

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA
DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES: Lingüística y Literatura



TESIS DOCTORAL

Exploring digital discourses on intimate partner violence: a socio-cognitive approach

Discursos digitales en torno a violencias en contextos de pareja:
una aproximación socio-cognitiva

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTOR

PRESENTADA POR

Alfonso Sánchez Moya

DIRECTORES

Juana I. Marín-Arrese

Alan J. Cienki

Madrid

Ed. electrónica 2019

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

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A SOCIO-COGNITIVE APPROACH**

**DISCURSOS DIGITALES EN TORNO A VIOLENCIAS EN CONTEXTOS DE
PAREJA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN SOCIO-COGNITIVA**

Alfonso Sánchez-Moya

Supervised by

Dra. Juana I. Marín-Arrese, UCM

Dr. Alan J. Cienki, VU Amsterdam

**TESIS DOCTORAL EN RÉGIMEN DE COTUTELA ENTRE LA UNIVERSIDAD
COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID Y LA VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM**

Madrid, Amsterdam

2018

I, Alfonso Sánchez-Moya, declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

Agradecimientos

I am normally told that I thank a lot. In my opinion, the act of thanking is an opportunity to let others know how important their knowledge, love, company or presence is for you. I believe I am a very lucky person to be surrounded by wonderful people. Therefore, and considering this may be the only doctoral dissertation I will ever write, it is wise to advise readers that this acknowledgement section is likely to take a while to read.

First of all, I would like to show my gratitude to my two PhD thesis supervisors: Dr. Juana I. Marín-Arrese and Dr. Alan Cienki. It was late on a February evening, back in 2012, when I first approached Dr. Marín-Arrese to share with her some of the initial thoughts underpinning this research project. I still vividly remember her encouragement to pursue my objectives, which are very much included in this thesis. It was also Dr. Marín-Arrese's character and enthusiasm to go beyond the expected and explore uncharted areas what made me consider a joint doctoral programme between the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. One of the greatest rewards of this decision was the opportunity to learn from Dr. Alan Cienki, who managed to enrich my experience both as a doctoral candidate and as a human being. Thank you both, Juana and Alan, for having provided me with thought-provoking and wise guidance, and for always encouraging me to continue working. I am really grateful for your helpful critical comments on earlier versions of this work (all the remaining shortcomings, however, are all mine!). Thank you both, too, for always understanding the circumstances that have surrounded the process of writing this thesis.

This research would not have been possible without the financial support I have received from many institutions. The seed of this project was rooted at Lancaster University thanks to a grant provided by *La Caixa Foundation*. More specially, I would like to thank Emilia Jordi for her constant support and encouragement to pursue research along these lines and showing her trust in my work. Likewise, this thesis owes its existence to the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, which generously enabled my commitment to this investigation by means of a four-year predoctoral contract (FPU13/4471). Apart from this, I would also love to show my gratitude to the IPV survivors and their voices, which I collected from Women's Aid online site, and without whom this study would not exist. Due to their constant work and willingness to help women undergoing IPV, I would like to encourage anyone reading these lines to support this organisation by making a donation to Women's Aid so that they can keep providing their crucial services for women and children.¹

Before I even decided I was going to write a thesis, there were many people who contributed to my academic, professional and personal growth. To start with, I will always be indebted to all the teachers I have had in life, from my very early stages to all my university professors at the Universidad Complutense, University of East Anglia and Lancaster University. Thank you very much for your invaluable faith in my abilities, your knowledge and the invaluable inspiration you provided me with. Thank you all for crafting me into the young discourse analyst that I am today. Similarly, to the various academics and researchers I have met throughout these years, thank you for your friendly and sincere engagement with my work at the conferences and events I have attended, and also for letting me access the human being behind the (academic) scenes. Although naming them all is not an easy task, I wish to show

¹ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/donate/donate-now/>

my special gratitude to Antonio García, Carmina Gregori, Miguel Fuster, Carmen Maíz, Begoña Núñez, Sergio Maruenda, José Santaemilia, Patricia Bou and Ruth Breeze. Special thanks also go to Piek Vossen, Jan Blommaert, Nicolina Montessori, Joyce Lamerichs and Isabel Durán for their suggestions to improve this thesis and their willingness to serve on the reading committee. Also, thanks to the PhD in English Linguistics Academic Committee in general, and Paloma Tejada in particular, for making things a bit easier.

The person I am nowadays is the result of thirty years of moving between many geographical spots and the amazing people I have found throughout this journey, which have nurtured my character as I know it today. From my childhood and teenage years, I will always be thankful to Ana (Paula), for inventing fantastic scenarios we would both visit to flee from the rather parched lands that surrounded us. To M^a Paz, Paula, and Jaime, thanks for becoming the first students I ever had. Similarly, thanks to Uncle Vidal for transferring his English cassettes to me, which turned out to be my only exposure to English until I grew up. To Emilio, Lorena, Israel, María and Elena for your special friendship. To José Ramón for his help with statistics, and to Ana Rubio for also being one of the best partners in crime I could ever think of.

My years as an undergraduate student both in Madrid and Norwich left a crucial imprint on me. On the one hand, I will always be professionally indebted to the ASM team. Thank you, Adela Atienza, for being able to quickly recognise my enthusiasm for teaching and for giving the 19-year-old version of me the opportunity to do so. Likewise, I was lucky enough to find Olga Cerro and Nuria Puertas, who guided me in my transition towards adulthood and have always been a constant pillar in my life. On the other hand, apart from strengthening my passion for teaching and developing my love for English and linguistics, it was during these years that I forged some of the most precious friendships I still treasure nowadays. I am particularly thankful to Alejandro Mendive, Patricia Guirado, Cristina Martín and Doug Kelly, with whom I keep building shared stories and experiences. Thanks a lot for the many moments I know we still have to live together. Thank you for letting me be me.

As a postgraduate student, I had the chance to meet people who kept stimulating my eagerness to learn and expand my horizons. My times at Lancaster University convinced me to become a discourse analyst. I wish to show my special gratitude to Maka Julios and Carmen Chiu for giving me the support I needed throughout those months and for being key parts of that experience. As a PhD candidate in Madrid, I have been fortunate to be surrounded by fellow PhD colleagues who have kindly contributed to overcome the obstacles we have encountered, so thank you Ángeles Jurado, Raymond Echitchi, Laura de la Parra, José Carrasco, Ximo Primo, Cesc Madriles, and Estrella Díaz. My experience as a PhD candidate in Amsterdam will not be easily forgotten either. Thank you, Bertie Kaal, for making everything possible. Also, thanks to Anita Raghunath, Roel van den Oever, Liesbeth Geudeke, Yao Tong, Marja Kramp and Floris Kolkman for making me feel at home both at the VU and in Amsterdam. Overall, these years have been tremendously rich in the process of becoming who I am at the moment. I wish to express my wholehearted gratitude to Felipe Tenorio and all his family for having accompanied me during many parts of this life expedition.

The final months of wrapping this project up were not the easiest ones. My friends have proved to be vital throughout this period. Again, thank you Alejandro, Patricia, and Cristina. Thank you, Javier Olloqui and José Luis Ramos for letting me share with you the ups and downs of these final weeks. Thank you, Itziar Lozano, for the many library and life moments we shared in July. Thank you, Laura Isla, for helping me rebuild the feeling of home that had

suddenly vanished. Thank you, Marta Gómez, for always speaking your mind. Thank you, Yelena, for helping me understand some of the most inscrutable parts of myself. Furthermore, I owe my biggest thanks to my family, without whom I would have never completed this manuscript. Mamá, gracias por demostrarme que la vida es cuestión de actitud. Gracias por tus incansables esfuerzos y sacrificios, por los que siempre estaré en deuda. Gracias por hacerme ver que, a pesar de todas las circunstancias, lo más importante es ser uno mismo, atendiendo a tu corazón para ir haciendo tu propio camino sin perder jamás la sonrisa. Papá, gracias por inculcarme y enseñarme principios y aprendizajes de incalculable valor, por transmitirme el privilegio que supone perseverar y luchar por tus ambiciones. Gracias por enseñarme la capacidad de reinención y por enseñarme a escuchar. Gracias, Jesús, por tu imaginación, creatividad e ingenio. Gracias por ayudarme a ver que la vida va mucho más allá del trabajo. Gracias a los tres por estar siempre y por vuestro amor incondicional. Finally, and to me most importantly, thank you Olga for making me feel there was always someone there to listen, to read, to laugh, to cry with and to go through everything. Thanks for your altruism, for sharing your experience, wisdom and empathy with me at all times. Thank you, Laura, for being my uncategorisable life partner, for riding with me on this roller-coaster of life. Thank you for adding bright colours to my life and for making me feel that, unlike many others, some things are forever. Thanks for being my everything.

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Abstract

This research project sets out to explore one of the most salient social concerns in contemporary societies, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), from the perspective of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). Partly due to its pervasiveness and ubiquity in the human condition, violence in general, and violence against women in particular, has been scrutinised from areas that are thought to be more directly linked to this social phenomenon. In fact, IPV has attracted attention from health, social and legal sciences. However, as suggested by scholarly voices (Aly & Naylor, 2013), trying to understand this type of violence from a single viewpoint has proved to be insufficient. In contrast to the multifarious perspectives adopted by the above-mentioned areas of expertise, there is a shortage of studies investigating IPV from disciplines that are connected with language and discourse studies. More specifically, then, this research project explores the online discourse of female survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. The main objective of this dissertation is to better understand the discourse of women who are suffering from this public health issue in their lives.

To this end, 474 forum posts (circa 130,000 words) were collected from a publicly-accessible, anonymised online forum. Taking advantage of the way in which this forum is organised, posts were collected from three different online communities in this online site: (1) Is it abuse?, (2) Getting Out, and (3) Life after an abusive relationship. As their names suggest, these three communities (and the discourse used in each of them) are seen as three stages within a prototypical abusive relationship (initial, intermediate, and final).

Apart from engaging with a theoretical discussion around key topics concerning this research (Intimate Partner Violence as a social phenomenon itself, digitally-mediated communication, the socio-cognitive view on discourse and critical discourse studies), this research consists of three empirical explorations of the data under scrutiny.

First of all, the corpus is investigated from a corpus-assisted discourse analysis perspective (CADS). A sentiment analysis software tool (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, LIWC) is used in order to gain a general discursive perspective of the discourse type at issue. This tool is also employed to check whether the three online communities mentioned above were discursively different from one another. Second, the socio-cognitive representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV are explored by analysing how these key social actors are represented linguistically. For the purposes of this study, a feature-based analytical framework is designed (Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse, SARDDA), which was used systematically to scrutinise the discursive mechanisms in which female survivors represent themselves and their perpetrators in this online forum. Emphasis is put on certain linguistic features that are thought to be relevant in the process of forging these women's digital collective identities (and their perpetrators'). Third, the socio-cognitive representations of female survivors and male perpetrators which are figuratively instantiated in discourse (namely metaphor) are also examined. This is done due to the potential that metaphor has to convey subtle ideological connotations around controversial topics (especially those that are not easy to deal with, like abuse certainly is).

Broadly speaking, results from these empirical analyses are presented following a mixed-method methodological standpoint. Therefore, online posts are investigated taking into account quantitative and qualitative explorations. Apart from using a wide range of methodological tools (LIWC for a corpus exploration and Atlas.ti for qualitative analyses),

results are statistically measured to validate the claims. Overall, this thesis provides an empirically-grounded exploration of the micro-level of these women's discourse. Further research will make additional efforts to keep building bridges between the micro and the macro-social level in order to keep shedding light on this worrying social phenomenon.

Resumen

Esta investigación pretende explorar una de las preocupaciones sociales más destacadas en la sociedad contemporánea, las violencias en el contexto de la pareja, desde la perspectiva de los Estudios del Discurso. Debido en gran medida a su ubicua presencia en la condición humana, la violencia en general, y la violencia contra las mujeres en particular, se ha estudiado en profundidad desde áreas que parecen estar más directamente vinculadas a este fenómeno social. De hecho, las violencias en el entorno de la pareja, en sus diferentes manifestaciones, han recibido la atención de disciplinas pertenecientes a las ciencias de la salud o a las ciencias sociales. Sin embargo, y como algunas voces académicas han sugerido (Aly & Naylor, 2013), intentar comprender este tipo de violencia desde un único punto de vista se ha probado hasta el momento insuficiente. Por otra parte, y en contraposición a las múltiples perspectivas que muchos de los campos anteriormente mencionados adoptan, existe una palmaria escasez de estudios que investiguen este tipo de violencias desde disciplinas conectadas con la lingüística y los estudios del discurso. Por tanto, y más específicamente, esta tesis doctoral explora el discurso digital de mujeres supervivientes de violencia en el ámbito de la pareja. El objetivo principal de este estudio es contribuir a una mejor comprensión del discurso de mujeres que experimentan este problema de salud pública a lo largo de sus vidas.

Con este fin, este estudio recopila 474 mensajes digitales (en torno a 130.000 palabras) procedentes de un foro de acceso público y anonimizado. Aprovechando la distribución de este foro, los mensajes fueron extraídos de tres comunidades digitales dentro de este portal web: (1) ¿Es abuso?, (2), Saliendo [de la relación abusiva] y (3) La vida después del abuso. Como sus propios nombres indican, estas comunidades (al igual que el discurso que se genera en las mismas) se toman como reflejo de tres etapas prototípicas dentro de una relación abusiva (inicial, intermedia y final).

Por una parte, esta investigación dedica buena parte de su extensión a la discusión teórica y crítica de nociones centrales del análisis posterior (la dimensión social de este tipo de violencia, las peculiaridades de la comunicación digital y el enfoque socio-cognitivo dentro de los estudios del discurso). Por otra parte, además, los datos recopilados se analizan de desde tres perspectivas diferentes.

En primer lugar, se investiga el corpus desde el enfoque propuesto por el análisis del discurso asistido por los estudios de corpus. Con este fin, se recurre a una herramienta de software para el análisis textual de los sentimientos (*Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, LIWC*), lo cual permite obtener un análisis discursivo global del tipo de discurso que aquí se examina. Además, se hace uso de este software para comprobar que las tres comunidades digitales anteriormente mencionadas son discursivamente diferentes entre sí. En segundo lugar, esta tesis realiza una exploración de las representaciones socio-cognitivas de las mujeres supervivientes y los maltratadores a través de los diferentes mecanismos discursivos que emplean para construirse textualmente como actores sociales. Con este objetivo en mente, esta tesis propone un marco analítico basado en los rasgos discursivos más característicos de este contexto comunicativo (*Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse, SARDDA*), el cual es sistemáticamente empleado y problematizado en el desarrollo de la investigación, poniéndose especial énfasis en aquellos rasgos lingüísticos más relevantes en el proceso de creación de las identidades digitales de las supervivientes y los maltratadores. En tercer lugar, se realiza un análisis de las

representaciones socio-cognitivas de estos actores sociales que se construyen a través de mecanismos figurativos (principalmente la metáfora). Esta aproximación se realiza partiendo del potencial que la metáfora tiene para transmitir connotaciones ideológicas más sutiles en torno a temas controvertidos (especialmente aquellos que son difíciles de gestionar, como ciertamente ocurre en el caso del abuso).

En términos generales, los resultados de estas contribuciones empíricas se presentan siguiendo algunas recomendaciones propias de enfoques metodológicos mixtos. En consonancia con esto, los mensajes digitales se analizan teniendo en cuenta parámetros cuantitativos y cualitativos. Para ello, y además de usar un amplio repertorio de herramientas metodológicas en el análisis (LIWC para una exploración cuantitativa del corpus y Atlas.ti para el análisis cualitativo), los resultados de esta investigación se miden también de forma estadística para dar mayor validación a los hallazgos. Así, este estudio aporta una exploración basada en contribuciones empíricas, centrándose principalmente en el nivel más textual (micro) del discurso de estas mujeres supervivientes. Además, se aporta un andamiaje teórico de gran utilidad para, en futuras investigaciones, continuar creando conexiones entre el nivel textual y social de los discursos generados en estos contextos, siempre en aras de seguir arrojando luz sobre este fenómeno social de dimensiones tan preocupantes.

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Abbreviations & acronyms

BNC	British National Corpus
CADS	Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDS	Critical Discourse Studies
CL	Corpus Linguistics
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CMCMC	Convergent Media Computer-Mediated Communication
CMT	Conceptual Metaphor Theory
DMC	Digitally-Mediated Communication
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KSC	Keyboard-to-Screen Communication
LIWC	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count
SAA	Social Actors Approach
SARDDA	Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse
SAs	Social Actors
SCRs	Socio-Cognitive Representations
VAW	Violence Against Women

CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale for research

Violence in its many forms is deeply entrenched in many socio-cultural scenarios. More specifically, given the patriarchal system in which most contemporary societies are embedded, violence against women in general, and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in particular, are no exception. It is therefore unsurprising to find out that the ubiquitous character of IPV has been denounced by a wide range of international institutions. For instance, the World Health Organisation has reported that 25% of European women suffer some form of IPV during their lives (García-Moreno et al., 2013). Similar concerns have been raised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2011). In fact, they warn that 18 women are victims of homicide each day in Europe on average, and 12 of these are murdered by intimate partners or other family members. Findings along these lines have also been reached by the European programme Daphne, which estimates that 3,500 deaths are related to intimate partner violence in the EU Member States (EFTA, 2007). Despite the alarming nature of the previous figures, it is even more worrying to observe that we are far from overcoming this social concern. Recent studies (Barómetro FAD, 2017), for example, have pointed out that 27.4% of Spanish youngsters aged between 15 and 29 believe that IPV represents a *normal* kind of conduct among members in an intimate relationship. Based upon these few arguments only, it is understandable that the World Health Organisation identifies IPV as a public health issue (García-Moreno & Watts, 2011; García-Moreno et al., 2013).

The present doctoral dissertation sets out to explore IPV as one of the most salient social concerns in contemporary societies from the perspective of discourse. Partly due to its pervasiveness and ubiquity in the human condition, violence in general, and violence against women in particular, has been scrutinised from areas that are thought to be more directly linked to this social phenomenon. In fact, IPV has attracted attention from health, social and legal sciences. Research along these lines is concerned with shedding light on the complex reality that IPV scenarios entail. As a matter of fact, as suggested by scholarly voices (Aly & Naylor, 2013), trying to understand this type of violence from a single viewpoint has proved to be insufficient. In contrast to the multifarious perspectives adopted by the above-mentioned areas

of expertise, there is a remarkable paucity of research contributing to IPV from disciplines that are connected with language and discourse studies.

This dearth of language-driven studies to foster explorations from less usual standpoints was one of the original motivations to undertake this research project. In this dissertation, language is conceived as one of the most reliable mechanisms to comprehend human beings. It therefore assumes that the majority of the linguistic units we use are one of the most useful resources for people to externalise their internal thoughts and emotions so that they can be understood by others. Hence, based on the assumption that discursive choices are never neutral or innocent, but ideologically loaded, this dissertation is based upon the assumption that a discourse-based analysis is a very suitable approach to identify the attitudes and beliefs that prevail in specific discursive practices within particular socio-cultural scenarios.

Another challenge that many industrialised societies are facing today concerns the gradual migration to online contexts that many social practices are experiencing nowadays. The rapid development of technology has brought about a drastic change in the way we interact, and digitally-mediated communication has inevitably become the main mediator across a multitude of digital practices in many of the (communicative) exchanges that we are involved with. Many of the affordances inherently available for digital media users are boosting an interesting paradigm shift, not only in the way we connect with each other, but also in how online discourse and communication are investigated.

Concepts of paramount importance for researchers in discourse-related disciplines, such as *context*, are currently being problematised in the light of these new technological developments (Szabla & Blommaert, 2017). Likewise, the many effects that digital technologies and communication are having on notions at the kernel of socio-constructivist theories, such as *identity*, are also triggering thought-provoking research. As argued by Cover (2015: 2), digital technologies and social networking sites constitute “performative acts of identity which actively constitute the user”. Therefore, social media sites have an enormous potential to curate the (online) self in the process of construction of both personal and collective online identities within digital communities. Discourse, in its many manifestations, has a key role in this process. Unsurprisingly, an increasing number of researchers is currently examining

online forums as interesting *loci* where issues concerning discourse, identity and communication are curiously interwoven. Overall, then, online forums are of great interest from the perspective of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS hereafter). In fact, these rather intangible (digital) communities become repositories of ideologically-loaded stereotypes and beliefs of all sorts, mostly due to the potential that discourse has to create, distribute and perpetuate ideologies.

Despite the plethora of approaches within CDS to investigate the connections between discourse(s) and ideologies, this dissertation is greatly influenced by the socio-cognitive approach to the understanding of discourse (van Dijk, 2008; 2009; Koller, 2012; 2014), in which the cognitive link between discourse and society is highlighted. Although the major theoretical implications of this perspective will be discussed in the development of this research, there is one concept that is particularly relevant for the process of forging collective identities (Koller, 2014). Drawing from social psychology theories (Moscovici, 2000; Augoustinos et al., 2006), the socio-cognitive approach to discourse gives prominence to socio-cognitive representations (SCRs), which are understood as “organised, coherent, socially shared sets of knowledge about an object, domain of objects [or group identities] which combine affective structures with inherent normative and evaluative dimensions” (Koller, 2012: 20). The relevance of investigating SCRs from a CDS perspective is based upon the assumption that these representations of group identities “are constituted and negotiated by the interactions within a discourse community” (Koller, 2014: 148). These socio-cognitive representations can be instantiated by means of a wide range of linguistic devices. Nonetheless, this research concentrates on the SCRs used to represent female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV as key social actors in the type of abusive relationships this study investigates. The linguistic analysis of how social actors are represented in discourse (van Leeuwen, 2008) is frequently used in socio-cognitive studies mostly because, through these representations, it is possible to grasp a better understanding of, *inter alia*, social actors’ beliefs, attitudes or expectations (Koller, 2014).

The combination of the previous ideas should be partly regarded as the main theoretical underpinnings that inform this doctoral thesis. In fact, this research project examines the discourse of female survivors of IPV in a publicly-accessible online forum, paying special attention to how these women linguistically represent

themselves and male perpetrators of IPV as social actors. As anticipated before, this is undertaken from the perspective of CDS due to the social orientation that prevails in its research agenda in contrast with some other related areas. More specifically, this dissertation assumes that IPV reproduces unequal relations of power (Wodak, 1996) between women and men, perpetuates gender inequality (Hester, 2012), and marginalises these women as people discriminated against in society (Chinkin, 2012). Therefore, the investigation of IPV from a CDS perspective can be easily justified, especially because CDS is characterised for its interest in exploring “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 10).

All in all, and in line with the previous arguments, this dissertation seeks to comprehend IPV by means of a critical analysis of the online discourse used by women who have been through this type of violence at some point in their life spans. Therefore, the main scope of this study is to contribute to a better general understanding of IPV as a worldwide concern that, as will be detailed later on, is far from improving. As this research approaches IPV from the perspective of CDS, one of the central tenets in CDS research (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, KhosraviNik, 2010; Koller, 2014) is that claims need to be based on textual evidence, and this can only be attained by means of detailed semiotic analysis in any form (linguistic, visual, multimodal, etc.). To address this general aim, more specific questions and objectives are addressed in the next section.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The overall objective of this thesis is to investigate the online discourse of female survivors at different stages within an IPV relationship in order to explore these women’s ideological (beliefs or attitudes), psychological and emotional characteristics as represented in their discourse. In the attempt to provide linguistic evidence, a corpus of *circa* 130,000 words was collected from a publicly-accessible online forum nested in the website of a British charity (*Women’s Aid*) aimed at helping women who are experiencing IPV. A total amount of 474 original posts written by women were gathered from three different subcommunities found within the general forum. Therefore, it was possible to contrast these three categories under the assumption that they could be unproblematically paired with three stages within a

prototypical abusive relationship: an initial stage ('Is it abuse?'); (b) an intermediate stage ('Getting out'); and (c) a final stage ('Life after an abusive relationship').

The first specific objective formulated in this research was to examine if the three online communities mentioned above could be approached as representations of the three different stages they suggest. Although this was also accomplished through a socio-netological exploration of the three communities (paying attention to the number of unique users contributing to each group), it was also necessary to account for the distinctive (if so) discursive nature of the three subcorpora in contrast to discourse types emerging from less specific communicative contexts. To this end, a control corpus including online posts in forums employed by more general audiences was also compiled. Posts collected from the IPV-related contexts became the experimental corpus (VIOL_CORPUS), which was contrasted with the control corpus (NONVIOL_CORPUS). In order to obtain a general discursive picture of these communities under scrutiny, the text-analysis software tool LIWC (Pennebaker et al., 2015) was employed. The linguistic output obtained by means of this tool provided useful insights in two different ways. On the one hand, it helped find out if the three IPV-related communities could be treated as separate communities. On the other hand, the application of this software tool on both the experimental (VIOL_CORPUS) and the control (NONVIOL_CORPUS) datasets shed light on the distinctive discursive nature between these two types of discourse. This initial objective was operationalised through the following research questions:

(RQ1.1) How can the online discourse of women undergoing IPV-related experiences be better understood through the application of text-analysis software tools such as LIWC?

(RQ1.2) How are the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny discursively characterised in the light of LIWC-provided categories?

(RQ1.3) Based on their discursive characterisation, to what extent do these online IPV communities differ from other non-violence motivated forum communities?

The second specific objective pursued in this thesis concerned the exploration of the two main social actors in any prototypical abusive relationship (namely the abuser and the abused). Partly encouraged by the alarming figures showing the

pervasiveness of IPV in contemporary societies, this research opted to examine the discursive representation of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV (as opposed to other gender combinations) via the online environment briefly described above. As pointed out before, this thesis takes a socio-cognitive view on discourse. Thus, one of the main interests of this study was to examine how the socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) of both survivors and IPV perpetrators could yield revealing insights into these women's ideological, emotional or psychological understandings of their specific reality. More specifically, this second empirical analysis was motivated by trying to find out if these women would opt to use more neutral or non-neutral terms when describing themselves and others (namely their perpetrators) in discourse. It was also interested in the type of categorisation used to represent themselves and the abusers (i.e., whether they used classification terms such as *woman/men*, functionalisations such as *victim/perpetrator* or relational identifications such as *wife/husband*). Relatedly, the role that these representations had in the construction of their online collective identities was also worth exploring. Drawing upon the layout of the online forum, this study sought to find out if these SCRs showed similarities or divergences across the three communities under scrutiny. This second specific objective was operationalised by means of the following research questions:

Finally, the third specific objective was to explore the socio-cognitive representations of both survivors and perpetrators in this online forum from a more abstract perspective and focus on those discursive representations that were accomplished via non-literal ways. As already argued by some scholarly voices, complex, subjective and in many cases controversial experiences (like IPV certainly is) tend to be conventionally verbalised and conceptualised by means of metaphor (Kövecses, 2000). As a matter of fact, the tendency to provide metaphorical representations of both themselves and the perpetrators was salient even from early explorations of the data. With this in mind, for the final empirical analysis, it was deemed necessary to investigate some figurative mechanisms used for representation purposes. Additionally, the inclusion of metaphor as an analytical tool is advocated by socio-cognitive approaches to the study of discourse (Koller, 2014; van Dijk, 2014), especially for their potential to embody different ways of conceptualising a given reality. Mirroring previous examinations of the data, this empirical analysis focused on the representations of the two main social actors

discussed throughout this thesis. Apart from that, it also intended to find out if conceptualisations of survivors and perpetrators shifted across the three online communities in which the online forum is divided. Thus, the operationalisation of this third specific objective is worded as follows:

(RQ3.1) How are female survivors of IPV figuratively represented in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ3.2) How are male perpetrators figuratively represented in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ3.3) To what extent do these figurative representations vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

Overall, this section has put forward the main objective this research seeks to accomplish. Apart from that, three specific objectives have been identified, each of which will be dealt with in three empirical contributions of this thesis. Additionally, these objectives have been operationalised by means of three sets of research questions. In the next section, I provide a general overview of how this thesis is organised.

