause problems in terms of their emotional state or self-image.

Daniel developed feelings of insecurity and shame in regards to his self-image following the physical and psychological violence he suffered. A sense of inadequacy in regards to his masculinity got instilled by his former girlfriend when he initially opposed the physical part of the violence. Even if Daniel claims to previously not have been bothered with conscious efforts of trying to live up a hegemonic masculinity, such processes seem to have started during the course of the relationship. Additionally a general unawareness of physical violence with a female aggressor may have caused confusion regarding how to view the IPV he suffered. Thus resulting in a greater vulnerability to question his spontaneous response to being subjected to violence while
gradually coming to terms with his exposure to it as an acceptable part in their relationship. This seems to finally have resulted in conscious efforts of trying to desensitize in order to live up to the expectations he perceived by his girlfriend, i.e. a man immune to her violence.

Martin on the other hand seems little affected by feelings of male inadequacy or shame in direct regards to the IPV he experienced. To the contrary he positions himself very strongly against the violence. The fact that he identified with his own victimhood, as well as that of his partner (in relation to the personal issues he believes she is dealing with) got manifested by continuous attempts of seeking help. What appears to have had the largest emotional impact on Martin is the indirect impact of the violence, such as having his financial situation greatly compromised as well as feelings of disappointment and disbelief from his contacts with the judiciary. Such consequences caused great feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that are still affecting him today.

Further the existence of mutual violence may also have a negative impact on the men. The Therapist argued that shame may be a common for men who consider themselves as the main victim of IPV but resort to a use of violence within their relationship. Martin had been very negatively affected from having resorted to mutual violence on 2-3 occasions. His attempts of manoeuvring the situation contradicted his usual ways of coping with it along with his core values. This caused severe guilt as well as an internal role-conflict regarding his self-image. However outside influence in terms of psychologists and others led him to a realization that everyone can be capable of violent acts and that violence is sometimes situation-based.

Coupling to earlier research

It seems as if the results generated in this research correspond to that from the studies within the theoretical framework that we chose. It also adds certain elements that we did not encounter within the previous research selected albeit pointing to the same tendencies. Stereotyping and gender roles was a major influencing factor in all of our themes, as perceptions on victims and abusers seemed highly influenced by it. However the statements of Martin and Daniel differ in regards to how they identify with such perceptions in relation as well as their masculinity in relation to them.
Within one research mutual violence was mentioned through presentation of the research by the American researcher Michael Johnson. Through categorizing patterns of violence that included the use of mutual violence his research had become rather controversial as it contradicted an idea where victim and perpetrator are unlikely to co-exist within one person. However through our interview with the Therapist we got the understanding that such occasions do occur, which later reoccurred in our interviews with Martin and Daniel. The patterns of violence put forth by Johnson was in this research a valuable asset to understand mutual violence that we encountered through our data.

In relation to the earlier research, stating that it is important for abused men to get confirmation that they are getting abused, this seemed to have been the case for both interviewees. While Daniel had not actively sought help, Martin struggled a great deal with getting recognition from the judiciary. To fail to get recognition for his experiences in legal instances caused him severe distress and disbelief in the judicial system.

Discussion of methodology and research process

At a very early stage in our research process, we anticipated some difficulty finding interviewees for this study. The subject is sensitive and very personal and this is just a C-paper by two social work students. We had some initial concerns regarding research ethics and if participating in this study could have negative effects on men who had been victims of IPV. Further we came to the conclusion that we should limit our sample group to men who had previously experienced being male victims of IPV but not currently be involved in such a relationship.

After contacting numerous men’s shelters and advertising our research, many replied that it was an important and interesting study but that it was too personal to participate. After some time we got a hold of two men who were willing to participate. We realized that due to time constraints we would have to broaden our sample group and therefore included people working with abused men on a day-to-day basis and we got three more people willing to participate.
Since our interviewees felt more comfortable doing email-interviews, that is what we have mainly conducted. To improve the credibility of this study we have also sent complementary questions to clarify certain statements as well as conducting a complementary phone interview. Had we accessed more interviewees or been able to conduct face-to-face interviews the data gathered could have been richer. However since the research subject we chose was attached to stigma a positive outcome of conducting the interviews over e-mail was that it enabled a sense of comfort for the participants which could have increased the degree openness and honesty when answering the interview questions.

As mentioned in earlier sections, we have tried to bridge our inexperience by working closely with each other on every part of the essay. We have thoroughly discussed our results, our analysis and our themes to see if our interpretation of the data complies.

Discussion of theories

Our chosen theoretical perspectives were social psychology and hegemonic masculinity. Regarding social psychology there exists a possibility to analyse data on different levels, such as the individual and the societal and how people tend to create their identities. The hegemonic masculinity theory on the other hand regarded the specific requirement that society puts on masculinity and how men may incorporate or chose not to incorporate such elements in the formation of their identity. It was stated both through social psychology and hegemonic masculinity theory that people adapt to the expectations of others and that we create our identity in the meeting with others.

The shortcomings of using social psychology is that it does not cover all aspects of a persons’ life. Socio-economic status, environmental background and culture are not taken into consideration when determining how a person interplays with various levels of their social network. Hegemonic masculinity bases its premise on a middle class, Western perspective and does not consider differences in how masculinity is determined in other cultural or socio-economic contexts. It would have been interesting, but perhaps too broad for a C-paper, to include more than gender roles and stereotyping to cover the issue of IPV and male victims. There are many aspects and levels to IPV, as
mentioned in our earlier research and although social psychology and hegemonic masculinity theory covers some of them, they still leave gaps.

Concluding words by the authors

The different reactions towards our chosen research subject have been interesting to witness. While many depreciates intimate partner violence in different of gender factors and have encouraged such a subject others have raised concern regarding potentially trivializing the massive issue of violence towards women by conducting such a study. However shedding light on what may be considered as a social problem affecting a minority of does not necessarily steel focus of similar problems affecting a larger amount of women. Shedding attention on IPV affecting any victim within any context should be acknowledged as a social problem in need of solution.

Genderism and sexism does not benefit anyone, as victims of the possibly detriment consequences of gender stereotyping may cause secret victims of abuse that suffer equally to those openly encouraged to search for help.

6.1 Suggestions for future research

Due to time restraints as well as limited respondents we here provide a small-scale study on the experiences of intimate partner violence from a Swedish, male-victim's perspective. We combined the stories of two men who had previously been subjected to IPV by a female partner with the work experiences of three people meeting such men on a daily basis. The stories amongst our two men differed significantly in most areas and a larger scale study including more men would likely provide further stories on the experiences and challenges a man may face in today's Western society from living in an abusive relationship with a female offender. Making a study, either qualitative (on the experiences of IPV by male victims) or a quantitatve (of the attitudes regarding such violence) in a different geographical spot would give an interesting comparison as other socio-cultural factors would likely affect the results.
Conducting a study on IPV within homosexual relationships would be interesting as possible issues of minority stress factors could be further explored. Further suggestions to increase the knowledge about IPV would be to conduct a qualitative study of the women themselves that exert violence within their relationships, what factors and experiences that impacts their behaviour.
7. Reference list


Appendix 1: Intervjughid (Män)

Hej!
Nedan följer en rad frågor angående dina upplevelser och tankar kring att vara i en relation där det förekommer våld. *Eftersom intervjun sker via mail så ber vi dig att svara så utförligt som möjligt*. Vi hoppas även att vi kan återkomma ifall vi har ytterligare frågor kring något av svaren som ges.
Tack för din medverkan!

Frågor
Berätta lite om dig själv (ålder, familj, sysselsättning, etc.)

Hur länge var du tillsammans med din dåvarande partner och under hur stor del av det förhållandet förekom det våld?

Hur skulle du beskriva din dåvarande partner? Hur var hon mot dig? Hur var hon mot andra?

Hur tror du att hon skulle ha beskrivit dig och er relation?

Hur såg andra på er relation? Var hon omyckt i familjen och bland vänner?

Vilken typ av våld blev du utsatt för? Hur motiverades våldet av din dåvarande partner?

Skedde våldet öppet eller privat? Om det skedde öppet, hur reagerade omgivningen?

Använde du någon gång fysiskt våld mot din partner och i så fall i vilket syfte?

Hur hanterade du våldet när det skedde? Hur tänkte du kring det efteråt?

Hur påverkade våldet din självbild och vardag?
Hur tänkte du eller vad gjorde du för att hantera din situation? Använde du några speciella strategier?

Vilka har du berättat för? Hur upplevde du att du blev bemött?

Fanns det något som gjorde att du drog dig för att berätta om din situation och i sådana fall, vad?

Hur upplever du att allmänheten ser på män som blir utsatta för våld av en kvinnlig partner?