1.3 Overview and organisation of the thesis

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. This first introductory chapter has described the background and the rationale for the present study. Additionally, it has put forward both the general and the specific objectives this research sets out to attain, which have been operationalised by three sets of inter-related research questions.

Following this introductory account, **Part I** engages in an in-depth discussion of the theoretical foundations upon which this thesis is built. **Chapter 2** is devoted to providing an account of intimate partner violence (IPV) as a social phenomenon. Despite its sociological nature, this chapter is believed to offer relevant insights into key aspects of IPV that will prepare the ground for a better understanding of the multi-faceted phenomenon that IPV is. Broadly speaking, then, this second chapter seeks to describe in detail the macro-contextual level that surrounds the discourse under scrutiny. **Chapter 3** focuses on digitally-mediated communication (DMC) and online communicative scenarios as the discourse practice context by which the data

analysed for this dissertation is unavoidably influenced. Therefore, attention is paid to different features of online discourse and digitally-mediated communication. Emphasis is particularly placed on the role that online forums can certainly have in the process of curating the online self, which is of great importance in the construction of collective online identities and communities. This theoretical part continues by presenting core concepts associated with the understanding of discourse by which this thesis is informed. More specifically, **Chapter 4** explains the suitability of exploring social phenomenon like IPV from the perspective of discourse. Apart from outlining the most common approaches within Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), this chapter also summarises the main criticism CDS has received and discusses the implications of adopting a socio-cognitive approach to the study of discursive phenomena.

Chapter 5 is intentionally located in the middle of these two major parts. Apart from identifying the main hypotheses and research objectives, this chapter is concerned with reporting the many details linked to issues of data selection and collection. Additionally, this chapter pays a great deal of attention to the ethical dimension of this research. Apart from identifying many of the ongoing discussions in the rapidly-changing field of Internet research, this chapter also contributes a proposed research protocol to comply with good research practices in ethical terms. It is noteworthy to specify that this chapter seeks to inform readers about the general methodological decisions adopted as this research project progressed. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that specific methodological considerations concerning each of the three empirical analyses carried out in this research are included in the corresponding empirical chapters. Nonetheless, an overview of methods is presented in this chapter.

In accordance with the three specific objectives formulated in Section 1.2 above, **Part II** consists of three main chapters. **Chapter 6** employs a text analysis software tool (LIWC) to provide a general, quantitative exploration of the corpus at hand. This chapter seeks to offer a first contrastive analysis of the three main online communities investigated in this dissertation and to assess to what extent IPV-related discourse differs from online data generated in non-violent related online communities. **Chapter 7** explores these female survivors' discourse from a more qualitative perspective. To this end, this chapter investigates the socio-cognitive

representations by means of which these online users instantiate themselves and their perpetrators as social actors in their online recounted experiences with IPV. **Chapter 8** takes a closer look at these socio-cognitive representations by focusing on the figurative mechanisms employed in the discursive instantiations of these two main social actors. Both Chapters 7 and 8 devote a great deal of attention to examine how these textual representations vary across the three online communities. This is undertaken in order to explore possible correlations between these socio-cognitive representations and the different stages within a prototypical abusive relationship that these online communities reflect.

Finally, **Chapter 9** summarises the main findings in the light of the three sets of research questions included in this introduction. Additionally, it addresses the main limitations identified in this study and suggests possible directions for research along these lines.

(I) THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

As anticipated in the introductory chapter, this research attempts to build bridges between several fields of knowledge which are not commonly explored from a unitary perspective. It should come as no surprise to find out that the theoretical foundations underpinning this dissertation derive from a wide array of disciplines, all of which are incorporated in this first theoretical part. In fact, this is divided into three main chapters that are closely aligned in this study: intimate partner violence (IPV), digital discourse and computer-mediated-communication (CMC) and critical discourse studies (CDS).

First and foremost, as also suggested in the previous chapter, the major motivation for this study is driven by the ubiquity of a social phenomenon that needs urgent attention. Consequently, it seems convenient to provide a detailed picture of IPV from a more sociological perspective, which is done in Chapter 2. This can be of great help especially when trying to combine findings from the analysis of the micro-level of discourse with different features of the macro-(social) level that characterise IPV.

Chapter 3 pays attention to central issues in digitally-mediated-communication (DMC) and digital discourse. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this research is based on a corpus consisting of *circa* 130,000 digital words collected from an online forum. Understandably, this peculiarity triggers the need for emphasising the role that different aspects of DMC and digital discourse are likely to play in the realisations of the discourse being examined as it is.

Finally, always bearing in mind that social issues –especially those that generate social inequalities– are one of the priorities for CDS and its research agenda (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), Chapter 4 builds upon the concepts that assist the understanding of both discourse(s) and critical discourse analysis from which this research is addressed. This is done in order to justify the reasons why analysing the discourse of IPV survivors from a CDS perspective can positively contribute towards the improvement of such a social issue.

CHAPTER 2 | INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by explaining key issues linked to violence as a problem in broad terms, especially those concerning the several understandings of violence as a phenomenon *per se*. It also begins by considering the various typologies of violence, among which IPV is found. Additionally, this first chapter hones in on the many definitions that have been used to refer to IPV as societal issue, as well as the types and dynamics that characterise it. Likewise, it offers a depiction of present-day global scenarios and summarises some of the many direct consequences that people experiencing IPV may have to face. Lastly, this chapter ends with a more in-depth review of literature that refers to relevant studies along these lines.

2.2 Broad contextualisations of violence: understandings and typologies

This first section sets out to offer a broad contextualisation towards violence in several forms. First, it attempts to provide a succinct explanation of the main understandings from which violence has been approached as a phenomenon. Without engaging in very deep conceptual discussions, this section also takes into account different definitions of violence and outlines the main typologies associated to it. This is done in order to better comprehend the framework that surrounds Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) both as one of the most salient types of violence in present days and as the main sort of violence this research focuses on.

2.2.1 Approaches to the understandings of violence

Regardless of the multiple nuances traditionally attached to it, both the notion of violence and the different ways in which it may be manifested are widely spread in most current societies. What is more, violence can be said to be a trait that characterises most living beings as one of the most effective resources to exert their power on those with whom they coexist in one particular social order. Not surprisingly, there have been many attempts to define this phenomenon and the many implications of it for human/social beings.

Although a detailed, philosophical discussion on the different conceptions of violence and the diverse attempts to study this phenomenon would be beyond the scope of this PhD dissertation, a summarised account of them can contribute to a better framing of this research. According to scholars in this field (Gilligan, 1997; Collins, 2009; Staudigl, 2014), research on the understandings of violence has undergone an important transformation since the 1980s. This change seems to be influenced by both the methodological nature of studies on violence and the understanding of the term itself. In short, more modern approaches tend to refute essentialist and naturalist views of this phenomenon. These are characterised by the assumption that violence is inherently present in the human being and by research interests that mostly explore the subjective causes underlying the origins of violence.

Contrary to these approaches, current discourses on violence mostly draw upon a more phenomenological stance. This interpretation defends the view that there is no violence *per se*, but "rather there is violence only to the extent that there are historically and culturally constituted –and thus irreducibly contingent– orders, within which the 'meaning violence' is ascribed to a given social event" (Staudigl, 2004: 1). Understanding this phenomenon along these lines also adds a further dimension to it, linked to the idea that violence is socially defined and negotiated to the extent that one particular social group is entitled to reach an agreement on what counts as violence and what does not (Whitehead, 2007; Staudigl, 2014).

Consequently, research based on the phenomenological approach has been urging the adoption of a broader perspective from which violence should be investigated. Under the assumption that different levels of experiences with violence have a crucial impact on one's conception of violence (Staudigl, 2014), these voices promote the use of more comprehensive lenses from which to examine some of the elements at the heart of most violent scenarios (Wieviorka, 2009). Thus, they claim a more integrative attitude towards the agents that violence presupposes, as well as more profound insights into the many possible contextualisations that can contribute to a better understanding of the different layers integrating a violent situation.

If these theoretical underpinnings are taken into account, it is not surprising to find out that the latter paradigm is at odds with some of the attempts that international institutions such as the World Health Organisation are making to examine issues

with a direct impact on both the health and the wellbeing of many societal systems (as violence itself surely entails). In fact, the World Report on Violence and Health (Krug et al., 2002), one of the first reviews of violence on a global scale, and studies of the sort are openly criticised by the phenomenological standpoint. More specifically, this type of research is deemed to lack, *inter alia*, both a coherent methodology and an integrative perception of violence that guarantees a more unified perspective to examine the many faces of violence in their relational character (Staudigl, 2014). Furthermore, reports of this kind are thought to make a rather weak link between structural or symbolic violence as the unique source of physical violence, without reflecting upon how these two manifestations of violence constitute parts of a unified phenomenon.

As can be interpreted, there is not a uniform line of thought when it comes to providing a definition for what stands for violence or the different methods to approach the study of it. This research is partly built upon the understanding proposed by phenomenological research. Like many other subjective phenomena originated in human passions (love, fear, envy, and so forth), violence is conceived as strongly embedded in personal values and, consequently, in societal and cultural systems. Therefore, following here some of the basic tenets of this type of conception (Whitehead, 2007; Wieviorka, 2009; Collins, 2009; Staudigl, 2014), I similarly adopt a more holistic approach to trying to understand violence and the many layers underneath that turn a 'violent' episode into what we eventually perceive as 'violent'. Similarly, this integrative view should also be applied to the treatment of those actors who intervene in a violent act. In fact, very much prompted by drastic social changes, research in violence has tended to concentrate on victims from the 1960s onwards (Wieviorka, 2009), in many cases disregarding the role of the actor at the opposite side of the spectrum (the criminal, the abuser, etc.). Although victims are usually those at stake and should be then well catered for, violence is most of the times a multi-faceted phenomenon and Manichean interpretations should therefore be avoided.²

Interestingly enough, although phenomenologists criticise the methodological validity of the rather descriptive attempts by institutions such as the World Health

² Studies claiming that today's aggressors were often victims in the past are worth paying attention to (Wieviorka, 2009)

Organisation (namely Krug et al., 2002), the most important caveat in the phenomenological stance is precisely related to methodology. Despite providing a very coherent approach to the understanding of violence, they recognise that a consistent methodology to tackle issues related to violence is yet to be developed (Staudigl, 2014). Taking the previous points into account, and of course acknowledging the limitations that the mere controversies around what counts as violence and what does not can certainly pose for studies of this kind, I am inclined to accept the efforts made by research that seeks to make violence a more tangible issue and put under the spotlight the sordid experiences that many individuals are still experiencing in today's world. It is precisely this apparently consistent methodological operationalisation of such a complex phenomenon that validates the findings obtained by the World Health Organisation and turn their reports into reliable sources of information.³

In short, this dissertation draws upon these alternative approximations to violence as a societal issue. Far from invalidating each other's claim, I take a combination of both trends on board in the assumption that it will offer a broader understanding of the main type of violence I will be dealing with in this research, i.e., Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Thus, very much influenced by the phenomenological understanding of violence as a phenomenon *per se*, I will also look at both theoretical and methodological suggestions put forward by institutions that have a more direct connection with IPV, namely the World Health Organisation and the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Apart from their solid and sociologically-grounded depiction of many types of violence affecting our societies, I value their open-mindedness to consider social scenarios which, though not so frequently researched (i.e. not Western societies), are equally relevant when attempting to explore possible solutions for the eradication of this situation.

2.2.2 Violence: a working definition & typologies

The World Health Organisation, according to its World report on violence and health (Krug et al., 2002: 5) defines violence as

³ See Krug et al. (2002: 7-13) for a detailed account of the methodological issues underpinning the WHO's *World Report on Violence and Health*.

the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

As can be noted, this definition mostly focusses on actual manifestations of violence, concentrates on the many possible agents (oneself, a group, etc.) and outlines some of the possible consequences (injury, psychological harms...). If the phenomenological approach is recalled, it would also be necessary to refer to the possible causes that trigger violence manifestations, promoting in this way a more holistic perspective. However, as pointed out in the previous section, most understandings of violence (or attempts to understand to it) still have problems when trying to investigate the many possible causes that may support each individual's motivation to get involved with violent acts. Apart from this, and despite some minor adjustments discussed later on in this section, the type of violence this dissertation (IPV) will be exploring seems to fit suitably in the definition provided above. At the same this entails a more or less valid interpretation of how violence can be widely interpreted.⁴

In addition, very much related to IPV, the role of intentionality in what is deemed violent is worth discussing here. As the WHO definition reads, violence implies "the intentional use of physical force or power" (Krug et al., 2002: 5, my own italics). In the attempt to clarify the use of this term and the implications of intentionality in their conception of violence, two major points are raised (Krug et al., 2002: 5).

First, apart from making clear that unintended events resulting in injuries do not automatically imply violence, they also claim that "the presence of an intent to use force does not necessarily mean that there was an intent to cause damage" (Krug et al., 2002: 5). To illustrate this point, they refer to possible brain damage caused by a parent who has vigorously shaken a crying baby in order to quiet her/him. According to their interpretation, force is possibly used in situations of this kind with no intentions whatsoever of causing injuries.

⁴ In the use of this first person plural pronoun I am including groups of people that somewhat share similar values and experiences with me and my circumstances, this is, individuals who were brought up in a Western-like societal structure in a developed country. By this I am also acknowledging that this understanding of violence may be different were it to be interpreted by someone that has a different background to the one I have just described.

However, this justification is deficient to a certain degree. On the one hand, and integrating here the phenomenological critique (Staudigl, 2014), this is mostly centred in the more physical side of violence, leaving behind many (and certainly crucial) of the layers that integrate a violent act. On the other hand, it is very complex to differentiate what is being done intentionally from what is not, not to mention more psychologically-rooted and subtler violent acts and the awareness (or not) that one particular agent may have concerning the violence of her/his acts.

Second, and very much related to the points above, the WHO highlights the difference between "the intent to injure" and "the intent to 'use violence'" (Krug et al., 2002: 5). More traditional perspectives towards the understanding of violence have established clear boundaries between particular cultures or social environments and the increased likelihood of engaging in violent acts (Walters & Parke, 1964). To a certain extent, this view can be said to justify the kind of violence that is allegedly socio-culturally determined. To put it differently, one individual's responsibility in a particular violent act is exempted from being considered violence merely because this act is morally supported by one individual's socio-cultural beliefs and codes (this is, it was not her/his intention to use violence, but the sociocultural determination around the violent agent that pushed him/her to commit a violent act).

Contrary to this, the definition provided by the World Health Organisation detaches itself from these rather deterministic understandings and focuses on the implications that violence has on individual's health or well-being (Krug et al., 2002: 5). In other words, violent behaviours will be considered as such when there is a direct impact on one individual's health and well-being, regardless of the many possible sociocultural factors around the violent agent. Although sociocultural contexts can have a crucial influence on some violent situations, it is hard to accept that a particular set of sociocultural beliefs and ideologies can solely stand for the justification of any type of violence, especially when one individual's health and well-being is at stake.

Hence, as mentioned before, it is true that the definition provided by the World Health Organisation could redefine their understanding of violence building on the phenomenological ideas included above (Wieviorka, 2009; Staudigl, 2014). Although accounting for the many possible layers underneath a violent act proves to be a

complex endeavour, the WHO's definition could explicitly refer to the need for adopting a more holistic approach that at least takes into account the many circumstances and factors that may encourage an individual to commit violent acts.

Paradoxically enough, it is surprising to find out that there is in fact an attempt to incorporate a more holistic approach by the WHO in their understanding of violence which they unfortunately fail to incorporate in the definition they provide (cf. definition above). In a similar vein to what is proposed by the phenomenologists, there is an acknowledgement of the multiplicity of levels (or layers) that may integrate a violent act. This is instantiated in what they call "the ecological model" (Krug et al., 2002: 12) for understanding violence, which is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 | The 'ecological model' for the understanding of violence according to the WHO (Krug et al., 2002)

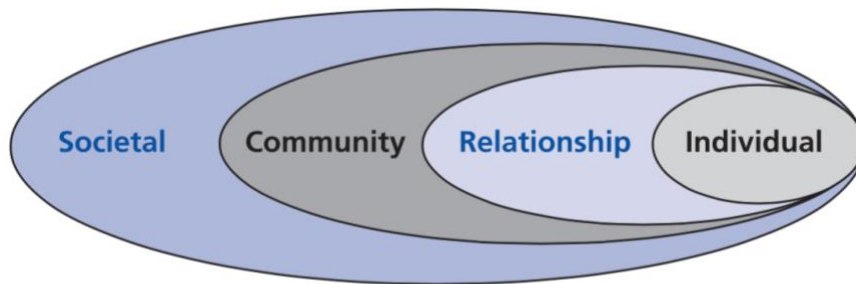
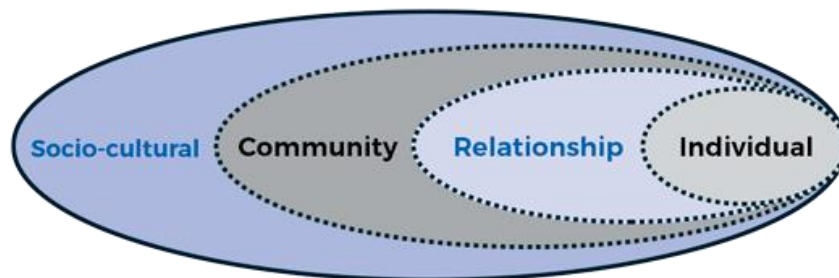


Figure 2 | Slightly modified 'holistic model' for the understanding of violence, based on the WHO (Krug et al., 2002)



In fact, the World Report on Violence and Health further specifies that the ecological model they propose "highlights the multiple causes of violence and the interaction of risk factors operating within the family and broader community, social, cultural and economic contexts" (Krug et al., 2002: 13). Apart from this, it is also claimed that it is complex to establish accurate limits to these risks factors, providing extensive literature that supports the interconnectedness of the many different factors that can coexist in a violent situation (Dutton, 1995; Heise, 1998; Krug et al., 2002). This

ecological vision of violence can be said to draw on the phenomenological underpinnings mentioned above and which partly accounts for the multi-faceted character of it. Therefore, I would argue that this recognition of the fluid character of violent phenomena latent elsewhere in the WHO's report should also be integrated both in the representation (Figure 2) and the definition supplied.

Despite its remarkable similarities, the representation of violence proposed above suggests a greater emphasis on the permeability across the different domains and factors that can be taken into account when approximating a violent act. Unlike the one used by WHO, this seemingly-banal graphic alteration (that replaces continuous lines by dashed, broken ones) can very efficiently convey the idea of how problematic the drawing of clear-cut and visible outlines and edges can be when the interconnectedness of the many layers in a violent act is considered.

Furthermore, as can be observed, some terminological considerations were added. First, though perhaps minimally, the influence of culture needs to be acknowledged. As suggested above, although sociocultural beliefs are not to be used as justifications for any violent act, they still play an important role in most violent scenarios. If I consider that the prefix "cultural" should be emphasised in this representation it is because cultural issues are even more connected to violence than sociological issues *per se*. Additionally, as the title of the graph shows, the label "holistic" would render more integrative connotations to the understanding of violence than the adjective "ecological" does, especially if IPV is considered. Although the term 'ecological' can be used in social sciences to refer to "the study of the relationships between people, social groups, and their environment" (OED, 2015), the most common association given to this adjective has to do with its more widespread connotation, the one related to the branch of biology that deals with the different environments that surround organisms. Apart from this, I also believe the etymology of the term does not match very well with the model being represented, especially if IPV is taken into account. Interestingly, this term derives from the Greek 'oikos', meaning house (OED, 2015). As discussed later on, this dissertation opposes the general belief that Violence Against Women (VAW) in general and IPV in particular are mostly present in domestic environments, an idea that could be implicitly conveyed by the use of the term 'ecological'. Contrary to these points, the

adjective 'holistic' mainly refers to "the tendency to perceive [...] wholes" (OED, 2015) and would generally speaking encapsulate the integrative vision less unequivocally.

As noted above, not only would the graphic representation of violence need some revision, but also the definition provided by the WHO. In line with what was suggested before, this definition works suitably for the purposes of this dissertation, although minor adjustments should be added in order to implement the integrative model discussed so far. Bearing the latter in mind, the following definition would come to terms with this holistic approach. Tentatively, violence could be defined then as follows:

the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, *generally triggered by a wide range of sociocultural individuals whose engagement with it tends to be multifaceted, multifactorial and multi-purposed*, that either results in or has high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation (based on Krug at al., 2002; own contribution in italics, own emphasis in bold)

Unlike the original definition, my proposal does not obscure agency and brings to light responsibility issues. As hinted elsewhere, the fact that violence tends to be intentional implies the fact of being purposely engaged with a violent act. Giving visibility to the many possible agents also responds to the holistic model for understanding violence, in which the individual (influenced by a multitude of layers) has to be taken into account when dealing with violent situations. Far from sticking to binary patterns, the proposed definition leaves room for the multiple array of violent scenarios to which a plethora of sociocultural individuals can contribute from multiple perspectives.

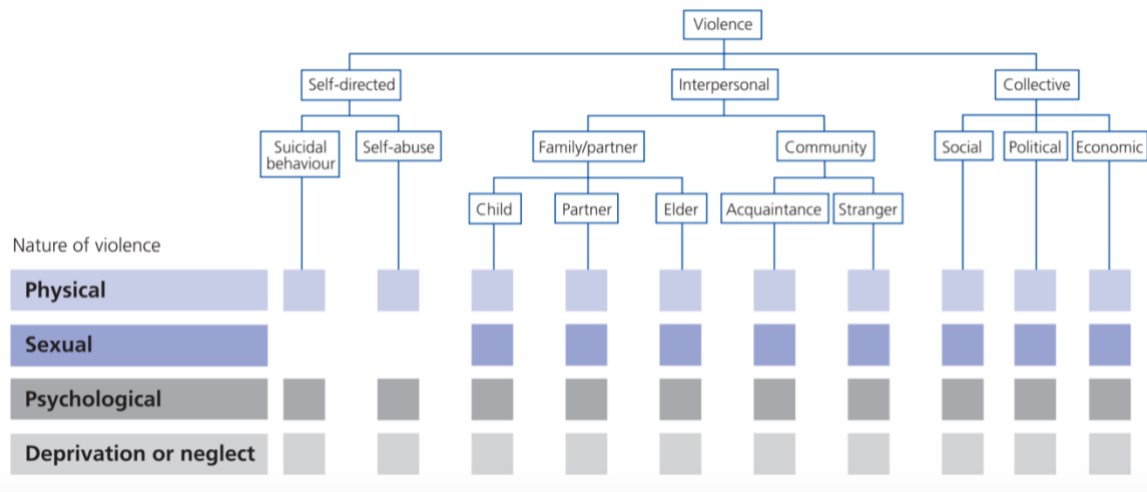
It is possible to go back to the late fifties and sixties to find the first solid accounts of violence and its typologies. Garver (1958) makes a difference between overt (more explicit and generally physical) and covert (more implicit, such as psychological or institutional) forms of violence. This dichotomy was later addressed by Galtung (1969), who distinguished between personal violence (in which the perpetrator tends to be an individual) from the structural one (in which violence is part of a system). Further, Galtung (1990) also contributed a more detailed description of violence by making a triangular correlation between direct types of violence and symbolic and

cultural violent acts, putting the emphasis on how more explicit kinds of violence can easily become institutionalised and thus part of cultural systems.

Major concerns around the impact of violence on contemporary individuals and societies, together with the huge improvement of methodological tools that helped to underpin the research attempts made around violence, resulted in remarkable contributions to violence research which galvanised in the 1990s. Not surprisingly, it was back in 1996, via the WHA49.25 resolution, when the World Health Assembly urged the World Health Organisation "to characterise different types of violence, define their magnitude and assess the causes and the public health consequences of [it]" (WHA, 1996).

Accordingly, the WHO put forward a typology based upon both the many possible types of violence and the nature of the violent acts that can occur in them. Despite the fact that there have been some other attempts to come up with a similar typology (Foege et al., 1995), the one proposed by the WHO has become prevalent and it is the one most commonly referred to when dealing with different types of violence. This taxonomy is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 | Typologies of violence according to the World Health Organisation (Krug et al., 2002)



As illustrated in Figure 3 above, the typology designed by the WHO presents an account of violence which is influenced by those committing the violent act (i.e.,

agency).⁵ Thus, according to this taxonomy (Krug et al., 2002), violence can be said to be self-directed (if a person inflicts a violent act upon her/himself), interpersonal (if violence stems from another individual or a small community) or collective (when violence derives from larger sociocultural structures such as states, political groups, and so forth).

These three overarching categories are also split up into more specific types of violence. Table 1 below, based on the definition provided by this report (Krug et al., 2002), differentiates each type of violence by means of acts, behaviours or situations that characterise each of them. Note however that there is no reference to the nature of violent acts in the table, due to the fact that the four types of violent acts (physical, sexual, psychological and deprivation or neglect) are pervasive in all the broad categories except in self-directed violence, in which sexual violence is not registered.

Table 1 | Characterisation of the types of violence (based on Krug et al., 2002: 6)

TYPE OF VIOLENCE	SUBTYPE OF VIOLENCE		CHARACTERISATION
SELF-DIRECTED	Suicidal behaviour		Suicidal thoughts, attempted suicides, completed suicides
	Self-abuse		Self-mutilation
INTERPERSONAL	Family/partner	Child	Violence largely between family members and intimate partners, <i>usually, though not exclusively, taking place in the home</i>
		Partner	
		Elder	
	Community	Acquaintance	Violence between individuals who are unrelated, who may know each other (or not), <i>generally taking place outside the home</i>
Stranger			
COLLECTIVE	Social		Crimes of hate committed by organised groups, terrorist acts, mob violence
	Political		War and related violent conflicts, state violence carried out by larger groups
	Economic		Attacks by larger groups motivated by economic gain (disrupting economic activity, denying access to essential services...)

⁵ This is interesting if the definition provided by the same institution is recalled in which, as discussed before, the focus is on the recipient of violence (*against*) and somehow obviates the agent (*by*). This is precisely the reason why my proposed definition of violence specifically refers to the paramount role that agency has to play in most violent acts.

By and large, this table provides a suitable characterisation of the multiple types and subtypes of violence. However, there are a couple of points that would benefit from further revision. First, I would undermine the importance that this characterisation gives to different *loci* (see italics in the table above). It is true that there should be a differentiation within interpersonal violence that distinguishes it depending on relational issues (i.e., child, partner, elder). However, as shall be discussed later on, the physical boundaries of interpersonal violence are most of the times blurred, and violence originated outside the domestic realm can burst inside and *vice versa*. Thus, the need for including this spatial reference as a differentiating factor between these two subtypes of violence could be reconsidered.

Second, and in a very similar line to what previous sections suggested, I would provide a different graphic account of how violence (and it intertwines with the multiple subtypes) should be represented. Drawing upon what the authors themselves recognise in the report, "the dividing lines between the different types of violence are not always so clear" both in research and practice terms (Krug et al., 2002: 7). Most types of violence are present in some violent situations and the identification of one or another type of violence seems a complex enterprise in many cases. A linear representation of the types of violence may encourage researchers or practitioners to try to categorise one particular violent act according to a particular type, whereas a more circular illustration of this may promote a more holistic understanding of this phenomenon. This is taken into account in the graphic illustrations pertaining to IPV below.

A more holistic understanding of both violence and its different typologies also contributes to the development of the theoretical foundations of this dissertation. As hinted elsewhere in this chapter, this research specifically deals with interpersonal violence originated within a partner (heterosexual and men against women) context. Generally speaking, there is a wide range of terminological variations to address this issue, some of them will be discussed in forthcoming sections. Nonetheless, the term to be used throughout this dissertation is namely Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The main reasons behind this decision, as well as a thorough explanation of this type of violence, are addressed in the next section.