Hur tror du att samhällets syn har påverkat;
   a) Dig som utsatt?
   b) Synen på din partner som förövare?
   c) Är det någon skillnad på hur du såg på det då och hur du ser på det nu? Och i så fall vad?

Är det någonting som vi har missat att fråga som du upplever är av vikt och vill dela med dig av?

Stort tack!
Appendix 1: Interview Guide translated to English (The men)

Hello!

Beneath follows questions regarding your experiences and thoughts about being in a relationship where violence occurred. Since the interview is taking place via e-mail we ask you to answer as thoroughly as possible. We also hope that we can come back to you if we have further questions regarding any of the answers.

Thank you for your participation!

Questions

Tell us a little bit about yourself (age, family, occupations, etc.)

How long were you together with the person in question and during how large part of that relationship did violence occur?

How would you describe your partner in question? How was she towards you? How was she towards others?

How do you think that she would have described you and your relationship?

How did others view your relationship? Was she liked within the family and amongst friends?

What kind of violence were you subjected to? How was the violence motivated by your partner?

Did the violence occur in public or in private? If it occurred in private, how did the surroundings react to it?
Did you even use physical violence towards your partner and in that case, for what purpose?

How did you handle the violence while it was happening? How did you think of it afterwards?

How did the violence affects your self-image and every-day life?

How did you think or what did you do to handle your situation? Did you use any strategies in specific?

To who have you told about the violence? How did you experience that you were received?

Is there something that caused you to refrain from telling about your situation and in that case, what?

How do you experience that the general public view men who get subjected to violence by a female partner?

How do you think that the view of the general public have affected;

1) You as a exposed
2) The view of your partner as offender
3) Is there any difference in how you viewed this then and how you view it now?
   In that case what difference?

Is there any question that haven’t mentioned and that you feel is of importance and want to share?

A big thank you!
Appendix 2: Intervjuguide (till dem som jobbar med de utsatta männen)

Hej!

Nedan följer en rad frågor angående upplevelser och tankar kring att vara i en relation där det förekommer våld. Eftersom intervjun sker via mejl så ber vi dig att svara så utförligt som möjligt. Vi hoppas även att vi kan återkomma ifall vi har ytterligare frågor kring något av svaren som ges.
Tack för din medverkan!

Frågor
Berätta lite om dig själv och ditt arbete med våldsutsatta män?

Hur ser situationen ut i Sverige för män som blir utsatta för våld av en kvinnlig partner (ex synen på dem som brottsöffer)?

Vad för sorts våld blir de oftast utsatta för?

Hur tänker de kring våldet de blir utsatta för (varför det sker, etc)?

Hur ser männen på sin partner i rollen som förövare?

Hur påverkar samhällets syn deras självbild och hur identifierar de sig själva som brottsöffer?

Vilka slags coping strategier brukar de använda för att hantera sin situation? (tex negativ och positiv coping?)

Hur upplever de att det är att berätta om våldet för nära och kära? Hur upplever de att de blir bemötta?

Av vilka orsaker söker de hjälp? Hur upplever det är att ta steget att söka hjälp?
Hur blir de bemötta då de söker hjälp (hos t.ex. polis, jourer, stödboende)?

Är det någonting som vi har missat att fråga som du upplever är av vikt och vill dela med dig av?

Stort tack!
Appendix 2: Interview guide translated to English (The people working with the men)

Hello!

Beneath follows questions regarding your experiences and thoughts about being in a relationship where violence occurred. *Since the interview is taking place via e-mail we ask you to answer as thoroughly as possible.* We also hope that we can come back to you if we have further questions regarding any of the answers.

Thank you for your participation!

Questions

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your work with men who are exposed to violence?

How is the situation in Sweden for men who get subjected to violence by a female partner (eg. The view of them as victims of crime)?

What kind of violence are they often subjected to?

What do they think regarding the violence they get subjected to (why it happens, etc.)?

How do the men see their partner in the role of the offender?

How does the view of the society affect their self-image and how they identify themselves as victims?

What kind of coping strategies do they usually use to handle their situation? (eg. negative and positive coping?)’

How do they experience telling about the violence to loved ones? How do they experience getting met?
By what reasons do they search for help? How do they experience the sted to search for help?

How do they get met when seeking help (eg. At police, centers or shelters)?

Is there any question that haven’t mentioned and that you feel is of importance and want to share?

A big thank you!