2.3 Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): definitions and institutional responses

In line with what the previous section anticipated, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV hereafter) is one of the most salient types of violence against women. Unlike other forms of violence against women (VAW), IPV has an interpersonal character and specifically deals with violent acts originated in partner contexts. Straightforward though it may appear, the process of providing an accurate definition for this problem has been (and still is) controversial.

As addressed later in this section, there have been numerous and worldwide institutional actions seeking to gain further insights into IPV mostly in order to try to eradicate it. By simply looking at the documents designed by the different institutions, it is possible to trace the improvements that have been made in order to theoretically frame this type of violence. One of the first attempts to specifically tackle violence used against women is that offered by the United Nations' *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* in 1993. Thus, Violence Against Women is defined in Article 1 as "any act of *gender-based violence* that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or *suffering to women*, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, *whether occurring in public or in private life*" (United Nations, 1993, added italics). As the italics may suggest, this definition has several implications. First, this definition makes a clear connection between VAW and its gender-based character, highlighting the fact that women are the main targets of this kind of violence just because they are women. Second, by locating VAW to both public and private spheres, this definition can be arguably said to focus on any type of violence addressed against women not making special emphasis on the kind of violence that originates in a partner context. To put it differently, as mentioned in the opening paragraph, this first attempt to address this issue concentrates on VAW as an umbrella term to identify violence that is specifically addressed against women.

Nevertheless, considering that violence against women can take place at many different levels, I would argue that measures seeking to combat this social issue do need to explicitly make a difference between violence at a more collective level (VAW) and violence that emerges from the interaction of various individuals engaged in an intimate relationship (IPV). Perhaps for this same reason, the Council of Europe

Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence –more widely known as the Istanbul Convention, held in 2011 and one of the latest institutional response to fight against gender-based violence– does echo this ambivalence to the extent of mentioning it on the name of the convention. Very much in line with the definition provided by the United Nations in 1993, VAW is understood as "a violation of human rights" and as "all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (Council of Europe, 2011).

Interestingly though, once VAW is defined, the Istanbul Convention makes a specific reference to the kind of violence that will be explored in this research. The label used to do this is *domestic violence*, whose corresponding definition is "acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (Council of Europe, 2011). Furthermore, this definition seems to take a clearer stance when it comes to the theoretical assumptions underpinning the whole convention, and it goes further to define *gender* as "the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men" (Council of Europe, 2011). Likewise, it is specified that *victim* means "any natural person who is subject to the conduct" (Council of Europe, 2011) specified in the previous points and that *women* "includes girls under the age of 18" (Council of Europe, 2011).

If compared to the initial definition proposed by the United Nations, the conceptual sophistication around the whole issue which is present in the Istanbul Convention text does not but demonstrate the improvements that have been in this matter. There are indeed several points in the definition that clearly link the theoretical understandings of both this convention and this research. For instance, gender is perceived as socially constructed, which is very much in line with the poststructuralist ideas around gender and sexual identities that frame this research. Similarly, it is interesting to observe that the definition of this type of violence is gender neutral and does not exclusively focus on women as victims. In fact, the Preamble recognises that, although women and girls "are exposed to a higher risk of gender-based

violence than men" and they are therefore affected "disproportionately" (Council of Europe, 2011), "men may also be victims of domestic violence" (Council of Europe, 2011), an idea can be certainly controversial.

Nonetheless, it is again possible to observe some terminological problems when approaching this definition in more detail. In fact, the Istanbul Convention and its Explanatory Report use "domestic violence" as an umbrella term to refer to two types of violence. As the Explanatory Report mentions in paragraph 41, domestic violence refers both to "intimate-partner violence between current or former spouses or partner and inter-generational violence which typically occurs between parents and children" (Council of Europe, 2011b). Similar to what other institutional sources believe (FRA, 2014), it is highly necessary to address these two kinds of violence rather distinctively since they are inherently two different forms of violent manifestations. What is more, in a broader sense now, I also fail to see the reasons why the term domestic is the one employed to refer to this issue. As argued in the previous section, the discursive association of this type of violence to a particular locus (the domestic environment) may have negative implications in awareness-raising endeavours, underrating the global and public dimensions with which violence of this sort must be regarded and combated. The inclusion of the term domestic in this definition makes even less sense if the sentence "whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (Council of Europe, 2011) is considered. In this vein, there have been numerous voices from gender studies arguing against the use of this adjective to refer to this social issue (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Anderson, 2005; Gefter et al., 2017). Therefore, it seems clear that using the term "domestic" to address this issue is definitely inaccurate if the scope of this research is considered, which is why I will consistently refrain from employing it throughout this dissertation.

Taking into account both the discussion above and several theoretical sources that pay particular attention to this sort of violence, the working definition of IPV that this research will take on board can be defined as multiple non-mutually exclusive acts of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading or violent behaviour within an intimate relationship triggered by a partner or ex-partner that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Coker et al., 2002; Heise & García-Moreno, 2002; Women's Aid, 2016).

If compared with previous attempts, this definition refrains from making explicit reference to any spatial environment in which IPV may take place but it does keep the mention of the relational character that essentially differentiates IPV from other types of violence. Furthermore, it should be noted that the definition for IPV here provided is intentionally neutral in gender and sexual terms, by this trying to present IPV as a phenomenon that may affect both women and men in all kinds of emotional relationships. Nonetheless though, this dissertation will focus on instances of partner violence initiated by male perpetrators against their female partners in allegedly heterosexual relationships. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, most crimes linked to IPV are arguably rooted in gendered issues. Although IPV is manifest in all countries, regardless of social, economic, religious or economic aspects (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002), the higher rate of women suffering from IPV is in many occasions entrenched in women's traditional unequal status in most societies (strongly characterised by patriarchal structures). The fact that women have economically depended on men until very recently (and thus subordinated and disempowered), for instance, has important implications for this predominance.

Second, social inequality in gender terms has contributed to a disproportionate number of women being affected by IPV. Not surprisingly, past and present empirical research in this field strongly suggests that IPV is a gendered phenomenon (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; McCloskey & Grisby, 2005; Harris et al, 2012). There are studies claiming that around 90% of victims in abusive relationships are women (Pagelow, 1992). Also, contrary to what happens to women, research evidences that men are more likely to be attacked by strangers or people from outside their close circle of relationships (Koss et al., 1994; Heise & García-Moreno, 2002). Arguments in favour of this view can be very easily gathered from official publications. For instance, 46% of female homicide victims in England and Wales between 2013 and 2014 were killed by a male partner or ex-partner, in contrast with a 7% of male victims killed by a female partner or ex-partner during the same period (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Similar conclusions can be drawn if studies in this line from different scenarios are compared. Both in the United States and in Australia, for example, the proportion of men killed by their wives, ex-wives or girlfriends between 1989 and 1996 was 4% and 8,6% respectively (Fox & Zawitz; 1999; Carcach & James, 1998; Heise & García-

Moreno, 2002), which sharply contrasts with the 40-70% of female murderer victims killed by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends in a comparable time span (Mouzos, 1999; Bailey et al., 1997).

These figures should not be understood as the underestimation of male victims. As indicated previously, this thesis defends a more integrative vision around IPV that aims at working from a holistic approach to solve this social issue. However, data shows that within the temporal framework this research is ascribed to, a disproportionally higher number of women are being killed at the hands of their male partners, which therefore justifies a more urgent need to investigate this particular reality. Furthermore, although there is research that proves that women engage in common couple violence (Jonson & Ferraro, 2000), little evidence is found to underpin that women subject men to the severe and escalating violence that many samples of battered women show in clinical samples (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002).

Blatant though these arguments may seem, they have been disputed by other scholarly voices. What they seem to argue is that it is possible to observe similar IPV perpetration rates among women and men (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Nicholls & Dutton, 2001; Stets & Strauss, 1992), with the only difference that, in their view, victimisation rates remain higher for women. This may be linked to the *status quo* that is still anchored in conservative understandings of manhood and in a more traditional view of masculinity, which may trigger an under-reporting of abuse by male victims of IPV (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). Relatedly, some other studies have suggested that violence initiated by women generally results in less serious physical harm of a male partner than the other way around (Benson et al., 2004; Ross & Babcock, 2009), an argument that is also used to support that there are no such drastic gender differences when IPV rates are to be taken into account (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). Furthermore, another potential controversy to bear in mind here deals with the complexity of measuring violent behaviour that is central in most IPV contexts such as psychological violence (Winstok & Sowan-Basheer, 2015). Research in the area is consistent when suggesting that physical violence is just the visible manifestation of many other psychological, sexual or financial violent acts (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002; Ellsberg et al., 1999). Regardless of this, most studies assessing IPV rates have little alternative apart from physical evidence to be

used as reliable indicators of this sort of violence, although it is the psychological damage that many women have more problems to cope with (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002). This does not but emphasise the slippery nature of research on violence, since it is not simple to provide a uniform method for measuring possible cases of IPV.

Considering these methodological controversies, it is necessary to draw attention on the different aspects that may have an impact on the accurate assessment of IPV. According to Heise and García-Moreno (2002), one of the most relevant one is related to terminological deviances between different definitions of IPV. As discussed previously in this section, there have been multiple attempts to find terminological agreement on what counts (or not) as IPV. Similarly, some studies do not make specific reference to the different types of violence that a woman may have to undergo, which may of course have an impact of the results are dealt with and interpreted. For instance, research has shown that using specific questions such as "Have you ever been forced to have sexual intercourse against your will?" trigger a higher rate of positive answers than more general questions asking women whether they have been "abused" or "raped" (Ellsberg et al., 1999; Heise & García-Moreno, 2002). Another relevant aspect that can impact the precise measurement of IPV is linked to the methodological decisions concerning which criteria should be used when selecting participants or which methods should be employed when gathering the information. There are studies that concentrate on women from a particular age or those who meet a marital status, aspects which are associated to the risk one woman may have of suffering partner abuse. Likewise, comparability is controversial if the different mechanisms to obtain data are considered. Although many survey modes have been used (face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, postal questionnaires in written form), it seems that smaller in-depth studies based on direct interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer produce richer and more detailed data than macro, national surveys (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002).

The inclusion of some of the methodological aspects described above instead of others will surely have implications when approaching IPV, especially if comparability issues are examined. In order to reduce the effect of these methodological procedures, more recent attempts to investigate IPV have developed more standardised international surveys, mostly designed and applied in the first decade

of the 21st century. The most representative examples are Krug et al.'s World Report on Violence and Health (especially the fourth chapter, by Heise and García-Moreno, focusing on IPV) in 2002, García-Moreno et al.'s *WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* in 2005, and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)'s *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey* in 2014. These are in fact the primary sources used to tackle IPV in this dissertation. Reasons behind this choice are linked to their methodological similarities, the fact that they present recent findings and their focus on the immediate context this dissertation is framed within.⁶

Despite the complexity behind measuring IPV, both past and recent surveys that aim at giving a detailed account of this issue do show that IPV is a serious and pervasive problem in most global contexts. Its persistence in social and temporal terms has instigated many international responses to try to lessen its impact on the many societies in which IPV is still a concern. Not surprisingly, these responses have been orchestrated by international institutions in the attempt to seek standardised and unified actions against this sort of violence. Although a more in-depth approach to them would be interesting, a summary of these institutional actions is provided in Appendix 1. As can be seen, institutional actions are ordered chronologically. Likewise, the main implications of each measure are briefly sketched in the table. Emphasis is placed upon actions that are in closer connection to Europe and the UE, the context that frames the current research.

Despite the multiple attempts at the institutional (macro) level, it seems these efforts are still not permeating the socio-individual (meso and micro) levels. As a matter of fact, although differences can be found depending on the type of violence under investigation, figures around IPV are still at present times alarming. Next section is devoted to providing readers with a more in-depth insight into the multiple typologies of IPV, as well as an overview of the extent of the problem. As presented in this section, global scenarios will be described in broad terms, although emphasis will be

⁶ In fact, the FRA survey on violence against women is the first survey of this sort that addresses this social issue in all 28 EU Member States by making use of the same questionnaire, the same mode of application and random sampling (FRA, 2014: 15). Likewise, this survey includes a methodological appendix that discloses both the composition of the sample and the characteristics of the respondents taking part in the survey, which somehow guarantees a more valid methodological approach.

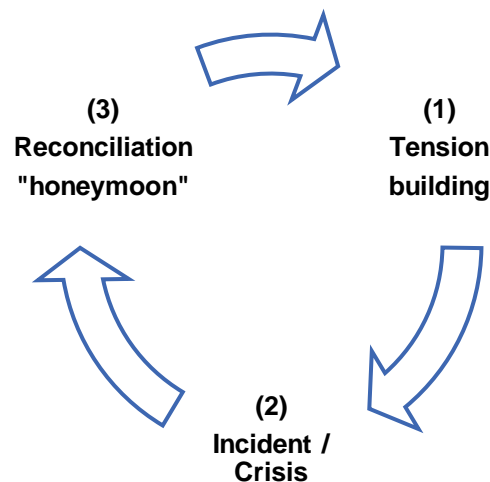
placed upon the more immediate context in which this dissertation is framed, that is, the European Union.

2.4 Deeper inside IPV: dynamics, typologies and current scenarios

2.4.1 IPV: accounts of its dynamics

As pointed out in the previous section, there have been numerous attempts to provide satisfactory definitions of such a controversial issue as IPV indeed is. Similarly, there have been equally numerous efforts to provide explanations in relation with the dynamics of partner violence. An established view into the different stages to which an ordinary IPV relationship may evolve was the so-called "cycle of violence", proposed by the American psychologist Lenora E. Walker (1979, 2006). According to Walker (1979), this cycle is divided in three phases, illustrated in Figure 4 below and briefly described afterwards.

Figure 4 | The cycle of violence, Walker (1979)



As suggested by the graph above, the cycle begins with the tension building phase, in which tensions between the members in the relationship increase and communication tends to break down. Also at this point, the victim may feel the need to de-escalate the situation by rationalising the situation attributing it to different circumstances. This tension reaches its summit in the second phase, in which tension explodes and the perpetrator engages in violent actions towards his wife. Abuse is displayed in many possible ways (physical, psychological and emotional, sexual, etc.), although physical outbursts are again those that tend to mark this

second stage. After this, the third phase usually begins, defined by apologising attitudes on the abuser's side that may include giving excuses or even denying the abusive episodes. It is also possible that the abuser blames the victim for these violent acts and charges her with the responsibility. After this, periods of calm would follow, although they are also possible at the end of each phase. An additional point is that the cycle tends to repeat itself in an ongoing way.

Despite the systematic look of the cycle, Walker (1979, 2006) suggests that not all IPV relationships may fit into this progression. Likewise, time lapses between each phase are assumed to differ depending on the circumstances surrounding the abusive relationship. In relation to this, Walker coined the "Battered Women Syndrome" (2006), which in essence means that a woman can be classified as battered if she has gone through two cycles of violence. Although this term has been used successfully in many professional fields linked to IPV, it has also been misleadingly employed to defend women who killed their violent husbands after spending years in an abusive relationship (Ali & Naylor, 2013; Walker, 2015), an action that is not justified by the terminological implications of this concept. Rather, it explains a "woman's psychological state after or during being traumatized by domestic violence" (Scholz, 2000).

Using both this cycle and theories of learned helplessness (Seligman & Maier, 1967), Walker (1979) hypothesised that IPV negatively contributes to a less developed cognitive ability to perceive success on the abused woman's side, which would also explain these women's scarce motivation to respond to abuse, their enforced passiveness and even little attempts on their side to leave IPV relationships. In fact, this would make clear why many women still justify being beaten under certain circumstances (García-Moreno et al., 2005; Wahed & Bhuiya, 2007).

Even though Walker's cycle is usually employed in reference materials that seek to explain IPV, there has been opposition to use this cycle to illustrate the dynamics of IPV relationships. Some have argued that were violence the outcome of tension building, frustration on the abusers' side could also be vented on other people apart from her partner (Ali & Naylor, 2013). Others have pointed out that this cycle does not adequately explain either the experience of individuals who have been battered or their reaction to battering (Dutton, 2009); in addition, some have warned of the

stigmatising consequences of using related terminology such as the 'battered women syndrome' (Walker, 2006) when dealing with IPV cases (Biggers, 2005). In a similar vein, some have critiqued this approach to the dynamics of IPV for its failure to take into account other factors that may prompt a woman's decision not to abandon abusive relationships, such as social, economic or cultural reasons, among many others (Naved et al., 2006).

Another salient attempt to better understand the dynamics of IPV has sprung from feminist paradigms. Feminism claims that Violence Against Women (VAW) in general and IPV in particular are mostly related to issues of male dominance over women that are essential to patriarchal systems (Yllo & Strauss, 1990). According to Pease, patriarchy refers to "men's systemic dominance of women" (2000: 20). Ideologically, patriarchy entails male dominance and rejects egalitarian structures that take the female counterpart on board, both in public and the private dimensions. Power is therefore viewed as an exclusively male privilege, which in private spheres is exerted not only against women but also against younger male members (Haj-Yahia & Schiff, 2007). Relatedly, violent manifestations are thus interpreted as an overuse of male power which, within heterosexual IPV relationships, crystallises in multiple abusive mechanisms used by men and patriarchal systems to maintain this supremacy and suppress women's power. In fact, research along these lines proves the connection between higher rates of IPV and patriarchal ideologies to the extent that wife beating is not only considered acceptable but even beneficial for women suffering from it (Glick et al., 2002; WHO, 2005; Haj-Yahia & Schiff, 2007).

Nonetheless, this view advocates a broader understanding of what integrates IPV relationships, and moves beyond conceptualising IPV as a phenomenon that can be easily classified in three different stages marked mostly by physical assaults. In fact, based on the feminist paradigm, a rather different way to account for the dynamics of IPV is the so-called Duluth model,⁷ which uses 'the power and control wheel' to explain the ongoing mechanisms used by men to maintain power and control over women. Contrary to what the Walker's cycle may suggest, this model defends that the dynamics of IPV are better represented as an ongoing wheel that encompasses

⁷ This model is called after a Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) developed in Duluth (Minnesota, USA) largely founded by Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar. More information on this model can be found here: <http://www.theduluthmodel.org> (last accessed, 14/03/2016).

"a pattern of actions used to intentionally control or dominate an intimate partner" (The Duluth model, 2016). Some of these actions are included in Figure 5 below, which illustrates the dynamism of IPV according to the Duluth model.

Figure 5 | The Duluth model (2016)



There are several drawbacks of approaching IPV from these perspectives, which have been employed to question their suitability to fully explain this phenomenon. On the one hand, the Duluth model is characterised for maintaining the responsibility of abuse and control merely on the male perpetrator (Ali & Naylor, 2013), assuming therefore that intervention should solely concentrate on the female victim. Likewise, this model has been criticised for failing to acknowledge the impact that many other aspects may have on IPV (Dutton & Corvo, 2006), such as, *inter alia*, substance abuse (Eckhardt, 2007) or psychological problems on the abusers' side induced, for instance, by childhood sexual abuse (Fisher & Goodwin, 2009). Similarly, criticism highlights the need to provide both emotional and psychological assistance to male abusers rather than uniquely having them dealt with by the legal apparatus (Fisher & Goodwin, 2009; Ali & Naylor, 2013). As a matter of fact, research on men's internalised experiences with abuse is still rather uncharted (Corbally, 2015; Morgan & Wells, 2016).

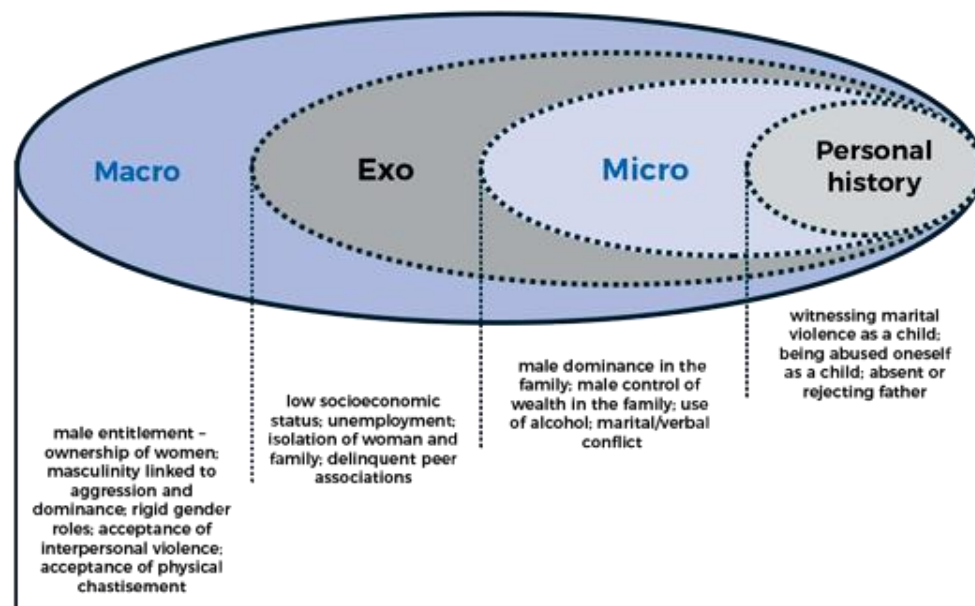
The feminist paradigm to understand IPV has also not escaped from scholarly disapproval. This ideological stance seems to fit well with the assumptions that generally underpin mainstream feminist ideas in connection with IPV, strongly influenced by taking on board some of the patriarchal tenets mentioned above. In fact, according to Mills (2009), mainstream feminism upholds that intimate abuse occurs in heterosexual environments, that violence is unidirectional (from male to female) and that women are willing to leave rather than stay in their abusive relationships. However, most of these principles are being constantly challenged by research. Apart from the studies claiming that women can also be in charge of triggering violence within partner relationships (Brown, 2004; Capaldi et al., 2007), there is a vast body of current research that demonstrate that IPV rates are proving to be consistently higher among lesbian and gay couples (Balsam, 2001; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Seelau et al., 2003). Although IPV in this type of relationships are yet to be explored in depth and on more solid methodological bases (Klostermann et al., 2011), the salience of IPV among non-heterosexual partner relationships would inevitably require a rather different reformulation of the role of gender within IPV, since the role of patriarchy as understood by mainstream feminism for example would be less unambiguous (Cook, 2009).

It seems then feasible to claim that IPV cannot be solely approached from the feminist paradigm, either. As suggested by Dutton (1994), mounting research supports the view that the feminist paradigm cannot deny the multiple aspects that do play a crucial role in abusive relationships, which are difficult to explain only from the impositions that patriarchy may exert on both sociocultural and individual dimensions. In a similar vein, some of the relevant theoretical underpinnings posed by mainstream feminists would need to be redefined in the light, for example, of how patriarchy works in non-male-to-female relationships and the implications this may have in IPV among non-heterosexual couples. Not surprisingly then, another major possibility that has found ample acceptance is that known as the 'nested ecological framework', which is in fact believed to have "the potential to accommodate feminist and social science insights about violence" (Heise, 1998: 264).

The 'nested ecological framework' to comprehend the dynamics of IPV is rooted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of child development (1977;1986), which was first used to approach child abuse and neglect (Belsky, 1980) and later

applied to the battering of women (Corsi, 1994; Heise 1998; Dasgupta, 2001). However, its popularity raised once after the World Health Organisation used this account to illustrate IPV in its *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002). Broadly speaking, the ecological framework claims that human behaviour is moulded by the interface between individuals and their social surroundings. This implies that any type of behaviour (including violent ones here) results from various levels of influence, in which individual, situational and sociocultural factors play a crucial role (Ali & Naylor, 2013). Therefore, IPV is understood as a multifaceted phenomenon where these different layers are finely intertwined, and all of them need to be dealt with simultaneously. This approach to IPV is illustrated by Heise (1998), as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 | The 'nested ecological approach'. Own adaptation based on Heise (1998)



As can be noticed, this graphic representation of the different levels that integrate IPV recalls the visual illustration provided by the World Health Organisation (see Section 2.2.2 above) when seeking to explain violence as a phenomenon, which somehow reveals the strong influence this understanding had in the aforementioned institution. In short, this framework portrays four overlapping levels that are interrelated and interdependent on one another. Despite some minor weaknesses,⁸

⁸ As argued in Section 2.2.2 above, the use of the label 'ecological' is believed to be misleading and a different term (such as 'holistic') may be worth considering.

this approach to understanding the dynamics of IPV has several strengths. First and foremost, it accounts for the many layers that are generally intertwined in IPV relationships, ranging from more personal, individual ones to more macro, cultural ones. Furthermore, it provides an interesting set of motivations behind IPV pertaining to each of the levels. This is particularly interesting because it somehow implies that, in addition to the influence imposed by rigid gender roles in the macro-system, circumstances at a personal level that are not always accounted for, such as witnessing IPV as a child or being abused oneself as a child can definitely have an impact on the exertion of violence. This emphasises again the risks of attempting to explain IPV from just one perspective. This is in fact in line with the ideas that key figures in the field of violence studies proposed when advocating that a complete understanding of gender abuse may require acknowledging factors operating on multiple levels (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Miller, 1994).

Thus far, this section has provided three of the most common approaches that have sought to explain the dynamics of an abusive relationship of this sort. Despite the many opportunities and pitfalls each of them entails, it should be clear that, to date, it is indeed complex to adhere to just one to fully explain the multiple mechanisms that simultaneously work when a violent act takes place within a partner relationship. Nonetheless, in spite of the terminological nuances to be reconsidered, it is the 'nested ecological framework' (Heise, 1998) that is the one that fits the most with the understanding of IPV supported by this research. In any case, this thesis upholds the idea that IPV is a very contentious field and, accordingly, not a single theory to date suffices to provide answers to the many questions still remaining (Ali & Naylor, 2013).

2.4.2 IPV: typologies

It should come as no surprise to discover that there are several ways to account for the different types of violence within partner contexts. A taxonomy that has met a relative degree of acceptance is that proposed by Johnson (2000, 2006; Kelly & Johnson, 2008) in which four major types of IPV are put forward: (1) intimate terrorism (when one partner in a relationship uses control and power over the other partner); (2) violent resistance (when violent behaviours are seen as a form of self-defence, and violence is used as a reaction to the exertion of intimate terrorism); (3) situational couple violence (thought to arise in arguments where one or both partners

physically hit each other, corresponding with "minor" forms of violence) and (4) mutual violent control (which takes place when both partners act violently).

Traces of this taxonomy can be found not only in a consistent body of academic research (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Rosen et al., 2005; Nicolson, 2010; Bates, et al., 2014), but also in more informative sources of information (like Wikipedia, for example). Interestingly, contrary to what research generally indicates, applications of this typology in academic publications in the field have concluded that intimate terrorism is far from being gendered and it is in fact women who exert it the most (Bates et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, this typology has also found disagreement. In fact, using Stark's (2006, 2009) and Rossiter's research (2011) as suitable examples of this critical stance, both Johnson's views on IPV and its taxonomy have been criticised for "finess[ing] the political differences between a feminist and a mainstream paradigm by resorting to behaviourism" (Stark, 2006: 1023). In other words, this approach is believed to rest too much on static assumptions when analysing power relations, regarding notions such as control not in the light of its political consequences for social power and meaning but "as an act that can be catalogued alongside violence" (Stark, 2006: 1023). Furthermore, this excessive focus on equating IPV with isolated episodes of physical violence is one of the reasons why legal intervention has failed to affect this social issue (Stark, 2006), since concentrating on these "minor" physical assaults is what downgrades repeated abuse over women (specifically known as "battering" (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002: 89) to a "second-class misdemeanour" (Stark, 2006: 1019).

Hence, based on Stark (2006) and Rossiter (2011), there is an urgent need to consider all types of abusive acts not simply as isolated violent acts but as effective mechanisms of subordination that usually take multiple forms (not merely physical) and happen unceasingly. In fact, if experience-based approaches to IPV are examined (Lischick, 1999; Piispa, 2002; Stark 2006; Rossiter 2011) battered women are more likely to refer to this type of abuse as ongoing, including repeated episodes of intimidation, isolation, control, physical assault and feelings of fear and entrapment at all stages of an abusive relationship. As can be noticed, many of these forms of violence are far from having physical realisations and are very much rooted in the psychological dimensions of abuse, which is why physical injuries constitute insufficient evidence when assessing IPV (Stark, 2006: 1020).

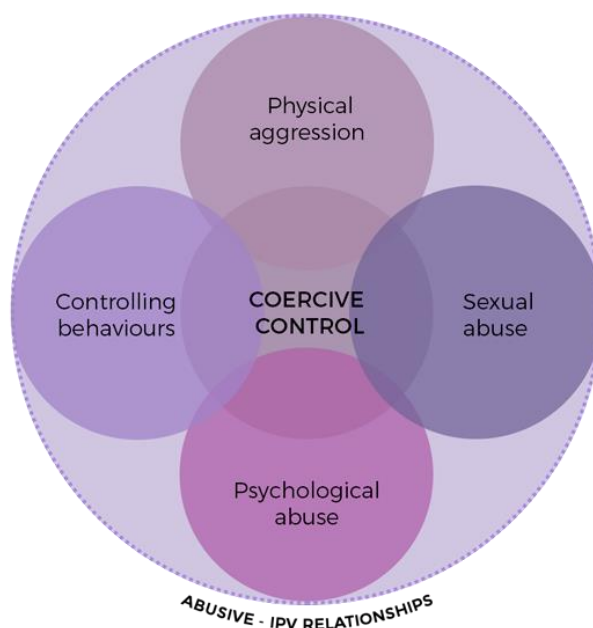
In fact, many of these arguments have contributed to the spread and consolidation of another possibility to account for the possible types of IPV, which is known as coercive control (Stark, 2006; 2007). Rather than focusing on static conceptualisations of physical assaults, Stark makes use of this term to approach IPV from a more holistic view. Emphasis is thus made upon the psychological aftermath of IPV by dwelling on the systemic and structural roots of abuse exerted upon women by men (Stark, 2006; 2007). Although engaging with a detailed description of this concept would be beyond the scope of this research, it is remarkable to mention that coercive control is thought to underpin any form of abuse used by the perpetrator to subjugate the victim's dignity, autonomy and freedom which simultaneously triggers the entrapment of the victim in the ongoing progression of an abusive relationship (Stark, 2007; 2012). Relatedly, this model understands IPV more as a violation of the victims' human rights than an attack to their bodily integrity (Stark, 2007), since physical assaults are conceived as one of the many possible tactics perpetrators employ to deprive victims of their sense of self (Stark, 2012).

Broadly speaking, most institutional answers to IPV seem to give prominence to this rather holistic approach that moves beyond a physical violence perspective, which may explain why the primary sources used for informing this dissertation show no traces whatsoever of Johnson's typology (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002; García-Moreno et al., 2005; Council of Europe, 2011; FRA, 2014, Women's Aid, 2016). Contrary to this, looking at IPV through the lenses of coercive control is leaving a mark in how national legislations in France or the UK are expanding the scope of IPV to tackle the psychological and emotional dimensions of intimate partner abuse (Stark, 2012). In a very similar line, Johnson's classification of the different types of IPV is not widely supported either by most feminist approaches to IPV, which argue against the idea of solely considering the salience of physical evidences in IPV survivors. Rather, IPV in general and physical assaults against female survivors by male perpetrators in particular are understood as rooted in the socio-political patriarchal hegemony that is still entrenched in current societal systems, an argument which closely aligns with Stark's stance. Also related to this is the justification why the term domestic has to be excluded from definitions of IPV, since for feminist understandings this must not be regarded as a private issue (Loseke &

Kurz, 2005; Yllo, 2005; Rossiter, 2011), but brought into the public sphere to be made visible and debated.

Taking into account these theoretical assumptions, and in line with previous and similar discussions of this issue, this dissertation favours the more integrative view on the possible typologies of IPV. Coercive control is thus thought to be at the core of abusive relationships, which is then displayed in a plethora of violent manifestations within partner relationships. These expressions of subjugation towards victims are in many cases physical and sexual, but not so obvious mechanisms of violence usually occur simultaneously at the psychological and emotional levels. Consequently, the different typologies of IPV need to be understood as a mosaic-like whole that tends to characterise most abusive relationships, as Figure 7 below illustrates.

Figure 7 | Coercive control as a central component of the most visible materialisations of IPV typologies (own proposal)



Nonetheless, it is possible to identify multiple sorts of micro-behaviours that can be ascribed to each of these forms of resorting to violence. Although this may be criticised for entailing somewhat reductionist accounts towards IPV, this is what macro-studies seeking to provide approximate measurements of IPV in contemporary societies need to resort to when dealing with the thorny methodological decisions to investigate this field (Heise & García-Moreno, 2002; FRA, 2014). The use of more tangible acts, belonging either to the physical or the

psychological categories, paves the way for obtaining more quantifiable data which seems to work better for awareness-raising matters, for example.

Some of the actions that are commonly associated with each type of abusive behaviours are included in Figure 8 below. These also correspond with the violent actions that many women have identified in their abusive IPV relationships (FRA, 2014). Again, these should not be regarded as isolated mechanisms that happen independently from each other, but rather as a part of the same continuum that integrates most IPV relationships, which is what Figure 8 below also tries to depict graphically.

Figure 8 | Holistic understanding of abusive actions in IPV relationships (own proposal)

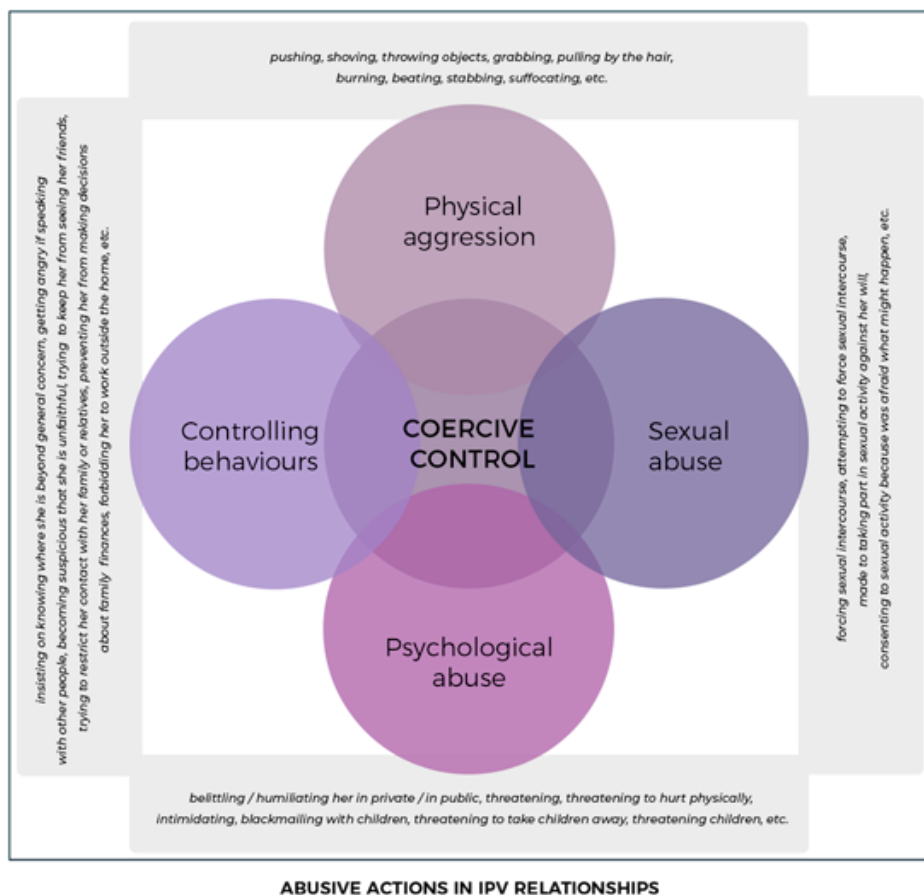


Figure 8 above seeks to show how coercive control stands at the core of partner violence, feeding into the most four frequent crystallisations of this behaviour. As illustrated, there are prototypical mechanisms which in more tangible ways are usually used against women. Note how the borders between these different domains

are intentionally degraded in the attempt to reinforce the holistic character of abusive behaviour in IPV contexts.

Having identified and problematised some of the more salient efforts to recognise the typologies of IPV, next section focuses on IPV and its presence in current scenarios. Several demographic aspects of IPV will be addressed, with a focus on physical and psychological partner violence. Apart from contrasting how these types of violence are present in all the 28 Member States,⁹ the next section will also concentrate on prototypical features (such as age, educational background or occupation) that characterise both survivors and abusers.

2.4.3 IPV: current scenarios

Regardless of the forms in which abuse is exerted, there have been several attempts to provide quantified accounts of IPV to measure how this social issue affects contemporary societies, especially after the commitment from institutional resolutions to supply an estimated assessment of it (World Health Assembly, 1996). Despite the numerous available sources, this section draws upon a well-documented report on violence against women created by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2014 (FRA, 2014 henceforth). This report is built upon a survey that began in 2010 and it was developed for two years –and only after the European Parliament also denounced an evident lack of comprehensive, comparable data on violence against women in national terms across all 28 EU country members.

Although well-established scholarly voices have warned of the need to treat statistics dealing with violence of this sort with due precaution (Walby et al., 2017), a set of methodological strengths adopted in the FRA survey make its results worth considering. First, the survey team received valuable insights from both established academic experts and practitioners working in areas related to violence against women (FRA, 2014: 15). Second, the original questionnaire was piloted with women who had been through episodes of this type of violence and with a sample of women

⁹ Note that this research spans a temporal scope that goes from September 2014 to September 2018. Although the UK decided to no longer form part of the EU via the membership referendum held on the 23rd of June 2016, data used for this research still contemplated the UK as another EU Member State. However, this does not affect the main purposes of the study.

who had not been identified as such. This was done in the attempt to come up with a suitable questionnaire addressed to women in the general population. Furthermore, although the original one was written in English, a translated version of the questionnaire into the official language(s) of each EU Member State was employed. Third, respondents were selected via probability sampling, resulting in a random sample of women from 18 to 74 years old. In each EU Member State, a minimum figure of 1500 women were interviewed, with the only exception being Luxembourg (908 in this case). Last but not least, one of the main strengths of this report is the great emphasis put on including thorough appendices with information about the actual results resulting from the survey that, in turn, informed the report.

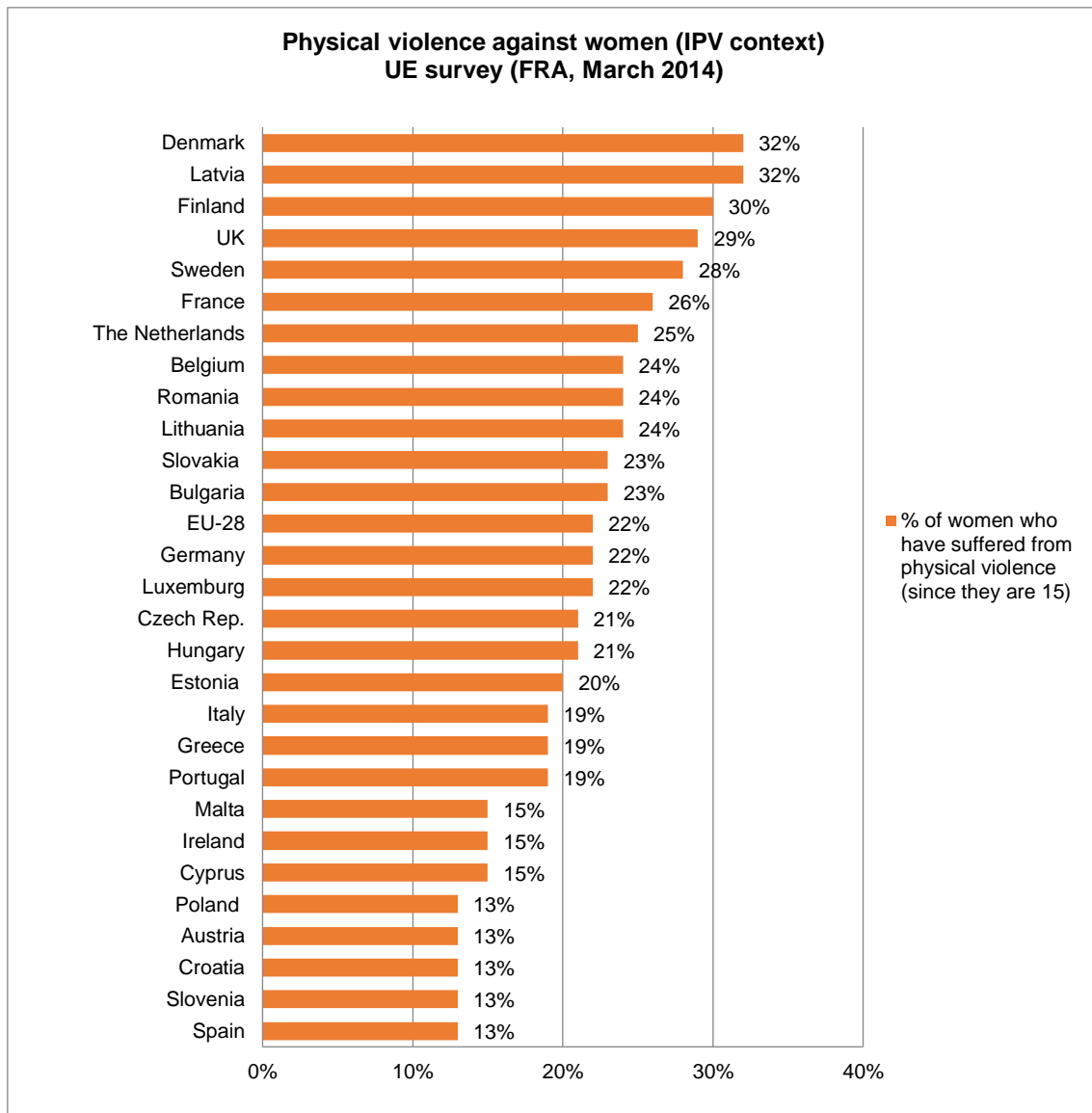
Given the many methodological complexities when dealing with violence, it is indeed useful for research to have access to such a comprehensive overview. All in all, the FRA survey on violence against women “is the first survey of its kind to capture the scope and nature of violence against women, using the same questionnaire, with the same some of application and based on random sampling” (FRA, 2014: 15).

Based on the FRA survey, a salient feature of current scenarios of IPV within Europe points out at a higher prevalence of physical and sexual violence. Broadly speaking, it is estimated that 13 million women in the EU had experienced physical violence in the course of 12 months before the survey interviews, to which an estimated 3.7 million women experienced sexual violence also need to be added (FRA, 2014: 21). To put it differently, this means that one woman in three (31%) in the EU-28 is said to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 (FRA, 2014: 27). Narrowing these figures down to the specific realm of Intimate Partner Violence, one woman in five (22%) who is or has been involved in a relationship with a partner has experienced a sort of physical and/or sexual violence.

Figure 9 below suggests there are significant differences if physical and/or sexual violence rates are contrasted in all EU member states (FRA, 2014: 28-29). Out of all respondents to the survey, percentages in this figure reflect physical and/or sexual violence said to have been experienced by women who were married, living together with someone without being married, or involved in a relationship (without living together) and exerted by any partner, current and/or previous (N=40192). It is worth acknowledging that, although all women were asked about the gender of their

partner, only few (151) referred to experiences with a same-sex partner in contrast with 30,486 women linked their experiences to male partners (FRA, 2014: 27). This echoes Section 2.3 above, proving yet again the higher prevalence of the male-to-female pattern in this type of violence.

Figure 9 | % rates of women who have experienced physical violence during their relationship by any type of partner across EU Member States (adapted from FRA, 2014)



If the survey results are considered at the country level, it is possible to observe rates in IPV ranging from 30%-32% in Denmark, Latvia and Finland to a lower 13% in countries such as Austria, Croatia or Spain.¹⁰ Although there seems to a positive

¹⁰ It is worth sharing an observation here, gleaned from my own experiences in conferences, lectures and workshops. Perhaps due to the more habitual tendency to refer to Scandinavia as a leading

correlation in the rates of partner and non-partner violence (FRA, 2014), which to some extent pinpoints that partner violence does not occur in isolation, there may be some other relevant issues here. As suggested by the FRA report itself (2014: 31), these victimisation rates may also reflect the extent to which women in these countries may find adequate to openly confess their experiences with IPV to an anonymous interviewer. In this vein, discussion related to what are conceived as public/private domains in different cultures may also be necessary.¹¹

Owing to the thoroughness of the FRA survey, it is also possible to find out more specific details about the most prevalent manifestations of physical aggressions. Out the nine violent acts with which respondents were presented (see Table 2 below), the most common form of physical violence is being pushed or shoved, followed by incidents of being slapped and, finally, being grabbed or pulled by the hair (FRA, 2014: 39). It is also striking to acknowledge that 34% of victims of physical violence experience four or more different types of violence (FRA, 2014: 39) or learn about the repeated episodes of victimisation.

In fact, and despite the imprecise nature of IPV (violence may permeate the whole relationship or take place only at certain points), some forms of physical violence are more likely to reappear. Table 2 below illustrates this tendency, describing the link between the type of violent act, the frequency with which they are repeated and depending on the type of perpetrator (current or previous). Note that observations based on fewer than 30 responses are signalled by means of brackets to suggest their lower statistical reliability. Likewise, those based on fewer than five responses are signalled by ‘—’ (FRA, 2014: 43).

reference in many areas, finding Nordic countries topping this list is in fact striking to many people. Rather, they tend to establish a more immediate connection between higher rates of IPV and countries which are generally stereotyped as more sexist (mostly Mediterranean countries). Despite the many possible explanations to this (see above), this is not but another piece of evidence proving that IPV is indeed more pervasive than it is generally believed.

¹¹ Interestingly though, the FRA report (2014: 161) also provides information about the level of awareness respondents in each EU Member State have concerning IPV and specific campaigns addressing this issue. Results are worth considering since they show a relevant correlation between lower rates of IPV and higher consciousness of these campaigns. In fact, 83% women in Spain or 78% women in Malta had recently seen or heard campaigns for these purposes. This contrasts, for instance, with 26% of women in Denmark or the Czech Republic.

Table 2 | Types of violent act and frequency rates of repeated episodes (%) depending on the type of partner (current or previous). Adapted from FRA (2014: 43)

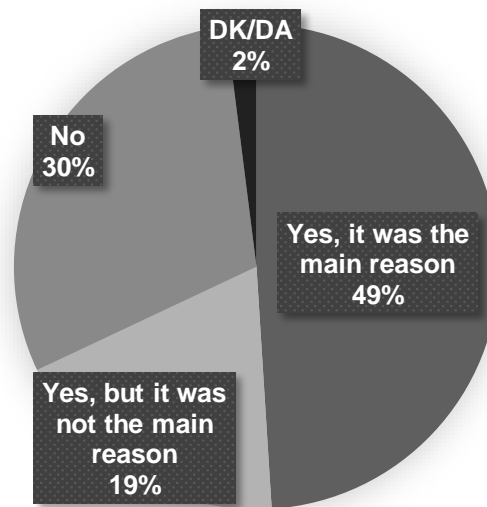
Type of violent act	Current partner				Previous partner			
	Once (%)	2-5 times (%)	6> times (%)	N	Once (%)	2-5 times (%)	6> times (%)	N
Pushed you/shoved you	45	37	18	1725	29	34	37	4965
Slapped you	53	30	17	1283	34	29	37	4066
Threw a hard object at you	61	24	15	483	37	30	33	2023
Grabbed you or pulled your hair	45	34	21	651	28	33	39	2772
Beat you with fist or hard object, kicked you	46	27	27	485	31	28	42	2241
Burned you	(69)	(28)	—	33	64	18	19	265
Tried to suffocate you	59	34	(7)	203	56	27	18	1138
Cut or stabbed you, shot at you	(65)	(30)	(6)	39	76	14	11	269
Beat your head against sth	50	30	20	198	41	31	28	1245

Table 2 above presents thought-provoking data. First, it evidences that roughly half of women experience repeated episodes of being pushed or shoved, being slapped; grabbed or pulled by the hair; or being beaten with a fist or a hard object (FRA 2014: 43). Moreover, it suggests that respondents may also be less prone to talk about violence in a current relationship, which contrasts with significantly larger numbers when talking about a past relationship. Thus, these dynamics to repeated victimisation may also be linked to equally revealing patterns of this type of violence within IPV relationships. In this vein, the FRA report also sheds interesting light on how physical violence can be connected to certain stages within the abusive relationship, as illustrated in Table 3 below, or whether violence was the main motivation for female respondents to the survey to finish with the relationship, which is shown in Figure 10 below.

Table 3 | Correlation between physical violence and stages within the relationship based on women who have separated from a violent partner (N=6400). Adapted from FRA (2014: 45)

Did violence take place...	Yes (%)	No (%)	DN/DA (%)
... during the relationship?	91	9	0
... during the break-up?	33	65	2
... after the break-up?	16	82	2

Figure 10 | % of women (N=6400) who have separated from a violent partner identifying physical violence as the main reason for ending the relationship. Adapted from FRA (2014: 45)



Unsurprisingly, as shown in Table 3 above, cases of physical violence tend to occur during the length of the relationship. Nonetheless, it is also remarkable to note that the ending of an abusive relationship does not go hand in hand with the end of physical violence. As a matter of fact, a total of 49% women report physical violent episodes even during break-up stages. Conversely, Figure 10 depicts a more alarming pattern. Although the distribution of percentages in this case needs to be treated carefully, less than half the women (49%) who had separated from a violent partner confess that violence was the main reason for them to finish with the abusive relationship. Despite the many possible readings this may have, this is also very telling when thinking of the psychological traits behind this type of women. More efforts should be invested in raising awareness among them, since at no point should any kind of violence be justified.

Quite relatedly, the FRA report also adds interesting insights into many factors that characterise both the victims and the perpetrators. Broadly speaking, and opposite

to what is commonly presumed, it should first be noted that there were not remarkably different sociological features if respondent groups were contrasted. This points out that belonging to one particular socio-cultural group does not prevent a woman from being afflicted by IPV. Nonetheless, there were some divergences worth mentioning. In terms of age, for example, women in the youngest age group (18-29 years old) are said to be more exposed to physical and/or sexual partner violence (FRA, 2014: 35). This proves to be a steady pattern until the group including women older than 60 is compared, which corroborates that the rates of physical and/or sexual violence decrease with age. As far as women's educational background is concerned, and despite widespread institutional and academic voices correlating low education levels with higher exposure to IPV, the FRA report (2014: 36) does not reveal notable divergences in this regard. In fact, 23% of women who had only attained primary education reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner. This slightly decreases among women with secondary education (21%) and, still strikingly, this figure does not vary considerably if women reaching tertiary education (20%).

Not less important factors are the area where women live or their employment status (FRA, 2014: 37). In this regard, again, observed differences if living areas are contrasted are minimal. Women in suburban areas are more exposed to physical and/or sexual violence by a partner (27%), which contrasts with the group living in more rural areas (18%). Less thorough information is provided when trying to find out about these women's occupational background. It stands out however that the highest rate of physical and/or sexual partner violence happens among women who work as supervisors (28%), opposite to women who have never done paid work (as the lowest part of the spectrum (FRA, 2014: 37). Although the FRA report takes a rather cautious stance at the interpretative level, it is certainly striking that women in power positions (supervising can arguably stand as such) are the ones with a highest exposure to physical and/or sexual violence. Despite the multiple interpretations, socially traditional patriarchal roles and expectations around them (namely males') may play a crucial role there.

As indicated above, the FRA report also manages to provide basic socio-demographic information about the perpetrators. It should be borne in mind that this

information was gathered from respondents who reported to be in a relationship at the time of the interview (FRA, 2014: 38).

To start with, there is not a direct correlation between partner's age and physical violence in the relationship (FRA, 2014: 38). Similarly, prevalence of this type of violence is not affected by the time both members in the relationship have spent together, since violence is found to be roughly as common among women who have spent more than 20 years in a relationship as those who have spent less than a year with their partner (FRA, 2014: 38). Another variable that seems to have little impact on physical violence is the partner's employment situation and occupation (FRA, 2014: 38).

In contrast, there are some variables which seem to influence physical violence prevalence. Interestingly, especially if compared to women's educational background, physical/sexual partner violence is more prevalent among women whose partner has not completed primary education (16%) than partners with higher education (6%). According to the FRA report then (2014: 38), the higher the partner's education, the lower the exposure to risk. This point emphasises the need to also pay attention to the role that masculinities have to play in IPV, an area which is still comparatively under-researched. In a similar vein, as reported by more studies (Jewkes, 2002; Thompson & Kingree, 2006), there is a very worrying connection between violent episodes of this kind and alcohol intake. In this sense, if a partner is said never to drink (or not as much so as to get drunk), the rate of physical violence was 5%. This is in stark contrast with women who reported their partners to get drunk once a month or more often, with the rate increasing drastically to 23% (FRA, 2014: 38).

Overall, and worrying though these figures may seem, it should not be forgotten that physical violence is only the most visible manifestation of IPV. In fact, as pointed out in Section 2.3 above, voices within this field keep stressing the need to move beyond the rather limiting tendency to identify IPV with instances of physical aggression. Emphasis has to be put on subtler mechanisms to exert violence in an intimate partner context, which is why this section now moves to providing a description of psychological violence in current scenarios.

The psychological and the emotional manifestations of violence in intimate partner violence have generally received less attention if compared to other sorts of violence. This is mostly due to the lack of agreement on how it works and how it should be measured (FRA, 2014: 71). Still, one in three women (32%) across the EU reports to have experienced psychologically abusive behaviour by an intimate partner (FRA, 2014: 71). This figure results from the 17 questions about psychological abuse included in the FRA survey, which revolve around the following four groups: controlling behaviour (trying to keep the respondent from seeing friends or relatives, partner getting angry if she speaks to other men or women, etc.), economic violence (vetoing the respondent from deciding on family finances), abusive behaviour (belittling, humiliating, threatening) and blackmail with the abuse of shared children.¹²

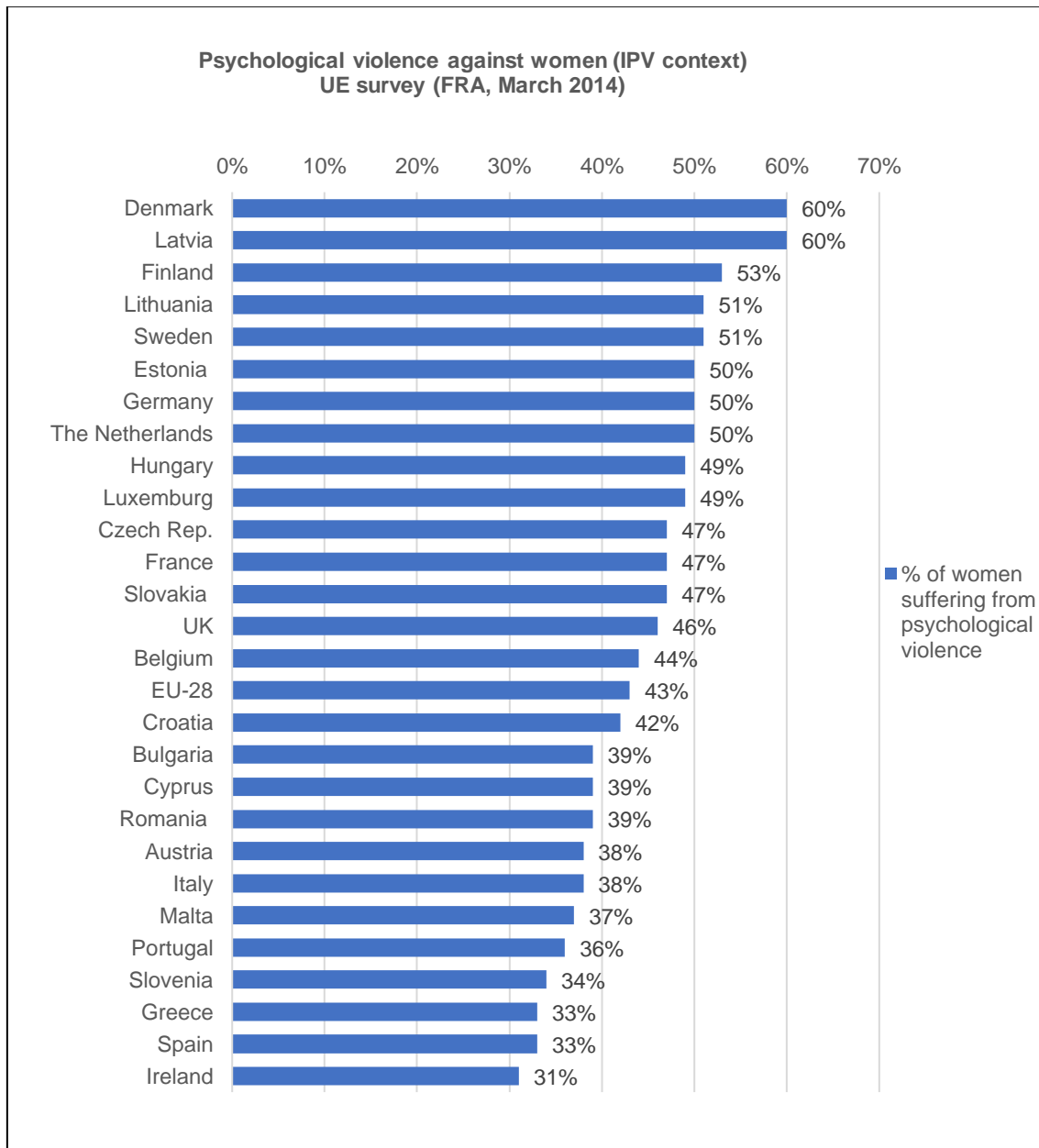
It is possible to observe notable differences if the cross-country variable is taken into account. This is illustrated in Figure 11 below, which depicts the percentage of women who have experienced psychological abuse during the relationship by any current or previous partner according to different EU Member States. It is based on the total number of women who were married, living together with someone albeit civil status, or involved in a relationship at the time of the interview or in the past (N=40192). As can be observed, rates for acknowledged psychological violence in intimate partnerships go from 60% in countries such as Latvia and Denmark to almost less than double in Greece or Spain (33%) and Ireland (31%). As already suggested above, statistics should be interpreted with caution. Although the questions were all the same regardless of the country in which the survey was conducted, these results may be influenced by what is convenient to be openly admitted in public (or, even, to what extent it is acknowledgeable) or the different understanding of certain abusive behaviours depending on the respondent's personal and socio-cultural background. In any case, these are methodological considerations that anyone working on IPV should at least be aware of.

Given the in-depth approach adopted by the FRA survey, it is possible to obtain a more detailed account of how psychological violence is experienced by many women across the EU. Respondents to this survey could select any of the psychologically violent acts proposed. This resulted in a total of 35% women suffering from

¹² See FRA (2014: 72) for more information on the question integrating the psychological section of the FRA survey.

controlling behaviour from either their current or previous partner. This was followed by a 32% of women experiencing abusive behaviour, and 12% of the total reported to have been exposed to economic violence (FRA, 2014: 73). In total, 43% of respondents reported having gone through any of these psychologically violent acts (FRA, 2014: 73).

Figure 11 | % rates of women who have experience psychological violence during their relationship by any type of partner across EU Member States (adapted from FRA, 2014)



Quite relatedly, women responding to the FRA survey were capable of identifying the most frequent (in psychological terms) abusive act. Table 4 below indicates the most recurrent behaviours as reported by these women according to the four groups they

could choose from. Again, this table is based on all women who have a current or previous partner (N=40192), except for those in which psychological violence also involved children (N=31418).

Table 4 | Most recurrent forms of psychological partner violence addressed against women by any partner (current or past) (%) (Adapted from FRA, 2014: 75)

Most recurrent forms of psychological partner violence		Psychological from any partner (current or previous) (%)
Controlling behaviour	Insisting on knowing where she is in a way that goes beyond general concern	23%
	Getting angry if she speaks with another man/woman	23%
	Becoming suspicious that she is unfaithful	21%
Economic violence	Preventing her from making decisions about family finances and from shopping independently	10%
	Forbidding her to work outside the home	5%
Abusive behaviour	Belittling or humiliating her in private	25%
	Belittling or humiliating her in public	19%
	Doing things to scare or intimidate her on purpose	18%
Blackmail with /abuse of children	Threatening to take the children away from her	7%
	Hurting her children	3%
	Threatening to hurt her children	3%

Despite its rather more superficial account (if compared to that provided to describe physical violence), the FRA report supplies demographic information about women suffering from psychological abuse and about those in charge of exerting it. Again, and echoing the general trend observed in cases of physical violence, there are few correlations between psychological abuse and many of these variables.

First, there seems to be no direct link between a particular age group and a prevalence of psychological partner violence (FRA, 2014: 77). Nonetheless, the age group formed by women older than 60 is somewhat less likely to have experience it. Although one reason to understand this can be the temporal distance between the time of the interview and the time of abuse itself (FRA, 2014: 77), it should also be recalled that the understanding of what stands as abusive in partner contexts has changed drastically in recent years towards a greater awareness in this regard.

As far as education is concerned, minor differences are spotted if psychological abuse was exerted by a current or a previous partner (FRA, 2014: 77). In this regard, women without completing primary education (34%) show higher rates of this type of abuse than overall women (23%). If experiences with previous partners are taken into account, women who have completed the second state of tertiary education (42%) are less exposed to psychologically-abusive acts as opposed to all women respondents (48%).

Interesting insights are gathered if aspects such as the living area, the occupation or the income are considered. A higher (albeit slight) prevalence of psychological abuse by both current and previous partners is reported from women living in suburban areas (FRA, 2014: 77). In a similar vein, it seems that there is no clear link between women's employment and exposure to psychological partner violence and, likewise, "women's occupations do not show clear patterns in terms of victimisation risk" (FRA, 2014: 77). Conversely, the FRA report suggests that there is a stronger link between women who perceive themselves as more passive in deciding how the household income should be used and a higher exposure to psychological partner violence (FRA, 2014: 78).

Shifting the focus now onto the perpetrator and the variables that make him more likely to exert psychological violence in current scenarios, it should be noted that the FRA report is based on cases where the perpetrator was the respondent's current partner (in a similar vein to the description provided in the section devoted to physical violence above). Broadly speaking, it should be noted that a very close resemblance is observed if profiles of physical and psychological abusers are contrasted.

Again, age does not seem to be a remarkable influence on the exertion of psychological abuse (FRA, 2014: 78). Nevertheless, there is an association between the partner's educational background and a difference in rates of psychological abuse, a pattern also visible when analysing physical violence. Women whose partners' education had not even reached the primary threshold showed a higher prevalence in psychological abuse (33%) if compared with those whose partners had experiences with tertiary education (21%). As stated elsewhere in this section, this reinforces the need for taking serious action when considering alternative ways of educating men in nowadays societies.

Intriguingly enough, the FRA reports suggests that, unlike it is case for women's occupation, there is a higher risk of suffering from psychological abuse depending on the partner's occupation (FRA, 2014: 78). Unemployment and part-time jobs (36%) or unskilled manual work (33%) seem to characterise psychologically-abusive partners more steadily, which contrasts with 19%-21% of abusive partners who are in charge of middle management positions or desk-related jobs (FRA, 2014: 78). On a rather different note, behavioural patterns associated with alcoholism are seen to play again a crucial role on the exertion of psychological violence. Thus, if the partner is said to drink to the extent of getting drunk once a month or more often, abusive acts at a psychological level are experienced by 46% of women. A drastic decrease is found if a woman's partner is described as never reaching stages of inebriation, in which case instances of psychological abuse amount to 19% (FRA, 2014: 78).

All in all, this section has sought to add demographic insights into current IPV scenarios. Given the scope of the dissertation, greater attention has been paid to the more immediate contexts in which this research framed (the EU). Mostly due to this factor, it was deemed convenient to describe this social setting following the results provided by the same survey (FRA, 2014) and on the basis of the comparable methodological and contextual circumstances. In contrast with the more global stance taken by similar studies (WHO, 2005), the FRA report frames IPV in spatial, temporal and cultural ways that are thought more suitable for the understanding of this research. Broadly speaking, this section has tried to shed light on the many complexities that approaching IPV can possibly have. Apart from highlighting the remarkable imbalance of both physical and psychological abuse in intimate partnerships across different EU member states, this section has attempted to stress the risks of over-generalisations when it comes to approaching IPV. As pointed out, this social phenomenon is widespread across many different social levels, and women can be exposed to victimisation regardless of their background. Demographic information has also been employed to emphasise the need for further exploration of perpetrators' characteristics and behavioural patterns. The fact that higher levels of education among the perpetrators are linked to less victimisation rates among women should be used to act accordingly in this direction.

2.5 The aftermath: what comes after IPV

The multiple consequences that IPV can have from those who suffer from it (directly or indirectly) have been studied in depth by a wide range of disciplines (see Section 2.2.6 below). However, taking advantage from the thoroughness provided by the FRA report (2014), it is possible to understand some of the consequences of IPV as reported by the same respondents that integrate the notable demographic sample represented in Section 2.2.4 above. Thus, this section aims at considering (a) the emotional responses to the most serious incidents of violence experienced by the victims and their more immediate reactions and (b) the more psychological consequences that can persist in the long run. Although the FRA report explores these two scenarios in non-partner contexts (2014: 56-70), data concerning partner violence will only be considered here. Reference to these emotional and psychological points are deemed relevant to further understand the reactions these women felt after experiencing cases of violent episodes and see whether it is possible to link these to the discursive dimension.

Table 5 below illustrates the percentage of the most frequent emotional reactions women identified with after the most serious incident of violence perpetrated by any partner (FRA, 2014: 56). As can be interpreted by the top-bottom arrangement, feelings linked to either anger or fear are the most two frequent emotional reactions in cases of physical and sexual violence, with more than half of all the respondents opting for these. Interesting interpretations can be reached if these two types of abusive manifestations are compared.

Judging from the results, it seems that women suffering from sexual violence experience 'shame' more noticeably (47%) than those facing physical violence (21%). If contrasted, guilt is the next emotional response that is felt differently (32% to 12%). Conversely, women facing physical violence seem to experience more anger (63%) than those facing sexual violence (58%). Broadly speaking, these results also indicate a more remarkable emotional stress among women undergoing sexual abuse in partner relationships.

Table 5 | Most frequent emotional response after the most serious violent episode (either physical or sexual) in partner violence (%) (Adapted from FRA, 2014: 56)

	Physical violence			Sexual violence	
	Type of emotional response (physical)	%		Type of emotional response (sexual)	%
Physical violence	Anger	63%	Sexual violence	Fear	64%
	Fear	52%		Anger	58%
	Shock	34%		Shame	47%
	Annoyance	32%		Shock	37%
	Aggressiveness	23%		Annoyance	37%
	Shame	21%		Embarrassment	34%
	Embarrassment	18%		Guilt	32%
	Guilt	12%		Aggressiveness	26%
	Other	3%		Other	9%

The FRA report also provides valuable insights into the multiple psychological consequences experienced by women following the most serious episode of physical and/or sexual partner violence. Generally speaking, as shown in Table 6 below, it is possible to affirm that psychological consequences among respondents were more difficult to trace than emotional reactions (cf. Table 5 above). However, if percentages between partner and non-partner violence are compared, “long-term psychological consequences are more likely to surface as a result of partner violence” (FRA, 2014: 57), which results from higher instances of repeated victimisation among partner violence survivors. If physical and sexual violence are contrasted, however, differences are far from salient. In fact, there is little divergence between the types of psychological consequences in this case. Women experiencing physical and sexual violence report to suffer from loss of self-confidence (31% and 50% respectively), feel anxiety (32% and 45%) and feel vulnerable (30% and 48%).

Table 6 | Most frequent psychological consequence of the most serious violent episode (either physical or sexual) in partner violence (%) (Adapted from FRA, 2014: 57)

	Physical violence			Sexual violence	
	Type of psychological consequence (physical)	%		Type of psychological consequence (sexual)	%
Physical violence	Anxiety	32%	Sexual violence	Loss of self-confidence	50%
	Loss of self-confidence	31%		Feeling vulnerable	48%
	Feeling vulnerable	30%		Anxiety	45%
	Difficulties in relationships	24%		Difficulties in relationships	43%
	Difficulty in sleeping	23%		Difficulty in sleeping	41%
	Depression	20%		Depression	35%
	Panic attacks	12%		Panic attacks	21%
	Concentration difficulties	12%		Concentration difficulties	21%
	Other	3%		Other	5%

Last but not least, the FRA respondents also assessed the impact of IPV resulting from either physical or sexual abuse in terms of the physical consequences after the most serious violent incident since the age of 15 (FRA, 2014: 58). Despite the tendency among IPV practitioners to focus on the physical outcome of violent episodes, it is remarkable to observe that about half of the victims of physical and/or sexual violence reported no physical injuries after the most serious incident (FRA, 2014: 58). This should perhaps serve as a warning of the need for a more global assessment of these women's general wellbeing after violent experiences, including aggressive behaviours that may not leave a physical imprint (from pushing to verbal humiliation). Sexual violence from any partner seems to be more physically severe, as included in Table 7 below, and an alarming 17% of women suffering from this type of violence indicated that the most serious accident lead to two to three different types of physical injuries (FRA, 2014: 59).

Table 7 | Most frequent physical injuries after the most serious violent episode (either physical or sexual) in partner violence (%) (Adapted from FRA, 2014: 58)

Physical violence	Type of physical injury (physical)	%	Sexual violence	Type of physical injury (sexual)	%
		Bruises, scratches		42%	
	Wounds, sprains, burns	10%		Wounds, sprains, burns	14%
	Fractures, broken teeth	5%		Fractures, broken teeth	7%
	Concussion or brain injury	3%		Internal injuries	5%
	Internal injuries	2%		Other	5%
	Other	2%		Miscarriage	5%
	Miscarriage	1%		Concussion or brain injury	4%

Regardless the useful repercussions of finding out which the most frequent reactions to the most serious IPV episodes are (especially for professionals in health sectors or in social work), it is also valuable to gain further understandings on the type of action these women take after having experienced intimate partner abuse. In fact, again according to the FRA report (2014: 60), a worrying 66% of all cases of IPV was not reported to any service or organisation. Although women suffering from sexual violence are more likely to report the incident to any service, it is still striking that the overall rate of women not taking action is that high. Another prominent finding here is related to the type of service these women turn to when disclosing their abusive experiences (FRA, 2014: 59). Support is sought mostly in health-related environments such as doctors, health centres or similar healthcare institutions (22% of sexually-abused and 15% of physically-abused women). This is followed by police (15% and 14% of women respectively), and professionals in legal services such as

lawyers (15% and 10%). According to the FRA report (2014: 59), there is a less noticeable tendency to seek support among women's shelters (6% and 3%) or victim support organisations (4% in both cases). These points are of particular interest if contrasted with the level of satisfaction the same respondents experienced with the assistance they received. Although it seems that professionals among the health, legal and social work sectors received rather high rates of approval (FRA, 2014: 65), survivors of IPV felt dissatisfied with how police could deal with their situation (49% of women undergoing sexual abuse and 60% of those affected by physical aggression; which contrasts with 84% and 88% levels of satisfaction received at a hospital, for instance).

At this point, it seems logical to look at the possible reasons these women have for not contacting any organisation or service. Unavoidably, suffering from any type of violence has multiple consequences, and the public recognition of violence is not always easy. This can become even more marked if the social stigma still attached to women as less powerful collectives in most cases of IPV is taken into account. Therefore, one possible way of interpreting this lack of reaching out may be related to the willingness to keep outbursts of intimate partner violence to oneself. Nonetheless, an interesting tendency the FRA report reveals is that women suffering from partner violence may be inclined to talk about their experiences, although noteworthy differences are observed depending on the type of aggression and the means of communicating.

Table 8 | Most frequent forms of contacting (or not) services or other people after the most serious violent episode (either physical or sexual) in partner violence (%) (Adapted from FRA, 2014: 66)

Physical violence	Did respondents (of physical violence) ...	%	Sexual violence	Did respondents (of sexual violence) ...	%
	... talk to somebody else?	36%		... contact the police or other services?	39%
... not talk to anyone?	32%	... not talk to anyone?	32%		
... contact the police or other services?	31%	... talk to somebody else?	28%		
No answer	1%	No answer	(0)%		
N	5415	N	1863		

As shown in Table 8 above, women suffering from physical violence are keener on talking to somebody else (36%) than to police or other services (31%). In contrast, in case of sexual violence, women opted for contacting the police or pertinent

services (39%) rather than talking about it with somebody else (28%). Again, this may pinpoint the more widespread belief that sexual offences need to be criminalised more urgently if compared with cases of physical violence, even among women experiencing this violence.

Furthermore, the FRA report allows to go deeper in the understanding of the manifold reasons underpinning these women's lack of motivation to contact the police or professional services available to them (FRA, 2014: 66). The most persistent justification these women provided is that they believed they could deal with the violent episode on their own, by involving a friend or treating this issue as if it was a family matter (55% of women suffering from physical violence, 47% in the sexual violence counterpart). After this, 34% and 21% of women respectively deemed that the violent episode itself was too minor or not serious enough to resort to professional guidance and support. Additionally, the third most common justification was linked to a feeling of shame and embarrassment (22% among women who experienced sexual violence, 9% in the case of those witnessing physical violence). Broadly speaking, these patterns suggest that many survivors still associate IPV to private and/or domestic realms and pay little attention to the serious consequences that violent acts may have for them. Therefore, greater emphasis needs to be put on the disassociation between IPV and domestic spaces to raise awareness of IPV as a public health issue.

In a very similar vein, more work seems necessary when helping IPV survivors on how to deal emotionally with violent episodes and make them overcome feelings of shame or embarrassment. In fact, respondents to the FRA survey were asked whether they would have appreciated any type of assistance (from practical help to someone to talk to) following the most serious violent event they had experienced (FRA, 2014: 67). Contrary to what may be expected, the most frequent need for assistance was thought to be "someone to talk to/moral support" (39% of physically-abused women; 54% of sexually-abused women). This willingness to seek support from "someone" is particularly striking if one takes into account that options for receiving police information (6% and 7% respectively) or medical help (5% and 10%) were among the possibilities. Another need they felt after undergoing the most serious violent incident was "protection from further victimisation/harassment" (in 15% and 25% of the cases) and obtaining "practical help" (14% and 21%). It should

be noted how there seems to be a preference to find support from more generic social actors (such as “someone” or just “practical help”) and a rather weak eagerness to having to cope with professionally-driven actors (such as “police” or “medical staff”).

This section has attempted to present the most remarkable consequences that broadly originate from IPV episodes as experienced by European women. By doing so, it is now possible to draw some conclusions on the way female survivors of IPV deal with the aftermath of partner abuse and the forms in which they take action. As pointed out above, anger and fear are the most recurrent emotional responses to instances of physical and/or sexual aggression. These experiences also have serious psychological consequences, the most salient being related to experiencing anxiety, losing self-confidence or feeling vulnerable. Section 2.6 below provides a more detailed account of research along these lines with studies exploring particular psychological consequences of this issue. Furthermore, this section has also fostered an understanding of the manners by which women in EU Member States take action when facing cases of IPV. Quite strikingly, a great proportion of them (66%) did not notify the abuse to any institution (be it police, health or legal related). Nonetheless, as suggested in several points above, victims of IPV feel a pressing need to share with others (less professionalised figures to a greater extent) their experiences with physical and/or sexual violence. As data included in this section suggest, and as put forward by the FRA report (2014: 70), multi-agency responses to intimate partner violence are needed to meet the needs of these survivors effectively. The next section outlines some of the common research patterns adopted in several fields to tackle IPV. In addition, the role that discourse-driven research has played (and the potential it has) in these multi-agented responses is also discussed.

2.6 Research tendencies in the field: a review of literature

The purpose of this section is twofold. On the one hand, the first subsection seeks to summarise salient findings from disciplines whose intervention in IPV is more incisive, with a focus on relevant approaches from social, health and legal sciences. On the other hand, the second subsection intends to concentrate on some research findings from discourse-driven perspectives. Apart from working as a link with the

forthcoming chapters, this is done in the attempt to identify the research gaps to which this research seeks to contribute.

2.6.1 Common explorations of IPV: social, health and legal approaches

It is not surprising to come across very thorough accounts of the social dimensions of IPV across many research areas. Broadly speaking, studies undertaken to explore this issue from this perspective are varied and multi-purposed. In most cases though, they seek to supply a fine-grained, sociologically-grounded depiction of IPV around the world (Krug et al., 2002; García-Moreno et al., 2006; Dobash & Dobash, 2015) referring for this purpose to IPV social realities in a vast range of countries and contexts of different sorts (Johnson, 1996; Hassan et al., 2004; Sunita & Johnson, 2004; Kocacik et al., 2007; Babu and Kar, 2012, to name just a few). Although dependant on many factors and variables, a general claim is that IPV is widespread in most current societies.

In a similar vein, there is also a very salient and prominent research field that deals with the health aftermath of IPV in its many manifestations (WHO, 2002; WHO, 2013a, 2013b). It is possible to find studies that associate IPV with physical health problems that go beyond the more obvious and immediate consequences of physical abuse and affect abused women's neurological, cardiopulmonary and gastrointestinal systems (Coker et al., 2002; Plitcha, 2004). Likewise, a huge amount of research is devoted to the study of psychological consequences that abused women are likely to experience, establishing for instance direct links between IPV and psychiatric disorders (such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress or eating disorders) and even self-harm and suicide (Campbell, 2004; Kumar et al., 2013). Last but not least, there is also specific attention devoted to issues related to reproductive health (Mayhew & Watts, 2002; Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013) and pregnancy (Izaguirre & Galvete, 2014).

Furthermore, given that IPV is recognised as one of the most worrying issues concerning public health (García-Moreno et al., 2006), both governments and institutions have tried to tackle IPV from a legal and forensic standpoint.¹³ Generally

¹³ For instance, it was back in 2005 when legislation specifically designed to address IPV in Spain came into force (*Ley Orgánica 1/2004 de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género* or *Organic Act on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence*)

speaking, studies in this line aim to characterise both victims and aggressors in criminological terms (Reijnders & Ceelen, 2014; Falcão de Oliveira et al., 2014; Regueira-Diéguez et al., 2015), with findings that very frequently refer to victims' psychological traits such as dependence and subordination. Apart from this, there is also research that reflects upon the implementation of legal measures and interventions to protect abused women in a wide range of contexts (Callu, 2015; Walker, 2015) and proposals that defend that IPV crimes should be considered crimes against humanity or state crimes (Rose, 2015).

2.6.2 Less common explorations of IPV: discourse-driven research

As suggested by the previous sections, research on IPV is of paramount importance in disciplines that have a direct effect on this social reality. Interestingly enough, most of the studies mentioned in this section specifically claim that their main objective is to contribute to a better understanding of IPV against women, somewhat implying that further research in this area is still uncharted (and thus highly necessary) and to be explored from a myriad of different perspectives.

Unsurprisingly, researchers in the field of linguistics are also showing increasing interest in the many possible ways that language and discourse can shed light on this issue. Thus, considering this dissertation is framed within the study of language and communication, this section now moves to outlining studies that concentrate on more linguistic dimensions of IPV. Accordingly, two major areas will be identified here. In the first one, there is a brief comment on research that has focussed on recontextualisations of discourses of/about IPV. In the second one, however, previous work based on discourses by female survivors of IPV is pointed out, together with an elaboration of the various applications this has had.

Research on recontextualised discourses of/about IPV is interestingly varied and vast. Based on theories that strengthen the power of different media and their language use over social individuals (Graddol & Swan, 1989; Gay, 1997; Street, 2011), many studies in this line touch on the linguistic devices used to represent both IPV itself and core social actors within this problem (namely abused women and male abusers) on different sources of information. Although insights into more traditional media, such as newspapers (Alat, 2006; Santaemilia & Maruenda, 2014), are more

frequent, recent studies are also showing interest in online media in formats such as audience's responses to both online articles dealing with IPV (Bou-Franch, 2013) and YouTube public service advertisements against the abuse of women (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). Apart from this, though to a lesser degree, there has also been research examining recontextualised discourses of female victims of IPV in narrative and literary texts (Núñez-Perucha, 2004).

Stimulating though these studies are, the most important caveat found here concerns the properties of third-party recontextualisations. To put it differently, echoing Attenborough's words, third parties (as journalists and also researchers can be said to be) tend to reformulate points of view on behalf of the original interactants in any mediated report about IPV descriptions (Attenborough, 2014a). Consequently, studies based on recontextualisations tend to rely on third parties' understanding of a particular situation or event, building on what the journalist or researcher thinks actually happened (Attenborough, 2014b). Although this approach can be of great use to contribute to the understanding of IPV from a language point of view, in a more peripheral manner, this research aims at gaining a deeper insight into the discourse used by actual agents that have undergone first-hand experiences of this sort. Likewise, one of the most remarkable tenets in feminist research vindicates the need to place women at the very heart of the research process by making them the source of knowledge (Harding, 1987; Garfinkel, 1991, Martín-Palomo & Muñoz-Terrón, 2014). In other words, it can be argued that the analysis of discourses by survivors of IPV (and not just discourses of/about them) would satisfy this principle by turning these women's voices into the generators of both theoretical and empirical knowledge.

However, there are studies that give prominence to more linguistically-grounded analysis and therefore pay attention to discourses used by actors involved with IPV; yet it is possible to find again two different standpoints. This distinction is based on the role that (critical) discourse analysis receives.

On the one hand, as it is the case in most of the articles reviewed for this dissertation, there is a tendency to use discourse analysis (though not always CDA) as a method to explore different social contexts and situations around IPV. They tend to pay attention to the macro- and meso-levels of discourse and opt for broad linguistic

operationalisation. Needless to say, examining these levels of discourse can have crucial implications for the understanding of women victims of IPV, as briefly pointed out in what follows.

Boonzaier (2008), for instance, identifies the existence of what she calls femininity discourse in the discourse of abused women. As suggested by this study, this discourse perpetuates the loving, caring and nurturing roles of women, which can partly affect these women's self-construction as the ones to blame for the situation, accepting responsibility and even minimising the partner's abusive behaviour. Similarly, Baly (2010) explores the discursive resources used by women when describing their abusive situation and identifies different kinds of discourses used by women victims when constructing the situation which they are in, namely relationship-maintaining discourses and discourses of self-reliance and responsibility. Studies in the same vein examine, for instance, the ideological dilemmas around IPV in everyday discourse (Harris et al., 2012), or women victims' discourses to examine their relationship with social workers (Keeling & van Wormer, 2012). Generally speaking, though, these studies do not tend to consider the micro- (textual) level of discourse in depth and rather opt for a broad picture of the interconnections between discourse and IPV. The main reason behind this lies perhaps in the fact that research of this sort derives from fields in the social sciences that use discourse as a means to a specific end (which is generally not related to linguistics *per se*).

On the other hand, and not surprisingly, studies with a clearer language motivation do concentrate on discourse at its a micro- (textual) level and rely on more detailed linguistic operationalisation. They analyse an array of discursive structures in the descriptions of IPV episodes (Frazer & Miller, 2009), or rhetoric and other linguistic devices that characterise the way perpetrators try to avoid responsibility in response to accusations about them (Cotterill, 2001; Ehrlich, 2001; Stokoe, 2010). Interestingly though, it is rather uncommon to track studies of this sort that apply one specific framework within the discipline of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to operationalise their analysis. Just as an example, as far as the review of literature for this dissertation is concerned, there no identified attempts to explore IPV from a CDS perspective, especially when it comes to exploring the socio-cognitive

representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV represented discursively as social actors.

What seems straightforward, however, is that there is still an important paucity of research efforts which try to merge the two aforementioned tendencies. To put it differently, it seems that there is not enough attention being paid to how a more detailed exploration of the micro-level of discourse used by key actors in IPV can contribute to a better understanding of the meso- and macro-levels of discourse of/about violent episodes against women in intimate partner contexts.¹⁴

With regard to methodological issues, most studies around IPV in this field of linguistics normally take a qualitative stance. This can be arguably attributed to a couple of reasons. First, as hinted above, most linguistic subdisciplines have not traditionally tackled this social issue and, therefore, studies combining these two dimensions of society are still unusual. As suggested by methodological principles (Dörnyei, 2007), research on uncharted areas such as this one fits best with qualitative approaches. Second, as discussed in subsequent chapters, the delicate ethical issues around IPV turn core stages in any empirical study (i.e. data collection) into a very a complex scenario. As a result, studies of this sort mostly rely on volunteer female survivors (or male abusers) willing to become research participants. Third, and most importantly, qualitative research itself unfolds as a valuable resource for allowing these women to make their voices more visible and central (Skinner et al., 2005; Bevan, 2014; Izaguirre & Calvete, 2014) and consequently, more empowered.

It comes as no surprise then to find out that the prevailing methodological tool in these studies is a wide range of interview formats carried out in face-to-face contexts with physical participants. Some studies opt for pair interviews (Baly, 2010) or focus groups (Harris et al., 2012) in which the roles of researcher and participants are identified. This results in a rather controlled linguistic account of episodes of IPV, leaving little room for naturally-occurring instances of discourse. In the attempt to reduce the possible consequences of the Pygmalion effect, other studies however prefer to examine transcripts of interviews conducted in different contexts, such as

¹⁴ Chapter 4 in this dissertation deals with the key theoretical underpinnings of CDA this research is built upon.

police stations or trials (Stokoe, 2010; Hester, 2012), in which participants and their language choices are likely to be less influenced by the feeling of being investigated. Research attempts to investigate discourse by participants who are not physical *per se* are even more scarce. This means that little attention has been paid to discourses of IPV by key social actors in online settings, although this is somewhat changing as more and more discourse analysts are beginning to explore online environments (Nacey, 2017).

2.7 Summary

On the whole, as this chapter has tried to demonstrate, IPV is a very salient social reality which is gaining visibility in most contemporary societies and whose eradication is a manifest priority by institutions at different levels. Likewise, there is an important amount of research seeking to improve this social phenomenon, namely from areas that possess a more direct link (or more visible) link with, it such as social, health and legal sciences. Though still rather limited, researchers from language sciences and related fields are actively joining this endeavour. However, this still somewhat uncommon combination signals an important number of research niches that definitely deserve careful attention. Having provided a grounded description of the macro/contextual level that characterises IPV, the following chapter turns to explore the specific context in which IPV is discursively manifested, that is, an online forum in which women affected by IPV deal with several issues attached to it in digitally-mediated communicative contexts.

CHAPTER 3 | DIGITALLY-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (DMC) AND THE DISCOURSE PRACTICE CONTEXT

3.1. Introduction

As anticipated in the introductory section, this research is based on the intersections of three main fields. First, it investigates Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as a social phenomenon, a thorough account of which has been provided in the previous chapter. Despite the multiple perspectives from which IPV can be examined, this research concentrates on how discourse can also play a crucial role here. More specifically, this thesis is interested in investigating the micro-level of discourse to explore how female survivors of IPV construct both themselves and the perpetrators discursively. Details of the linguistic perspective employed to approach this social issue will also be addressed in Chapter 4 below. Nonetheless, as suggested elsewhere, the discourse this study scrutinises has a digital nature and it is produced in a digital environment. It is therefore necessary to provide details about the discursive context in which the discourse under analysis is produced, since a direct connection between the discourse context and the discourse production can by no means be avoided. Hence, this section outlines some of the most relevant notions to understand digital discourse. First, some brief details about the development of digital discourse and communication will be discussed, linking this to the many affordances, opportunities and pitfalls that communicating online can possibly have. In addition, room will be left to discuss the role of online identities and how this is related to the process of building communities in digital contexts. This chapter will come to an end by briefly indicating the most usual research trends followed in the field of Digitally-Mediated Communication (DMC).

3.2 Digitally-Mediated Communication (DMC): definitions, nature and classifications

Claiming that both technology and the Internet have drastically changed the way in which most (especially Western) societies experience life is certainly unproblematic. For many (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992; Lie & Sørensen, 1996; Berker et al., 2006), the outset of this sudden revolution has its roots in the so-called “domestication of technology”. In short, this approach describes the process by which different

technological media was gradually adopted within household contexts to the extent of becoming central in most everyday practices. The ubiquity of technology can be easily envisioned, for instance, looking at the access to ICTs at home across the 28 EU Member States. One of the more recently available measures in this regard is that offered by the Eurostat (2015), which points out that four fifths of all households across the EU (81%) benefited from access to the Internet in 2014 (whereas only 55% could do the same in 2007). Apart from this, interesting tendencies can be gathered from this report. For instance, the rate of daily Internet use overtook daily computer use among young people in 2012 (Eurostat, 2015), proving the steady pattern especially among younger generations of using the Internet on devices other than computers, namely smartphones.¹⁵

The more electronic gadgets and applications proliferate, the wider the range of social practices that are becoming mediated. Based on the understanding of mediation as involving “an intermediary that conveys information between two entities” (Hession, 2016: 214), our social interactions are gradually adapting to this digital mediation, transforming everyday social practices in professional, educational and interpersonal realms (Thorne et al., 2015), to name just a few. Given the omnipresent character of communication, it is unsurprising to realise that many daily communicative practices in today’s Western societies are digitally mediated: from emailing and texting (or even sexting) to social/professional media. In fact, as Crystal puts it, “[t]he Internet is the largest area of language development we have seen in our lifetimes. Only two things are certain: it is not going to go away, and it is going to get larger” (2011: 149).

On these grounds, researchers within the linguistics community soon became aware of the many potentials of exploring language and the multiple ways it can be used online, justifying the gradual shift towards online arenas among linguistic research (Barton & Lee, 2013). Nonetheless, efforts to investigate online communicative phenomena are not new and go back to the 90s. In a similar vein, the search for a suitable label to name this research area has been active ever since (Locher, 2014). Some of these labels are discussed in what follows.

¹⁵ Only in Spain, for instance, 98% of people aged between 16 and 24 connect to the Internet on a daily basis, with 96,3% (aged 25-34) and 95,8% (aged 35-44) doing the same. Interestingly, 50% of people in the youngest group are “mobile first”, that is, they only use their smartphone to access the Internet (Fundación Telefónica, 2018).

No sooner had this type of communication begun to develop than Susan Herring's usage of the term 'computer-mediated communication' (CMC) became established as the preferred label, partly due to the impact that the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* had in the 1990s. As technologies developed, resulting in a consequent development of the possibilities of communicating online, the suitability of this term was called into question. Apart from questioning its rather broad character, claiming that this term could be also used to tackle many forms of communication such as images or music (Crystal, 2011), the rise of mobile digital devices problematised the inclusion of "computer" to best conceptualise this form of communication. In fact, some voices argued that this would wrongly imply that the field is solely interested in computers as a means of communication (Crystal, 2011; Locher, 2014). Herring et al. (2009) advocated a slight variation in the term, recommending 'convergent media computer-mediated communication' (CMCMC) as an alternative in the attempt to recognise the wide range of communicative elements in online contexts.

In contrast with these rather ample terminological options, some others have claimed a need for emphasising the language-driven orientation of research carried out by linguists in this domain. To this end, Jucker and Dürscheid (2012) suggested the term 'keyboard-to-screen communication' (KSC), seeking to highlight the central role that keyboards play in communicating by these means. However, in line with what Locher points out (2014), the fast development of technologies seems at odds with associating online communication to the keyboard only, especially considering the advancements in voice-recognition tools. This trend to narrow the field down (at least terminologically) is also observed in another relevant researchers on this type of communication. Soon after the discipline gained visibility, Crystal (2001) proposed the term 'Netspeak' with the intention of unifying the way users *speak* on the net. Having witnessed the vast range of options to be employed in different online media, together with the problems posed by linking online discourse to speaking, Crystal himself distanced from this term by recognising the complexities of making strong generalisations regarding online communication as a whole (Crystal, 2011). Acknowledging that terms such as 'Netspeak' or 'Cyberspeak' put "undue emphasis on the potential linguistic idiosyncrasy of the medium and suggested that the medium was more homogeneous than it actually is" (Crystal, 2011: 2), he opted for 'Internet

linguistics' as the most suitable term for the scientific study of the manifestations of language in electronic media (Crystal, 2011).

This study takes a rather intermediate approach and uses 'digitally-mediated communication' (DMC) and an interchangeable use of 'digital discourse', 'online discourse' or 'electronic discourse'. Broadly speaking, I shall be using the first term to refer generally to the specific academic domain in charge of investigating any type of communication that is mediated by digital devices. Although this has certainly met criticism for its rather unspecific research objectives (Jucker & Dürscheid, 2012), the use of DMC favours the inclusion of any type of communication that takes place in digital environments, which not necessarily occurs via computers *per se* (but via rapidly-changing technological possibilities such as smartphones, tablets or even smartwatches). Furthermore, apart from reflecting communicative practices among youngsters in Europe (Eurostat, 2015), favouring the inclusion of 'communication' in detriment of 'linguistics' responds to the broadness of the former term. This would incline studies in this field towards the multimodal character of digital discourse, expressed by means which go beyond the traditional scope that has traditionally characterised studies within linguistics. As suggested before, the terms 'digital discourse', 'online discourse' or 'electronic discourse' will be used interchangeably throughout this research. All of them are understood here as the more tangible discursive outcome that results from digitally-mediated communicative interactions and mediated social practices in online environments. Not only is this terminological preference also observed among other key researchers in the field (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011; Meredith & Potter, 2013) but also in recent studies that explore DMC in more multidisciplinary realms (Darics, 2015; Hession, 2016; Mansell, 2017). Given the recent nature of the discipline, it is perhaps too soon to know which of the above-mentioned terms will become standardised, which also leaves room for further discussion in this area.

Not surprisingly, an equivalent amount of research within this field has also been devoted to the nature of online discourse since its early developments. General attempts to undertake this endeavour were rooted in the prevailing idea that assumed that discourse could only be expressed by means of either oral or written forms, which had characterised the most usual discursive manifestations until then. Therefore, initial efforts to define the nature of online discourse took a rather

dichotomous stance. One of the first labels used to refer to this “emergent register” was in fact “interactive written discourse” (Ferrara et al., 1991). The strong influence of discursive features traditionally associated with oral texts upon online discourse led many researchers to highlight the orality underpinning digital texts. Using notions such as implication, expression or emotion among users of oral texts, December (1993) argued that DCM was closer to the oral domain. Nonetheless, the most usual tendency to explain the nature of online discourse relies on hybridity as its main component (Baron, 1998). Based on this ascribed hybridity, and depending on the adopted perspective, researchers have varied in foregrounding the closer proximity to written and/or oral manifestations of discourse. Crystal (2001), for instance, defended that online discourse shows a greater similarity to written discourse. He based his argument on the capacity that online discourse has to be edited or the inappropriateness of applying concepts which are central to spoken communication (such as overlapping and adjacency pairs) to online exchanges. Conversely, a considerable amount of research identified stronger boundaries between online and oral discourse. Herring (2010) argued in favour of this trend by pointing out the type of verbs DMC users employ when describing their online communicative practices. As she put it, there is a preference to use “talk”, “say” or “heard” rather than “type”, “write” or “read” when referring to this type of communication. Similarly, others recognised features of prototypical spoken interactions such as code-switching (Halim & Maros, 2014), the arrangement of digital turns resembling oral turn-taking (López-Quero, 2013) or the strong oral component in phenomena such as directionality and deixis (Vela-Delfa, 2007). This hybrid nature has favoured the general agreement of defining digital discourse as “written orality” or “oralised written texts” (Yus, 2011), which is to a certain extent a suitable description.

Understanding online discourse has a mere hybrid influenced by oral and written discourse may imply that DMC somehow derives from more primitive forms of communication. Nonetheless, and more in tune with the view of DMC as a specific conceptual system advocated by recent studies (Georgakopoulou, 2017; Blommaert, 2018), this research subscribes to the idea of exploring beyond these binaries when trying to explain the nature of digital discourse. This approach has also been adopted by some researchers that soon recognised the many potentials that this type of discourse has. They argued in favour of reducing the importance of understanding it as intrinsically written or oral and acknowledging its innovative character as sufficient

merits to consider digital discourse a new communicative medium with enough unique features to make it distinguishable from other modalities of language (Mayans i Planells, 2002) and to the extent of bringing about “a shift of paradigm” in the ways we communicate (Cassany, 2011; Ess, 2014). On no account does this imply that traditional categories used to characterise written or oral discourse are not to be used when trying to analyse digital discourse (Mayans i Planells, 2002). Rather, as also pointed out by recent research (Jucker & Dürscheid; 2012; Alcántara-Plá, 2014; Varis & Blommaert, 2015), there should be efforts to move towards a wider set of concepts that enables us to broaden our knowledge of DMC more generally and understand online interactions as “social practices in their own right” (Lamerichs & Molder, 2003). To this end, this revision should be tackled from the assumption that the communicative output under scrutiny is also very likely to differ depending on the technological features of the digital environment in which any discursive production takes place (Alcántara-Plá, 2014). Furthermore, approaching the nature of DMC from the usual binaries (asynchronous versus synchronous, written versus spoken, monologic versus dialogic) needs to be revisited perhaps by expanding the terminology or replacing some of the concepts that have gone out of fashion as the Web 2.0 has gradually developed. In fact, concepts such as “communicative acts” or “communicative act sequences” (Jucker & Dürscheid, 2012: 1) may be more suitable when trying to understand “the new realities of online communication” (Jucker & Dürscheid, 2012: 1), which are by no means monolithic and are indeed constantly exposed to change (Bolander & Locher, 2014).

In contrast to the fruitful and still ongoing discussion regarding the labels to be used and the nature to explain online discourse, there seems to be a wider agreement in how online discourse can be classified taking into accounts its diverse manifestations. Early attempts to provide systematic accounts of DMC categorised digital discourse following a more global approach, which relied heavily on using the written/oral dichotomy as a central division (Ferrera et al., 1991; Crystal, 2001). Afterwards, attention was paid to how different modes of DMC could be used with classifying purposes, with a focus on the multiple ways communication was employed in all of them (Cherny, 1999). The third identifiable tendency applied an already-existing set of categories to the classification of DMC data. Despite less remarkable attempts by Collot and Belmore (1996) and Rice and Gattiker (2000), the so-called “faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse” proposed

by Herring (2007) is still nowadays widely used by researchers in the field. Recognising Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING mnemonic as a substantial influence, Herring recommended classifying CMC data in the light of multiple categories or "facets", a concept that is borrowed from classification theory in information sciences in the attempt to outline the aspects of both the technical and social contexts that can have an impact on the use of discourse in digital environments in a systematic way (Herring, 2007).

Herring's "faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse" (2007) is built upon the two basic influences that are thought to have the greatest impact on DMC: medium (technological) and situation (social) factors. Herring (2007) warns of the non-hierarchical presentation of each of the categories that integrate each influence type, encouraging researchers to discover how their influence may be more prevalent depending on the communicative context under investigation by means of empirical analysis.

On the one hand, Herring proposes an open-ended scheme containing the ten most significant technological features of DMC that are likely to transform digital discourse, which she identifies as "medium factors" (2007). As shown in Table 9 below, these medium factors are mostly determined by the technological features offered by each service (from software to interfaces, to name just a few), in which users of DMC have no saying whatsoever. Although Herring engages in more in-depth explanation of each of these medium factors (2007), a succinct clarification of all of them is included in Table 9 below. Drawing on Bolander and Locher (2014: 15), this classification relies on short questions that any researcher could potentially apply to her/his own DMC data.¹⁶ Broadly speaking, in spite of having been designed in the light of online communication as developed in 2007, this table puts forward criteria that are by and large applicable in today's manifestations of digital discourse. Nonetheless, it is true that in a more up-to-date classification more room should be left for multimodal affordances that different online communicative services supply their users with, which would unavoidably affect digital discourse at the medium factor level (i.e., the fact that an instant messaging tool is able to offer voice recognition tools or voice messages will have an impact on how discourse is employed).

¹⁶ In fact, this faceted classification will be used in Chapter 5 to provide a general understanding on the data under scrutiny for the purposes of this study.

Table 9 | Medium factors (M) conditioning DMC discourse according to Herring (2007) including short explanatory remarks based on Bolander and Locher (2014)

Medium factors (M)	Medium
	SYNCHRONICITY
M1	<i>Is data synchronous (are exchanges performed in real time) or asynchronous (is there a time lag between the production and receipt of messages)?</i>
	MESSAGE TRANSMISSION (1-way vs. 2-way)
M2	<i>Are messages transmitted via one-way or two-way message schemes (are they transmitted as whole entities to be read by the addressee upon completed composition by the author of the message, or ready line-by-line as they are produced, respectively?)</i>
	PERSISTENCE OF TRANSCRIPT
M3	<i>How long does a written record of the interaction remain accessible on the site for other users to read?</i>
	SIZE OF MESSAGE BUFFER
M4	<i>Are there technical restrictions on the number of characters a message has?</i>
	CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION
M5	<i>Via what medium are messages produced and received?</i>
	ANONYMOUS MESSAGING
M6	<i>Does the system provide, encourage, or inhibit the production of anonymous messages?</i>
	PRIVATE MESSAGING
M7	<i>Does the system provide, encourage, or inhibit the production and reception of messages via a private channel only accessible to particular participants?</i>
	FILTERING
M8	<i>Do individuals have the technical possibility to filter out messages they do not wish to read?</i>
	QUOTING
M9	<i>Does the system provide an in-built system to quote parts of messages or entire messages without having to copy/past them or manually type them?</i>
	MESSAGE FORMAT
M10	<i>How do messages appear on the screen, in what order?</i>

On the other hand, Herring comes up with a compendium of eight social factors that are identified as contextual aspects that have a potential influence on online communication, which are referred to as “situation factors” (2007: 11). Unsurprisingly, and based on observations related to condition variation in both DMC (Baym, 1995) and in spoken discourse (Hymes, 1974), this set of social factors addresses contextual information about those taking part of the communicative exchange such as participants, how they relate to one another, the purpose behind their interactions or the tone they make use of to this end. Although Herring again

provides a fine-grained explanation of these situation factors (2007: 18-23), she also furnishes this outline by means of cues that exemplify more detailed considerations in each of the categories. These are included in Table 10 below.

Table 10 | Situation factors (S) conditioning DMC discourse according to Herring (2007)

Situation factors (S)	Situation
S1	<p style="text-align: center;">PARTICIPANT STRUCTURE</p> <i>one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many public / private degree of anonymity or pseudonymity group size, number of active participants amount, rate, balance of participation</i>
S2	<p style="text-align: center;">PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS</p> <i>demographics: gender, age, occupation proficiency: language and/or computers experience: with addressee/group/topic role/status: in “real life” or online personae pre-existing sociocultural knowledge attitudes, beliefs, ideologies and motivations</i>
S3	<p style="text-align: center;">PURPOSE</p> <i>of group (professional, social, experimental) goal of interaction (get information, develop professional/social relationships, have fun, counselling)</i>
S4	<p style="text-align: center;">TOPIC / THEME</p> <i>of group (politics, linguistics, sex) of exchanges (vacation plans, personal information)</i>
S5	<p style="text-align: center;">TO NE</p> <i>serious/playful formal/casual contentious/friendly cooperative/sarcastic</i>
S6	<p style="text-align: center;">ACTIVITY</p> <i>debate, job announcement, information exchange, phatic exchange, problem solving, exchange of insults, flirtation, virtual sex</i>
S7	<p style="text-align: center;">NORMS</p> <i>of organisation of social appropriateness of language</i>
S8	<p style="text-align: center;">CODE</p> <i>language, language variety font/writing system</i>

As was the case for medium factors, situation factors seem to apply, by and large, to most digital environments nowadays. Nonetheless, some interesting observations could be added to this. Again, it seems clear that, back in 2007, DMC was predominantly mono-modal as far as *code* (S8) was concerned. This is evidenced by the paucity of references pointing to *emojis*, GIFs or *memes*, for instance, which are of uncontested salience in current manifestations of online discourse. In a similar vein, it is rather striking that Herring was willing to include such a wide range of details concerning *participant characteristics* (S2). As a matter of fact, one of the most prominent features that DMC is able to guarantee is the possibility of camouflaging many of the demographic details that may characterise any user, to the extent of

building a drastically different online *personae* with very little resemblance to the offline self. The lack of available resources to trace the actual demographic information of someone engaging in online communicative practices makes this situation factor less easy to account for. In a way, this boosts one of the most central and vivid discussions in DMC nowadays, which seeks to discuss to what extent online communication is the output of a human participant in the more traditional sense or, rather, an online, curated version of the self (or, to put it differently, an avatar). Issues concerning this particular topic and some others related to the affordances of communicating online will be dealt with in the forthcoming sections.

To conclude, it is worth recalling that this section has sought to offer an abridged overview on core aspects of DMC. More specifically, it has first concentrated on some of the most remarkable terms that have been used to label this communicative phenomenon. Second, and quite relatedly, attention has been paid to the different discussions around the nature of online discourse. Lastly, this section has dealt with one of the most outstanding classifications that has been widely used to classify digital discourse. In the next section, attention is paid to the different research trends within this field.

3.3 Research in the field: past, present and future trends

This section sets out to briefly identify the different stages that digitally-mediated communication has been through from a rather broad perspective. Considering that the previous sections have widely referred to studies that provide the theoretical foundations for the current research, the objective this section has is to summarise the key periods for the development of DMC as a field. More importantly, and based on relevant scholars within the discipline, some paragraphs are devoted to some of the potential features that future research may need to consider.

There have been several attempts to classify online communication and the type of research it has generated. A broad proposal is that made by Synder (2015), who establishes three different periods. The first two periods are taken from Warschauer's (2001) early try to divide online communication. The first one goes back to the mid-1980s, when computer-mediated communication began to be introduced in educational settings. The second period extends to the advent and development of

the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s. Synder (2015) argues that the third period to add to this early classification is strongly influenced by the spread of the so-called Web 2.0, which essentially refers to the transition from more static to more dynamic, interactive online environments.

Before proceeding, it should be clear what is meant by Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Darcy DiNucci is commonly credited for having coined the term 'Web 2.0' in her article "Fragmented Future". It is possible to gain a very basic understanding of the differences between these two notions when she points out that "[t]he Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfuls, is only an embryo of the Web to come. The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop. The Web will be understood not as screenfuls of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens. It will [...] appear on your computer screen, on your TV set, your car dashboard, your cell phone, your hand-held game machines and maybe even your microwave oven." (DiNucci, 1999, emphasis added). Additionally, as suggested by Manu (2017), "by 2004 the terminology Web 2.0 became mainstream in communities actively involved in the development of online experiences, expanding the capabilities of the once static Web 1.0. Once the significance and capabilities of Web 2.0 became clear to more and more users, the empowerment to create, manage and upload content transformed the World Wide Web into the largest platform ever created for the transmission and dissemination of culture" (n/p).

Despite the usefulness of this division, especially in order to sketch out different chronological stages, it may not be that useful in the context of studies interested in the linguistic component of this sort of communication. For these purposes, it is possible to draw upon Androutsopoulos's proposal (2006; 2015), which delimits different stages with a more language-driven motivation.

As he tentatively suggests, the first wave of research on language use in DMC was mostly concerned with the nature of this type of communication, a discussion that is appropriately addressed in the section above. Setting off from contexts related to business and education, this first stage explored the uses of DMC and its potential effectiveness (Herring, 1996) focusing on the medium-specific features of language

use (Herring, 2004). As Androutsopoulos argues (2006), this first stage paved the way for a good understanding of key issues in DMC, namely its unique discursive features, its hybrid nature and the differences between synchronous and asynchronous modes. The second stage is characterised by a shift in the type of perspective adopted to analysis online discourse. In short, researchers gained interest in user-related patterns of language use, bringing the various forms in which discourse was used by different group practices to the spotlight (Androutsopoulos, 2006). In Georgakopolou's words, there is a move from the observed features of online discourse to "contextual and particularistic analyses that shed light on how different contextual parameters shape and are evoked in the discourse of various types of CMC" (2003: 2). This change of research motivation is referred to as the move from "the language of CMC" to "computer-mediated discourse" (Herring, 2004). As a result, research in digitally-mediated communication began to pay attention to ideas that were rooted in ethnographic approaches to online environments, giving rise to studies that examined the role of identities or the building on online communities in online contexts.

This need to move beyond the interest in formal features of new language media (mostly spelling) towards greater attention to situated communicative practices among users of new media and its inherent intertextual and heteroglossic character is also highlighted in Thurlow and Mroczek's recent compilation devoted to the study of digital discourse (2011). In their work, Thurlow and Mroczek echo Georgakopolou's recommendations for future research in DMC (2006), which can be summarised as follows. First of all, there is a need to accept that new media relies on discourse that is partly based on spoken and written language and, apart from this, it has its own peculiarities. In fact, these specific features are in many cases influenced by the different affordances that one particular online setting may have on discourse generated therein, which is why Georgakopolou urges to emphasise the contextual nature of new media discourse. Second, and taking the previous point as a basis in many cases, she highlights the importance of considering the less informational functions of DMC and shedding light on issues related to altering performances of identity in online scenarios and how these are in many cases grounded in broader sociocultural practices. To this end, it is also relevant to scrutinise the interconnectedness between online and offline practices, together with the development of online identities versus offline varieties of them. Third, and on a

rather methodological note, there is a call for relying on the triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative research methods that manage to provide more empirical foundations to studies along these lines. As a matter of that, many of these recommendations are essentially intertwined in this particular research.

Most of these concerns are still central in contemporary DMC-driven research. Interestingly, prominent scholars within the field are now foregrounding explorations that take into account more multimodal ways to communicate online in order to contribute to what it may be regarded as the third wave of DMC research. As a matter of fact, the salience of multimodality as a central feature of online communication has been widely pointed out by several scholarly voices (Bolander & Locher, 2014; Androutsopoulos, 2015; Herring, 2015). Necessary though studies in this line may be, it should be also borne in mind that the constantly-changing scenario of technologies is at the same time one of the hardest obstacles for researchers to overcome. Despite the general interest among DMC scholars to move from descriptive accounts of discourse in new media contexts, it is indeed complex to engage in the exploration of situated communicative practices without prior attention to the medium-specific features that are sure to influence users' discursive production. This also partly explains why studies interested in online discourse can quickly become outdated.

Regardless of the multiple challenges, judging from how studies taking pragmatic and discursive approaches have continued to flourish across many online environments (Sánchez-Moya & Cruz-Moya, 2015; Zappavigna, 2015; Sampietro, 2016; Yus, 2016; Maíz-Arévalo, 2018), it seems that the exploration of online discourse in digitally-mediated communication has a promising future trajectory. It is in fact exciting to think of the many possible ways in which technologies are likely to shape communicative practices in years to come. This is why many researchers in the field support Paulus et al.'s claim (2016: 7) when suggesting that "there is indeed a need for continued study of the range of human activities involved in producing online talk", especially insofar as practices such as "counselling, business meetings and teaching continue to migrate online" (Paulus et al., 2016: 8). The next section focuses on more specific aspects of communicating online as a digital (and social) practice, especially those which are of particular relevance for this research.

3.4 Communicating online: affordances and opportunities, controversies and challenges

Researchers concerned with analysing social interactions are “interested in how people, together in real time, make sense to do whatever it is they are doing, with whatever resources are available, including talk, body, objects, and the surrounding environment” (Nevile, 2015: 141). To a greater or lesser extent, studies aiming at investigating social interactions in contemporary societies (mostly Western) are likely to explore the many ways in which both digital technologies and digital practices are impacting on them.

Following Jones et al.’s views, digital practices are conceived as a conglomeration of actions that are materialised by the different tools made available by digital technologies which, at the same time, are recognised by certain groups of people in order to achieve social goals, perform social identities or engage in social relationships. What is more, and in their own words, “the assumption is that digital technologies, because of the different configurations of modes and materialities they make available, both make possible new kinds of social practices and alter the way people engage in old ones” (2015: 3). As may be interpreted, these new possibilities heavily rely on the configurations of modes and materialities different users of digital technologies are afforded. This argument is in fact connected to the idea of *affordances*, which is in itself a core notion for researchers interested in digitally-mediated communication and thus will be addressed in what follows.

As a concept, *affordance(s)* can be linked to the research in the field of psychology of perception carried out by Gibson (1979). Although proving an in-depth explanation of what Gibson understood by this idea (and the contexts to which he applied it) would be beyond the scope of this research, affordances are, in short, the possibilities that a given context offers for action.¹⁷ If applied to digital technologies, early associations between affordances and digital technologies focused on the *physical* properties of objects that enable users to use them in particular ways (Baron, 2010). Far from agreeing that affordances can be solely restricted to the more tangible utilities of technologies, this research endorses the somewhat broader

¹⁷ In words of Hutchby (2001: 447), “For Gibson, humans, along with animals, insects, birds and fishes, orient to objects in their worlds (rocks, trees, rivers, etc.) in terms of what he called their affordances”.

approach that conceives an affordance as “the mutuality of actor intentions and technology capabilities that provide the potential for particular action” (Faraj & Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013) or, in other words, as “the action potential that can be taken given a technology” (Majchrzak et al., 2013: 39). To put it differently, as also advocated by Hutchby (2001), different technologies are presumed to offer different affordances. The latter are to be held partly responsible for the uses ascribed to those technologies, since the many possible effects and constraints are subjected to the possible uses made available by each sort of technology. To illustrate this view, it is possible to think of the different affordances that different digital technologies can provide. Narrowing it down to social media in digital environments, for instance, the sharing of images is not a central affordance in most online forums, whereas there are some others (such as Facebook or Instagram) in which users are more likely (and even expected) to share visual content. On these grounds, a particular human action can be linked to a particular technological capability. If this association is treated as a unit of analysis, the affordances of a digital technology (and the practices emerging from it) are bound to affect the process of sharing online knowledge (Faraj & Araz, 2012). At the same time, ignoring the communicative outcome produced by how affordances can constrain both meanings and uses of technologies (and *vice versa*) can hinder the systematic analysis of which are the possible effects and constraints of any digital practice (Hutchby, 2001).

Mediation is one of the most central affordances of digital practices, particularly as far as communication is concerned. As included elsewhere, mediation necessarily involves “an intermediary that conveys information between two entities” (Hession, 2016: 214). Electronic devices are gradually becoming the main mediators of most social interactions, in many of which communication has a pivotal role. Although it would be possible to identify as many affordances as the multiple technologies one can think of, it seems feasible to highlight some of the most ubiquitous opportunities that users communicating online have at hand. It may be convenient to begin by outlining those aspects which are more widely recognised as the helpful affordances of DMC.

One of the main strengths of digital practices in general and DMC in particular relies on their ability to alter tempo-spatial conventions that hardly could have been overcome decades ago. Communicating online can therefore bridge both distance

and time at a wide range of levels. At a more personal realm, mediated online communication may be useful for people who are more introvert and hence prefer the detachment supplied by mediating feelings through their screen. Similarly, those communicating in a foreign language may appreciate the value offered by DMC when editing their discursive outcome and the higher control on messaging it provides, especially in contrast with the messiness that face-to-face conversation can sometimes create (Garber, 2014). Broadly speaking, as argued by Hession (2016: 214), “with mediated communication we feel in control over how others see us and perhaps less vulnerable as we hide behind our screens”. Nonetheless, and partly due to another key affordance of online communication (anonymity), some crucial controversies are starting to spring from these communicative practices. Although users of DMC services tend to assume that there are other (human) users behind online interactions, we are witnessing a somewhat contentious trend to find computer software in charge of this human-to-machine communication (Dix, 2009) which is drastically changing communicative practices online. In a similar vein, given the prolonged exposure (and even consumption) to posted diaries and videos of others’ (digital!) lives, some scholarly voices have raised deep concerns with the growing incapacity among DMC users to distinguish between the fuzziness sometimes created by our curated (fictional) online self and our offline (real?) self (Dalbudak et al., 2013). Considering its relevance for this research, this discussion will be addressed later in this chapter.

Digital technologies have also boosted the empowering process of people experiencing medical and/or health problems. A vast body of research has examined online forums aimed at groups suffering from different medical conditions, establishing that specialised forums of this sort are potentially beneficial in terms of support between people that are close in experience but may be far from each other geographically (Lamerichs, 2003; Nieuwboer et al., 2013; Landqvist, 2016) whose chances of meeting face-to-face would be quite scarce otherwise (Solomon, 2004). It is worth recalling that this type of mediated communication is the one this research is particularly concerned with, which explains why a different section is devoted to this (see Section 3.4 below).

As the previous paragraphs suggest, there are multiple benefits deriving from the many affordances that digital (namely communicative) practices entail. Nonetheless,

it would be somewhat biased to ignore some of the more hazardous aspects of online communication. Paradoxically enough, and due to the shield offered by the same anonymity afforded by it that encourages some users to seek support and guidance from online communities, digital communication is also triggering an expansion of social pressures that are potentially detrimental to society. For instance, as documented by Chau and Xu (2007), online hate groups have been securing more visibility since the early 2000s, especially by means of blogs. Unsurprisingly, the steadier the tendency to transfer traditionally-offline practices into online realms, the more likely it is for these online hate groups to proliferate. These groups are of wide-ranging nature, which may vary from political extremists and racial supremacists to religious zealots (Chen et al., 2008; Brown, 2009; Hawdon, 2012). What deserves urgent attention is their behaviour online, which mostly seeks to disseminate their radical views and recruit new group members (Chau & Xu, 2007). This is even more worrying especially when considering that the youth generation is the one with the highest chances of being influenced by them (Oksanen et al., 2014). It is precisely this greater exposure to digital technologies and practices among younger generations what has also provoked the transformation of behavioural practices that took place in offline settings before the development of such technologies, such as bullying. As a matter of fact, a constantly-growing body of research is dedicated to the effects that cyberbullying is exerting on students who witness how abuse is directed against them via their mobile phones and the Internet (Smith et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2012) but also to how these practices may have drastic consequences in their own offline lives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Quite relatedly, also surely boosted by the partial anonymity that digital communicative practices can provide, some researchers have identified a consistent pattern among online users to lie through their screens (Hession, 2016). To date, an interesting amount of research has tried to shed light on the many factors that lead online users to engage in deceptive practices when talking to others online. Interestingly, some have highlighted the idea that for some users, deception is one of the most salient affordances of digital communication (Schouten et al., 2009) merely because mediation is capable of overriding nonverbal clues that can easily foster self-closure. Early explorations of this phenomenon also pointed at issues concerning privacy as one the main reasons among users (especially younger, frequent and more competent ones) to curate their online *personae*, which was

associated with a sense of enjoyment resulting from the online game and its powerful mechanisms for changing behavioural and moral standards that their offline versions could have not imagined (Caspi & Gorsky, 2006). Apart from recognising many of these reasons, more recent research has concluded that one of the main justifications for people to lie online relies on the general assumption that everybody lies on the Internet (Drouin et al., 2016), although the preference towards deception seems to be domain-specific. Thus, lies are generally more expected on sexual websites than in social media (Drouin et al., 2016), especially if sex-related conversation took place between users who only knew each other in online settings (Drouin et al., 2018). Likewise, users expect more deception in topics that relate to physical appearance (Drouin et al., 2016). In this vein, some other studies have connected this tendency to distort posted messages in online communication scenarios to the need for garnering more attention from the recipients of those posts (De Salve et al., 2016). As argued by some, distortion is widely practiced in mediated communicative contexts with the only excuse being to keep “likes” and “retweets” feeding our online egos or to prevent being “swiped right” in dating applications (Toma & Hancock, 2012).

Taking into account the points raised so far, it seems clear that the many affordances of digital technologies (both the more and the less beneficial ones) do, and will, leave an imprint on the numerous ways users of online media communicate. Besides this, it is also interesting to consider that the development of these new practices is at the same time stimulating the different approaches that discourse analysts are adopting to investigate the nature of online discourse itself. This is in itself one of the most salient challenges that springs from online communication, since these somewhat innovative configuration of modes, materialities, affordances and so forth are pushing language researchers to revisit core notions related to the analysis of discourse: texts, contexts, actions and interactions, and power and ideology (Jones et al., 2015).

To start with, despite the intertextual and heteroglossic nature of texts produced in digital contexts (Bakhtin, 1981; Androutsopoulos, 2011), not only are digital technologies shaping online users’ reading and writing skills (Jones and Hafner, 2012) but also provoking the problematisation of concepts such as textual boundaries or authorship (Domingo et al., 2015). In a similar fashion, the conceptualisation of *context* nowadays does necessarily imply the assumption of the

fuzzy boundaries resulting from the altered tempo-spatial transformations that integrate online spaces. In fact, although early research on DMC was keen on emphasising the clear division between online and offline practices (Jones, 2010), more recent studies advocate a more holistic interaction between “physical and virtual spaces, times, interaction orders and cultures” (Jones et al., 2015: 9). As for the ways in which actions and interactions need to be considered differently, it is worth recalling that new technologies and their associated practices are thought to influence both the ways people interact online and, perhaps more interestingly, the several forms in which users integrate these new media practices in the physical spaces they dwell (Carrington, 2015; Merchant, 2015). Therefore, discourse analysts today need to understand online actions and interactions as indispensable elements in the process of creating and maintaining social practices and the many communities which result from them.

Last but not least, notions concerning power and ideologies are also expected to transform in the light of digital technologies. Apart from how new media has a pivotal role in the construction of several “versions of reality” or ideologies, an important area where the traditional notion of power is likely to undergo drastic changes is online mass communication media (namely newspapers). Despite the promised values that were once associated to the Internet as a more democratic platform to approach certain issues more freely (Herring, 1993), new media are still nowadays perpetuating many of the ideological biases that characterised old media. Even more worryingly, and mostly owing to the quick spread of digital content (by sharing, retweeting, etc.), this way of ideological creation and reproduction has more direct chances of reaching a vast amount of people in a very short amount of time.

In summary, this section has focused on how the affordances supplied by digital practices and the communicative practices associated with them can pose opportunities, controversies and challenges. After having approached several aspects concerning their definition, as well as the central role that affordances have for the understanding of online communication, this section has highlighted some of the most beneficial opportunities that different online media may have for communicative purposes. In the attempt to provide a more balanced view, this section has addressed some of the many controversies that online communication is generating and paying attention to how these are unavoidably transforming more

conventional practices traditionally linked to offline settings. Additionally, this section has also discussed the implications that these opportunities and controversies are having on language researchers, since central concepts in (critical) discourse analysis are being transformed by online discourse and DMC. The outlining of these issues is far from definite and more related ideas are likely to be added. For this reason, next section is thought to specifically address two areas that are of particular relevance for this research: the construction of online communities and the powerful role they may have on the curation of (collective) online identities. Apart from this, these two issues are mostly foregrounded based on their relevance for the digital context this research looks at, i.e., online forums.

3.5 Online forums: curating the self in (collective) identities and the construction of online communities¹⁸

Conceptualised back in the 1980s, digital discussion forums were conceived as collaborative spaces online aimed at users communicating asynchronously for knowledge sharing purposes (Rehka & Venkatapathy, 2015). In fact, online forums are seen as virtual communities formed by “groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism” (Ridings et al., 2002: 273). Despite the fast development of virtual communities, online forums are still managing to gather plenty of users from many parts of the world (Fox, 2011). Given the wide range of options that users today can choose from to communicate online, there must be certain affordances supplied by online forums that still attract many users to these environments. As suggested by White and Dorman (2001), forums are particularly relevant insofar as they are assigned some conditions for the sort of communication that takes place there, namely availability, anonymity, selective disclosure and social networking. In a way, this is very much connected with earlier understandings of the Internet as a suitable space that served as a “cyberspace curtain” (Hunkele & Cornwell, 1997) which, only owing to the blocking of semiotic cues and signifying practices that characterise face-to-face communication (Donath,

¹⁸ Although the term ‘curated’ is used in this section, on no account does this mean that the digital identities we perform in online contexts derive from a supposedly “real” one (or less “real” than our offline identities). As a matter of fact, and in line with recent research along these lines (Georgakopoulou, 2017; Blommaert, 2018), we also engage in the process of curating ourselves in offline interactions. It is precisely for this reason why so much emphasis is put on the connection between performativity, the process of identity construction and social media (Cover, 2012; 2015).

1998), fostered the chances of engaging in a somewhat masked version of one's own identity (Rheingold, 1993).

Although the more automatic connections tend to categorise sites like Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat as such, online forums also fit in what the term 'social network site' entails, especially if Ellison and Boyd's definition for it as "a networked platform in which participants [...] can consume, produce and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site" (2013: 158) is taken into account. To a great extent, this may remind one of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's notion of 'community of practice' (CoP) (1992) and their vision of language as a community-based practice through which notions like 'membership' emerge. In fact, although social network sites are possibly organised following different criteria, this research explores an online forum in which the idea of membership is made legitimate via the mere writing of posts to the forum, as seen in similar research carried out by Stommel and Koole (2010).

Nonetheless, and before embarking on the exposition of less tangible ideas related to processes related to the curation of online identity and the construction of online communities, it seems feasible to draw attention to some of the most relevant features of communication in these online environments from a more formal point of view.¹⁹ First of all, mostly due to the anonymised identity that many users of online forums take advantage of, communication in forums tends to benefit from evident openness (Landqvist, 2016). As observed in studies exploring digital media and discourse, this triggers a phenomenon known as 'benign disinhibition' (Suler, 2005) which quite understandably results in uninhibited language (Crystal, 2011). As a matter of fact, it is the ability to explore naturally-occurring language employed in such spontaneous circumstances which many language-driven researchers recognise as one of the most valuable aspects of these communicative online arenas. Quite relatedly, the possibility offered by online forums to select certain aspects of your identity and put them at work is what has led many scholars analysing the discourse of forums to highlight the constructivist nature of this type of interaction, which is at the end of the day constructed by participants of a particular forum (or thread therein). As effectively pointed out by Bolander and Locher (2014: 16),

¹⁹ Please note that a more specific discourse-driven analysis of the forum explored in this dissertation is provided in Chapter 5 below, where many of the specificities of the collected corpus are presented.

“notions of emergency and performativity are increasingly emphasised, especially in connection with an epistemological shift towards social constructivist understandings of language use and practice”.

In a similar vein, the manner in which online forum are articulated most of the times does have an impact on other formal features of forum discourse. In short, one participant submits a post (in many cases embedded within the many different sub-communities the same forum may have) and other users engage in the mutual and collaborative creation of a discussion thread. Communication is therefore asynchronous in the sense that responses to the same written post can happen uncontrollably, and the resulting interaction is in most cases on the rampage (Landqvist, 2016). The ongoing and even overlapping character of these communicative exchanges has become one of the most explored phenomena in online talk, since it is in fact complex to accurately mark beginning and final parts of turn taking (what Herring (1999) identifies as ‘disrupted turn adjacency’) or similar phenomena that is more easily identified in oral contexts (such as the notion of conversational floor). Not surprisingly, this need for revisiting core concepts in conversation analysis has come to be a central research aim for conversation analysts (Paulus et al., 2016), since communicative contexts such as forums do foster what has been called “alternative perception[s] of cohesion” (Simpson, 2005).

The previous two factors (i.e., the ability that users have to choose what they display and this type of asynchronous interaction) can be seen to have an influence on another formal feature of this sort of discourse: style. As widely explored by Androutsopoulos (2006; 2007), styling tendencies in informal discussion threads online are generally non-institutional and vernacular. Thus, it is not difficult to find an abundance of somewhat unplanned, spontaneous and dialogical forms which seem to foster interaction among users who are willing to engage in continuous exchange. Even more interestingly, as also noted by Androutsopoulos (2014), style conventions are in many cases negotiated not only in order to respect their relevance for a given discussion but also as an invitation for further interaction.

A last relevant feature of discourse used in online forums worth highlighting here is related to the public character that many of them possess. As argued by Zhao et al. (2008), the fact that most forums are open to the public (be it a wider audience or a

specific, forum-related one) presupposes that an unexpected number of people may have the opportunity to respond to submitted posts in one way or another. According to similar research (Landqvist, 2016), this has an impact on how discursive self-presentation is realised in these contexts, which is achieved through stories, reports, explicit views and a greater emphasis on group identities rather than on personal reports. Likewise, research on Internet-based interaction is gradually demonstrating that digital environments such as online discussions forums have a pivotal role for self-presentation purposes (Seargant & Tagg, 2014), since individuals there “make deliberate choices to communicate their beliefs, establish their cultural knowledge, validate their authenticity, and construct social identities” (Jacknick & Avni, 2017: 54).

This role of self-presentation discourse in the process that underpins the construction of social identities online can be used to explore the connections between language and social identity issues in DMC contexts in general and in forums in particular. Broadly speaking, this connection was addressed by Panyametheekul and Herring taking gender as the starting point. In fact, they claimed to observe “systematic differences in the participation patterns and discourse styles of males and females” (2003: 6), especially in asynchronous DMC (mostly forums). This led these researchers to argue that gender asymmetry and dominance was still persistent in online communicative practices, despite broad assumptions of the egalitarian role that Internet could potentially have on digital self-(re)presentation. Nonetheless, findings in this line are not always confirmed by similar research. Influenced by studies that proved a rather weak link between gender and the discourse of online self-presentation (Rodino, 1997; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Del Teso-Craviotto, 2006), some other researchers have advocated treating social identities as categories that are performatively constructed in discourse (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Quite unavoidably, as hinted at the section above, attention needs to be paid to understanding the role of performativity in the creation process of online identities. Owing to the character of this research, special emphasis is put on how discourse plays a crucial role here. The notion of performativity and its connection to identities unmistakably resonates the work of Judith Butler. It is clear that engaging with Butler’s deep insights into identity issues would be beyond this already-

multidisciplinary research.²⁰ However, more recent and really interesting approximations to understanding the relationship between social media, DMC and identity have been offered by Cover (2012; 2015). In essence, he very clearly explains the reasons why a Butlerian approach to performative identity can be helpful to comprehend many issues behind the creation and communication of the online self. In Cover's views, digital technologies (and media in general) and the use of social networking sites are not but "performative acts of identity which actively constitute the user" (2015: 2). Far from accepting the assumption that defends the existence of a fixed identity that is expressed or represented via the engagement in online activities in more or less truthful ways, Cover advocates that identities and online communication practices in our daily lives are knitted in interwoven and co-creative ways. More specifically, he argues that

it is possible to show that social networking activities and behaviours are both a means by which subjectivity can be performed and stabilised and, simultaneously, made more complex and conflicting [since] social networking is not a singular activity but a set of interrelated - sometimes incompatible - interactivities which include identity performances through profile management, friending [or unfriending], linking fan pages, tagging, being tagged, updating statuses, having responses given by others to one's own status, etc. (Cover, 2015: 2-3)

Consequently, Cover equates online social networking to another real-life act, since both constitute a sense of self and identity and both are similarly performed. Based on central research along these lines (body, 2008), Cover identifies at least two ways in which the online performance of identity is articulated in social networking. First, he highlights the options users have to modify their own online profiles, which very graphically endorses constructivist visions on identity. In fact, most users of online social media are likely to be aware of the many options they can deliberately choose from particular categories through which their identity can be performed (Cover, 2015). Second, he foregrounds how users can refine and manipulate their own profiles by engaging in certain digital practices they are afforded in many social networking sites, such as updating their statuses, uploading photos, sending messages, tagging and/or untagging friends from a tailor-made selection of online friends, etc.

²⁰ Readers who are interested can always check Butler's most salient contributions to these ideas (Butler, 1990; 1993).

Despite its general suitability to approach the process of online identity creation, there are several remarks that are worth recalling here. The first remark deals with the extent to which the building of online identity responds to an act of creation or to the process of curation. By the former, we may infer the action of bringing something into existence (OED, 2018) whereas the latter can be roughly defined as the selection or organisation of certain items (normally in a collection or exhibition) (OED, 2018). To put it differently, an interesting discussion around the process underlying the formation of online identities may be worded as follows: are online users creating a new (online) identity or are they curating certain items of their offline self and transferring them to online realms?

Although an in-depth debate would be again outside the actual scope of this research, several arguments are worth pondering on here. According to some voices, we are now living in the age of curation (Buskirk, 2010). Far from engaging in etymological details, the most widespread meaning of the term 'curation' is generally associated with art galleries and museums. In this sense, curation is understood as the medium through which the communication between the art and its audience takes place (Synder, 2015). Similarly, as an example, an art gallery curator has the role to select, organise, and take care of a given exhibition with a more active part within the production of art (O'Neill, 2007). Not surprisingly, many scholarly voices have established a correlation between the curation of an exhibition and the process of portraying one's identity online.²¹ Similarly to what a curator does in an exhibition of a museum, online users make use of the Web 2.0 technologies "to create, organise, interpret and share pictures, video, music and opinions [so] they "curate" stuff by engaging in the social practice of content curation, often now referred to as "social curation" (Synder, 2015: 215). For some, understanding social curation as any other social activity is reinforced by the communicative interactions between two or more individuals that it entails (Synder, 2015) and also because it encourages the gathering of stories, sharing expertise and creating meaning within a community (Schlatter, 2010). Hence, it is unproblematic to affirm that curation is gradually becoming a significant social practice in online environments insofar as

²¹ In fact, interesting connections can be drawn here between these notions and the issues concerning performativity described in previous paragraphs.

they have a very influential role in the ways technological beings (as most of us are becoming to a greater or lesser extent) receive, process and understand the world around us. In fact, as most online users can generally (and quite resignedly) recognise, Internet algorithms have their own personalised biases to influence the ways in which Facebook curates our digital context, Spotify curates the music we end up listening to or the online newspapers curate the news we unavoidably click on (Synder, 2015). As a matter of fact, it is this deliberate selection of the content online users are exposed to that leads Synder to claim that “as social practice, curation [...] is always ideological, always rhetorical, often political” (2015: 214).

The second remark to Cover’s arguments concerning the process of online identity construction is precisely related to a notion also included in the previous paragraph. Debatable though as this may be, there seems to be a more frequent association between Web 2.0 technologies and this active process of identity construction. As pointed out in previous paragraphs, the performative development of one’s digital identity seems to be attached to more multi-modal affordances, which are mostly integrated in technological possibilities granted by the interactive Web 2.0 such as profile management, sharing of photographs, videos and multimodal content, etc. To put it differently, and according to these arguments, the process of online identity construction seems to be heavily dependent on a particular set of affordances. Despite the relevance of this assumption, it is worth recalling that online forums (which are the kernel of this research) are predominantly mono-modal and are only capable of offering far more static affordances than many of those mentioned before. With this in mind, then, how is identity work accomplished in these specific digital contexts and by means of what practices?

It is at this point when the role of texts understood as “the fabric in which discourse is manifested” (Talbot, 1998: 24) comes into play, especially because it is via this text-based online interaction that the building of online identity crystallises in forums like those analysed for this study. In fact, and addressing the notion of ‘speech community’ (Patrick, 2001) to pinpoint that online communities are considerably sustained by dense interaction, research on forums and their communicative practices has recently supported the idea that “identity work is interactional in nature” (Jacknick & Avni, 2017: 55) insofar as “participants position themselves and others to bolster their own claims to knowledge and expertise, or to weaken the claims of

others, invoking overlapping and often competing areas of expertise in their self and other-positioning” (Jacknick & Avni, 2017: 55). Despite the static features that users are afforded in most online forums, this identity positioning is precisely facilitated by the anonymity and the disembodied nature that communicating through online forums can effectively grant.

It is indeed interesting that the affordances provided by online forums have fostered the creation of online communities around a plethora of social and/or communicative practices. Certainly, as widely supported by a vast amount of pertinent literature (Nieuwboer et al., 2013; Landqvist, 2016; Limatius, 2016; Greiner et al., 2017), a wide range of online forums have been particularly developed around somewhat delicate social, physical and psychological issues. This is of course considerably influenced by online forums users’ willingness to write under the cloak of anonymity hoping to obtain a combination of informative and emotional support in return (Rains et al., 2015). Although more specific details concerning this type of online communities will be briefly dealt with in subsequent paragraphs, it seems convenient now to devote some lines to the idea of online communities *per se*.

Early attempts to comprehend the ways in which online communities work go back to the pioneering definition provided by Rheingold, who sees virtual communities (VCs) as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough *people carry on those public discussions long enough*, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (1993: 5, italics added). As suggested by the italicised wording, one of key factors for one group of people gathering online to become a community relies on continuous interaction among them. Similar remarks have remained in posterior attempts to define a virtual community, highlighting their interactive nature by defining them as “a group of people who interact in a virtual environment” (Preece et al., 2003: 1023). Even more recent versions for this description stress that “the[ir] common feature is ongoing interactions among people over time” (Kraut et al., 2012: 1). Furthermore, some researchers have even identified differentiable language practices that characterise these online communities. Baym’s proposal (2003) considers mostly four (group-specific vocabulary, forms of non-verbal communication, genres and humour). Although these are only four out of the many discourse-driven features that can in fact characterise online communities, Baym’s view is endorsed here in the sense that

certain linguistic features play a crucial role in the building process of a particular online community. As she puts it, users “create and codify group-specific meanings, socially [and *discursively*, I would add] negotiate group-specific identities, form relationships [...] and create norms that serve to organise interaction and to maintain desirable social climates” (Baym, 1998: 62).

Along very similar lines, driven by the attempt to draw effective lines between what makes general online groups turn into virtual communities, Herring (2004) proposed six criteria that could be used to operationalise this divide. These are: (1) active, self-sustaining participation around a core of regular participants; (2) the emergence of roles, rituals, and hierarchies; (3) evidence of shared history, culture, norms and values; (4) self-awareness of the group as an entity that is distinct from other groups; (5) solidarity and support, as evidenced in humour, politeness and reciprocity; and (6) criticism, conflict and the emergence of means of conflict resolution. Although a certain degree of flexibility should be accounted for when applying these six criteria, these are valid indicators to investigate to what extent an online gathering of users suitably fits in general understandings of virtual community. This ductility is in fact observed in the more recent functionalities associated to online communities. Some believe that VCs serve a very similar range of purposes that offline groups, networks and communities serve (Kraut et al., 2012), to the extent of understanding online communities as “*any* virtual space where people come together with others to converse, exchange information or other resources, play, learn, or just be with each other” (Kraut et al., 2012: 1, italics added).

In fact, the attempt to provide a clear differentiation between online and offline communities can be said to warrant a vivid discussion in related literature. Perhaps influenced by the relatively scarce development of online communities back then (especially if this is compared with the current scenario), some research around the 2000s pointed out that Internet-based communities could not qualify as communities in the more traditional sociological sense due to, *inter alia*, the lack of physical proximity, weak membership connections and a paucity of long-term commitment (Jones, 1998; Kavanaugh et al., 2005). In contrast to this, and following a similar pattern when the mere nature of digitally-mediated communication was being discussed, another trend recommended to refrain from trying to comprehend online communities through the dynamics that characterise communities offline. As Castells

points out, virtual communities “are not unreal [but, rather,] they work in a different plane of reality” (2000: 389). The many possible ways in which this difference works has been applied to interactional positing, for instance. Thus, a vast amount of research has accepted that both online and offline environments can be used by individuals to assert identity, authority, knowledge and/or power (Jacknick & Avni, 2017). To put it differently, as Burkhalter finds out, “racial identity is no more ambiguous online than offline” (2003: 62), mostly because the engaging of individuals positioning themselves and others with regard to their words and texts is as relevant in digital discourses as in face-to-face interaction (Jacknick & Avni, 2017).

This does not mean however that online communities are to be studied in isolation from offline contexts. Although the boundaries between the offline and the online limits are becoming more and more blurred as digital (communicative) practices evolve, the offline/online divide is not mature enough to be abandoned yet. To this end Giles et al.’s arguments (2015) are endorsed when trying to justify this point. On the one hand, they presume that the online/offline distinction successfully manages to cater for the interesting phenomena taking place at the more micro-level of interaction, which are being progressively overshadowed by the effects of ‘big data’ in communication-driven research. On the other hand, they come to the conclusion that a great deal of online activity nowadays is very unlikely to be practiced in offline realms. In fact, the way in which online interaction occurs is obviously restricted to online realms. Apart from this, many of these online communities take advantage of many of the affordances mentioned before and turn them into essential parts of the communicative exchanges happening therein, which also explains why it is more meaningful to investigate these communities as unavoidably embedded within online environments.

It is at this point when it is deemed appropriate to pay closer attention to these stigmatised communities that are likely to thrive in the rather safe, anonymous and disembodied environment forged under the auspices of online forums. Recent literature has recognised the multiple benefits that communicating in digital environments has for people in vulnerable positions (Limatius, 2016), which may be underpinned by several reasons. First, it should be taken into account that only the act of writing itself has been commonly associated with many benefits for people in

crisis or experiencing a hard time, namely as means of therapy, as a way to obtain support, useful information or as engaging in the exchange of advice (Sanford, 2010; Rains & Keating, 2015). As it is the case in many other communicative practices, online environments have fostered the development of sites that target users communicating around a wide range of physical and psychological conditions (Nieuwboer et al., 2013; Greiner et al., 2017). Apart from the technological affordances suggested elsewhere, it has also been reported that this type of online communities resembles the so-called 'recovery model'²² in several ways, especially in the empowering effect it has on its users or its reliance on peer support mostly based on the exchange of experiential knowledge (Greiner et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, research has recognised an important number of advantages that online self-help groups can benefit from. These go from a general improvement in users' quality of life (offline), reduction of stress levels, strengthened decision making and increased self-determination (Coulson, 2005; Lee & Lin, 2016). Nonetheless, Beaunoyer et al. (2017) have identified the most salient drawbacks of type of communities: the rather uncontrolled, poorly-moderated character of these communicative exchanges which can, in turn, lead to the spread to harmful and stressful information.

More specifically, the role that interaction plays in these online communities for a has also been examined. The potential of interaction in digital environments for performative purposes among users of traditionally marginalised communities has been explored, for instance, in the light of an Israeli LGBTQ group (Marciano, 2014). In particular, transgender users relied on online interaction to go through some experiences virtually before enacting them in offline settings, to the extent of using their (discursively-created) online world to envisage identities which were not plausible offline (Marciano, 2014: 830). This interactive co-construction of a virtual, secure space is also seen in a community integrated by visually-impaired adults, who engaged in a process of sharing thoughts and emotions when presenting their problems and receiving support (Kupferberg & Hess, 2013). Quite relatedly, some other studies have highlighted the importance that discourse has in the creation of

²² The 'recovery model' is gaining special prominence in disciplines concerning mental health. In short, as pointed out by Frese et al. (2001: 1463), it entails "a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles". In this approach, "recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness". Furthermore, "the recovery model stresses the importance of phenomenological, subjective experiences and autonomous rights of persons who are in recovery"

in-group online identities. In this line, previous research has found out how labels that can have pejorative connotations for a given community offline are turned into a positive resource online as a mark of mutual, in-group peer recognition (Vaisman, 2011, Yeshua-Katz, 2015). Furthermore, related studies have managed to prove that certain discursive features can be used to “apply for community membership” (Stommel, 2008: 145) and/or maintain the feeling of belongingness to a particular community online (Limatius, 2016).

Despite the gradual efforts to study online communities of this sort, there seems to be general agreement when claiming that a relatively little amount of research has focused on how support and help is offered (and communicated) among users in these groups (Greiner et al., 2017). In fact, as Landqvist (2016: 98) affirms, “it is unclear precisely how support is expressed, what it consists of and what makes it fulfilling”. Some recent attempts seem keen on applying the somewhat stale, gender binary-driven approach to point out the male versus female discursive differences in the expression of online support (Hayat et al., 2017). Not strikingly, women’s more cooperative and supportive discourse is thought to prevail also online, in comparison with men’s assertive and dominant trends. Fortunately, some other studies seek to get further insights into the actual mechanisms underlying the process of rapport and knowledge construction in online communication. In fact, based on the interaction of a Swedish social network site, Landqvist (2016: 104) suggests that online support is accomplished by “framing knowledge within personal experience”, since “the sharing of knowledge establishes rapport among participants who may find their match in the forum, be it a pal to laugh together with or someone who always has something encouraging to say”. Therefore, support is achieved because “knowledge is rather made relevant from expressed needs and negotiated in a context of community and concern for others” (Landqvist, 2016: 104), and it is in fact no coincidence that there is little room for expert voices boosting the feeling of superiority among users. As a result, dialogic cooperative evaluations and positions are seen to play a crucial in the expression of epistemic stance, and there seems to be a correlation between a more supportive style in the ways of expression with a steadier development of online community building (Landqvist, 2016).

Interesting though as these findings may appear, there is still much work needed along these lines. This is not surprising if the fact the studies of this sort represent a

rather recent trend in the somewhat uncharted range of research-wise possibilities offered by digitally-mediated communication. To this end, the next section offers a succinct overview of some of the stages that DMC has witnessed from its outset to current dates.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has sought to give a somewhat holistic approach of the practice context in which the discourse analysed in this research is embedded. This is of great relevance considering that, as argued throughout the section, the type of language this study is concerned about is to a great extent a consequence of the multiple contextual factors playing a role in digitally-mediated communication (DMC) and, quite unavoidably, in online discourse itself. To this end, an initial section has discussed key issues linked to DMC as the discipline within linguistics that has paid greater attention to the study of online discourse and communication. Additionally, emphasis has also been paid to some of the affordances that many online media share, which brings about many opportunities, controversies and challenges for discourse-driven research. Given its relevance for this particular study, another section has dwelled upon the fascinating process underlying the construction of online curated identities and the formation of communities in digital environments. Special attention has been paid to try to comprehend how and why online forums have become so central for communities at rather vulnerable positions. This chapter has concluded by outlining past and current trends that have broadly informed research in DMC, as well as by highlighting crucial considerations to take into account in future research. Having provided the most outstanding details of the discourse practice context, the next chapter will consider the specific features that characterise the more purely-linguistic framework this dissertation is built upon.

CHAPTER 4 | DISCOURSE(S) AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDIES (CDS)

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters provided a theoretical framework for a better understanding of IPV as the social phenomenon this research looks at in digitally-mediated communicative contexts. In a similar vein, this chapter moves on to offering key concepts concerning the views on discourse(s) and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) that inform this thesis. Starting from an explanation of core notions such as *text* or *discourse*, this chapter then concentrates on clarifying important concepts for Critical Discourse Studies. Likewise, the major current approaches to CDS are outlined. Criticism levelled at CDS is also identified here. To conclude, given its relevance within this research, special attention is paid to the socio-cognitive approach to CDS.

4.2 Understanding and conceptualising core concepts in CDS: text, genre, discourse(s)

Although a profound discussion around the many notions which are of relevance to the understanding of *discourse* would be out of the scope of this thesis, it may be convenient to briefly draw on some core ideas that need to be taken into account before proceeding. Back to when critical linguistics started to forge, Hodge and Kress (1988) made a distinction between *message*, *text* and *discourse* from a socio-semiotic perspective. Whereas they identified *message* as the smallest semiotic form to which “a source and a goal, a social context and a purpose” (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 5) are associated, *texts* and *discourses* are larger units. On the one hand, text is understood as “a structure of messages or message traces which has a socially ascribed unity” (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 5), emphasising its dynamic character within a social system to the extent that texts are seen as “both the material realisation of systems of signs, and also the site where change continually takes place” (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 5-6). To put it differently, and according to more recent voices, texts work as “the fabric in which discourse is manifested” (Talbot, 1998: 24). In a similar vein to Talbot’s idea, Hodge and Kress themselves see discourse as “the social process in which texts are embedded” (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 5-6).

Though less-widely addressed in Hodge and Kress's contribution, another key notion that foregrounds the sociality of language is that of *genre*. Its centrality for all areas of linguistics was already adumbrated by Bakhtin (1986), who could soon recognise that concrete utterances (written and oral) and the diversity of generic forms of them are always associated with various spheres of human activity and communication. Additionally, Bakhtin (1986) stressed the importance of having a clear idea of the nature of various speech genres for research in any special area. Thus, it is possible to understand *genre* as a type of communicative event to which multiple features can be ascribed, from the foregrounding of specific relations between discourse participants to the fulfilment of specific communicative purposes. In fact, Berkenkotter and Hucking (1995) identified five principles that usually correspond with the idea of *genre*. In their view, genres are (1) dynamic, since they are always changing and developing; (2) situated and embedded within communicative practices; (3) recognised for formal and content pointers, which explains why users interacting within a given genre can perceive structural delineations and follow communicative conventions accordingly, (4) structurally dual, given the iterative process in which users of these conventions are simultaneously in charge of reproducing them; and (5) crucial for building community ownership, and, as such, those who belong to the (discursive) community validate the nature of a genre as such and reinforce its conventions. Despite the numerous tensions generated around the communicative behaviour of genres (see Bhatia, 2004: 25), relying on the notion of genre to understand discourse has gained prominence in language related studies. Not surprisingly, several trends have recognised the usefulness that the study of genre has for discourse, *inter alia*, as typified rhetorical and social action (Miller, 1984), as goal-oriented social process (Martin, 1985) or as conventionalised communicative events associated with communities of practices (Swales, 1990). Broadly speaking, as Bhatia (2004: 10) puts it, this centrality lies in the relevance genre has for

the investigation of conventionalised or institutionalised genres in the context of specific institutional and disciplinary practices, procedures and cultures in order to understand how members of specific discourse communities construct, interpret and use these genres to achieve their community goals and why they write them the way they do.

As may be clear from these early definitions, there is an obvious and gradual prominence towards the social component of language that was being partly transferred from social theories by Foucault (1978) or Habermas (1987). In short, language was no longer conceived as a system but also as the archive that is capable of fostering social construction and social action. This paradigm is central for the sort of work in linguistics that started to be developed from then onwards, crystallising in equating discourse to a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1992), an understanding upon which this research is built. As a matter of fact, the term 'discourse' is generally used within (critical) discourse analysis in two broad ways (Pennycook, 2001; Paltridge, 2006; Fairclough, 2010; Koller, 2012). On the one hand, discourse is employed as an abstract noun to refer to language in use as a social practice. In this sense, it is common to find the use of this term as a pre-modifier that may hint at either "the historical context or the social realm in which the discourse under investigation is enacted" (Koller, 2012: 21), paying special attention to larger instances of discourse such as paragraphs, utterances or whole texts that characterise this type of discourse. This understanding of *discourse* can be exemplified in 'marketing discourse', for example. On the other hand, discourse is also generally used as a countable noun. According to Fairclough, this reflects the practice of not just representing the world, but of signifying it, this is, "constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (1992: 64). Using discourse in this sense –or *Discourse*, as later proposed by Gee (1996; 2004), enables the indication of stance, topic, locality, producer or channel of distribution (Koller, 2012), *inter alia*, as illustrated in 'discourses on immigration in 19th century Spanish newspapers'.

This research conceptualises discourse as a form of social practice and as the "sort of language used to construct [*or represent*] some aspect of reality from a particular perspective" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999: 63, italics added). Defining discourse as social practice has several implications. First, it acknowledges "a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it" (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997: 258). Second, it assumes that discourse constitutes social and cultural contexts and that these are constituted by it (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997: 258). This dialectical relationship places a very strong (and understandably obvious) emphasis on the many contextual factors of discourse, which explains the reasons why there is general consensus in the need to "unpack [*discourse*] with reference to different dimensions of context (linguistic,

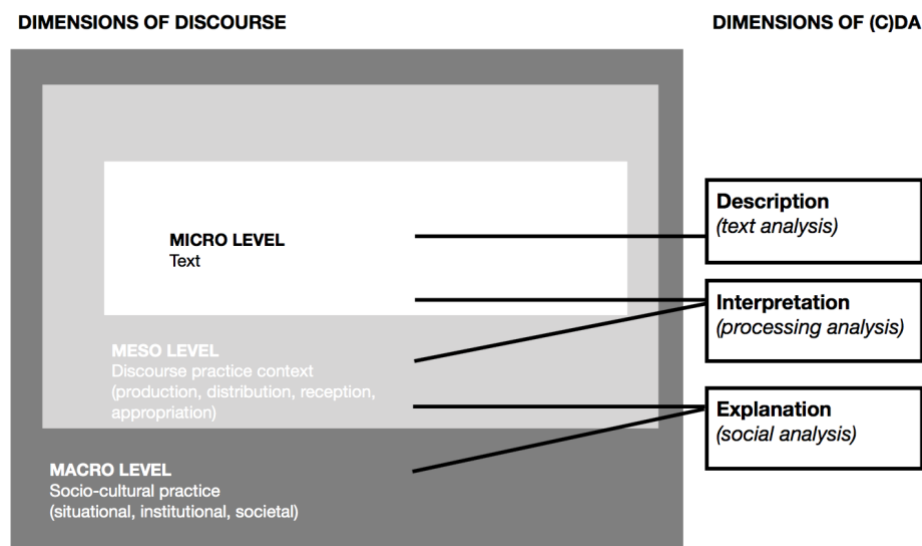
intertextual, historical, social and situational)” (Hart & Cap, 2014: 1). Given this contextual ‘dialogicality’ (Bakhtin, 1986), it is worth taking into account van Leeuwen’s understanding of discourse as a representation of (re)contextualised social practices (van Leeuwen, 2008), since these representations relate to something that already exists. In fact, based again on the Foucauldian assumption that discourses do not merely involve a field of objects (Foucault, 1978), van Leeuwen defends the idea that discourses are not only representations of recontextualised social practices (van Leeuwen, 2008) but also evaluations and justifications of them. This idea reinforces the constitutive role of discourse as a “potential and arguably actual agent of social construction” (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002: 13).

This role of discourse as an actual agent of social construction is also a very central tenet in this research. Scholars within CDS go beyond the association between discourses and ‘mere’ ideas. Rather, discourses are conceptualised as societal means of production insofar as they produce subjects and reality via intervening active subjects in their social contexts as co-producers and co-agents of discourses (Jäger & Maier, 2009). Discourses then have the potential to guide both the individual and the collective creation of reality by means of a very interesting process (Jäger & Maier, 2009). First, discourses are capable of constituting individual and collective subjects by creating individual and mass consciousness. This consciousness then manages to fuel human action through many possible materialisations, which explains why discourse can in fact determine (human) action. For this to be accomplished, it is true though that the concept of *power* is also relevant. Although its relevance for CDS will be further explored in the next section, the Foucauldian sense of power seems relevant at this point. If power is to be understood as “a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, that seem capable of inducing behaviours or discourses” (Foucault, 1996: 394), it comes as no surprise to accept the idea that those in power,²³ by means of discourse, “have the ability to institutionalise and regulate ways of talking, thinking and acting” (Jäger & Maier, 2009: 35).

²³ Note here that by “those in power” I am referring to those social groups that have been traditionally conceived as powerful and whose beliefs have been usually privileged. Some of them are, but not limited to, white, heterosexual, bourgeois and religiously-mainstream men.

At this point, and very likely owing to the allegedly-powerful effects of discourse described above, readers may be wondering about the mechanisms by means of which discourse can possibly have such an impact on salient social issues around us. The link between the linguistic and social aspects of discourse was originally posited by Fairclough (1989: 25) through the three-dimensional conceptualisation of discourse which is reproduced in Figure 12 below. On the one hand, he framed discourse as constituted by three levels: text, discourse practice and social practice, which relate to the micro-, meso- and macro-level correspondingly. On the other hand, Fairclough also proposed three different dimensions of (critical) discourse analysis. This three-step model has been generally adopted by many CDS scholars when taking a critical discourse analysis approach to the analysis of texts.

Figure 12 | Dimensions of discourse and dimensions of (C)DA. Adapted from Fairclough (1989)



Regardless of the multiple approaches to the analysis of discourse, Fairclough's three-dimensional conceptualisation of it still remains widely valid. This is partly because, as van Dijk suggests (2009), the exploration of social structures for CDS scholars necessarily requires an analysis of both micro (local) and macro (global) structures of society. To put it differently, not only does CDS pay attention to individual social actors (and their situated interactions) but also to institutions, organisations, movements, social groups and the many possible relations between them (among which power and domination are likely to be). Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that CDS scholars are generally less interested in scrutinising specific discourses produced by independent social actors and their (usually isolated)

interactions. Rather, there is a tendency to concentrate on how specific discourses may represent instances of more general discourse properties such as the formation of biased models and stereotypes which may ultimately lead to the creation, distribution and reproduction of certain types of ideologies underpinning social inequalities.

Thus, these three dimensions of society (the micro, the meso and the macro) and their corresponding levels of analysis are multiply integrated in CDS research. As further explained in the forthcoming sections, CDS scholars are mainly driven by certain social phenomena (especially those bringing about social imbalances) that can be seen as embedded in the macro-social level of society and which tend to be finely-engrained in abstract structures. Nonetheless, CDS research is particularly suitable for tracing how these more general social practices crystallise in more tangible, linguistic ways. This is why discourse analysts focus on material instances of text and talk, which are understood as typical micro productions of a more macro dimension. In other words, as van Dijk puts it, “it is generally assumed that society and its structures –as well as its structures of inequality–, are ‘locally’ produced by its members” (2009: 80).

Although there is a general agreement among CDS scholars to accept this dialogicality between the three levels, there is an interesting bulk of discussion questioning how this interaction is made possible. One of the most established attempts to explain this bridge is that proposed by the socio-cognitive approach to CDS, of which van Dijk is one of its most representative scholars (van Dijk 2009, 2014a, 2014b). In his view, the connection between these three levels is triggered by the social representations (namely knowledge and ideologies) that are shared by members of any given community. Although this is the main perspective informing this research, as will be further elaborated in Section 4.6 below, it is worth emphasising that most CDS research understands this micro-macro distinction as an analytic construct. As a matter of fact, social members of any community are thought to experience and interpret such structures synchronously in their daily communicative practices. Quite relatedly, as Koller points out (2008), it should be also mentioned that this three-dimensional conceptualisation of discourse also influences the analysis of discourse *per se*. Hence, CDS researchers’ *modus*

operandi may start focusing on the micro-level by paying close attention to linguistic units and linking them to the macro-level of discourse eventually or *vice versa*.

This section has attempted to provide a general summary of the core concepts underpinning this research and research within the field of CDS more broadly. On the one hand, it has sought to explain how the three-dimensional conceptualisation of discourse and its micro-, meso-, and macro- layers can help understand the ways in which any text is recursively connected to social practices, which is precisely what allows CDS researchers to make claims about the socio-cultural traits reproduced in one specific text. On the other hand, and most importantly, this section has emphasised the view of CDS as textually-mediated social action. As argued by Koller (2009), CDS researchers assume that text and discourses have actual material impacts, which may range from an unfair distribution of wealth to physical violence against objects and people, which is partly what justifies the exploration of Intimate Partner Violence from a CDS approach. Having presented these central conceptualisations, next section further elaborates on this connection between IPV and CDS by dwelling on core ideas that designate CDS as one of the most appropriate fields of knowledge to investigate social inequalities from a language point of view.

4.3 CDS and the investigation of social inequalities: the critical unveiling of power abuse in language

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), also commonly known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), began to develop as a field in the late 1970s and has become a central approach in today's social and human sciences.²⁴ As the wording may suggest, there is some discussion when deciding which of the previous labels is to be used to refer to this field of research. According to van Dijk (2009), the use of CDS emphasises the generally-accepted assumption that CDS goes beyond the (critical) analysis of language but also entails engaging with both critical theory and critical applications. In addition, the use of the term 'analysis' in CDA may underpin one of the most common misconceptions within this field, which supports the idea that "one can do 'a CDA' of something" (Koller, 2014: 149). In other words, this

²⁴ According to Breeze (2011: 495), "the term Critical Discourse Analysis itself appears to have first been used by Fairclough in an article published in 1985 (Fairclough 1985), but was popularised by the highly influential book *Language and Power* [in] 1989."

gradual shift from 'Analysis' to 'Studies' seeks to claim that CDS is not a method in itself, but a transdisciplinary, text-analytical approach, perspective, position or attitude to critical social research (van Dijk, 2009, Hart & Cap, 2014). Likewise, opting for this label also reinforces the understanding of CDS as a research programme in which a large number of methods sourcing from the human, social and cognitive sciences may be eclectically used and combined for their potential to deal with particular research questions (Hart & Cap, 2014; Koller, 2014). Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that what differentiates critical studies of discourse from other approaches within critical social research is their tendency to be based upon the micro/textual analysis of data in its many possible multimodal manifestations (Hart & Cap, 2014; Koller, 2014). As suggested by the recurrent use of the label in this research so far, it seems clear that I am also inclined to speak of CDS. Apart from endorsing the above-mentioned arguments to justify my terminological inclination, this thesis lies at the intersection of several fields and it combines a set of methods in order to explore the social phenomenon under scrutiny. Moreover, and in line with another key characterisation of CDS (van Dijk, 2009), it is also my socio-political commitment to the better understanding and further application of this research to the study of Intimate Partner Violence that fits best the way I conceptualise my own research contribution.

Interestingly, regardless of the label to be employed, it is worth noticing how the label 'critical' has characterised this approach to linguistic investigation since its very outset, which is in itself a straightforward implication of what lies at the foundations of this research programme. In fact, and far from the frequent misunderstanding that links CDS to the study of negative or exceptionally 'serious' socio-political phenomena (Unger et al., 2016), the relevance of 'critical' in this field has been traditionally associated with the idea of 'critique'.

Not surprisingly, 'critique' as one of the CDS core notions can be already identified amongst those ideas promulgated by the Frankfurt School back in the interwar period (Rasmussen, 1996; van Dijk, 1999; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Far from entering into a grounded explanation around the Frankfurt School, this stream of thinking was vastly influenced by Horkheimer's conception of 'Critical Theory'. It defended that, by means of 'critique', social theory should be oriented towards changing society, a claim that in itself was at odds with traditional theory and the tendency to solely

explain it (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 6). For this to be accomplished, critical theory should ideally apply a rather integrationist approach in the attempt to transform society, which would require the combination of knowledge from all the major social sciences. Thus, as briefly summarised by Wodak and Meyer (2009: 7), critical theories

want to produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection. Thus, they are aimed at producing 'enlightenment and emancipation'. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of elusion. Even with differing concepts of ideology, critical theory seeks to create awareness in agents of their own needs and interests.

Echoes of this approach influenced the 'critical' impetus in the language realm, which fostered the development of Critical Linguistics. Mostly originated at the University of East Anglia (UK), a group of linguists started to investigate the connections between language, language use and the social conditions of that use (see Fowler et al., 1979; Kress and Hodge, 1988). Being critical was thus the attempt of making visible the connectedness of things (Fairclough, 1985), since the use of language was thought to carry ideological means with it and its systematic analysis could therefore serve for unveiling, awareness-raising purposes. From this point onwards, emphasis was placed on the interplay of language and ideology. Critical linguists understood the world as social structures manifesting different ideologies, and their contribution aimed at exploring the ways in which language reflected them. Not by chance, this movement was closely linked to Halliday's (1978) contributions to linguistics, in which the interactional and personal functions of language had a remarkable role and challenged many of the principles of generative, by far less *critical*, formalist understandings of language.

In fact, the critical turn in linguistics developed simultaneously with a more general reaction against formalist paradigms which governed the social sciences mostly in the 1960s (Bimbaum, 1971; Hymes, 1972). Consequently, this boosted the emergence of new (sub-)fields or disciplines to approach social sciences in general and linguistics in particular, examples of which are, *inter alia*, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, or conversation analysis. Although their backgrounds, motivations and methodologies varied, they had a similar discourse-oriented motivation and shared many basic tenets (van Dijk, 2009; Wodak & Meyer,

2009). One of the most primary interests sought to move from the study of abstract language properties exemplified by invented, in many case constrained examples, to investigating the properties of naturally-occurring instances of language and how real language users employed them. Quite unavoidably, this meant the need to incorporate the study of the many contexts around these language users (from socio-cultural to cognitive) and the functions they made of these language instances. The mere mutable nature of these always-changing contexts also triggered an emphasis on dynamic, interactional moves and strategies as manifested in language. These phenomena were hardly observed in isolated words or sentences, which brought about an exploration of linguistics beyond sentence grammar and the focus on new analytical units such as texts, discourses, speech acts or communicative events. Considering these language instances were influenced by textual grammar and use, studies gradually moved to the investigation of macrostructures like (im)politeness, interactional turn-taking or mental models to name just a few. This discourse-oriented paradigm also encouraged the study of non-verbal aspects of multimodal communication, expanding the scope of linguistics to the examination of the (audio)visual mode also.

Despite the remarkable similarities shared by these discourse-oriented disciplines, the main difference between them and CDS is related to the problem-oriented character of the latter. Thus, the motivation for many CDS analysts does not spring from their interest in investigating a set of linguistic units *per se*. Rather, CDS assumes that researching social phenomena is a complex enterprise that necessarily requires a trans-disciplinary, multi-methodical approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Furthermore, a basic and original tenet in CDS was the tendency to look out to the social and political worlds, “seeing language not in itself but as evidence for what is happening across a much wider network” (Breeze, 2011: 496). Endorsing such approaches is optimal for CDS-driven research mostly because the many possible ways in which social phenomena and power are intertwined, a connection I turn to discuss now.

The notion of *power* is central for CDS. Although a detailed account of the many understandings of *power* would go beyond the limits of this dissertation, it is convenient to provide an overall explanation of the different approaches adopted not only within CDS in general but also within this study in particular. Regardless of the

numerous factors that socio-political theories take into account when explaining power, most rely on the Weberian assumption that sees power as “the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others” (Weber, 1980, quoted in Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 9). Additionally, inclined by the work of one of the most theoretical influences within this field, most CDS scholars uphold Foucault’s idea of *power* as “a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, that seem capable of inducing behaviours or discourses” (Foucault, 1996: 394). Power is also regarded as a systemic and constitutive characteristic of society (Foucault, 1978; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and social groups or institutions which seek to impose their will on others (van Dijk, 1999) by fostering social relationships characterised and by promoting an unequal distribution of power and the access to it (Koller, 2009).

Consequently, (social) power is also articulated by means of control (van Dijk, 1999). In this vein, social groups can be said to have more or less power depending on their greater or lesser control over the interests, behaviours, actions and thus the willingness of other groups (van Dijk, 1999). In fact, CDS is particularly concerned with how members belonging to groups in power can be capable of taking power too far by means of dominance. This unavoidably triggers a potential division of social structures in two salient groups: those exerting their dominance by an illegitimate exertion of power (becoming the abusers), and those who see how their interests, behaviours and actions are violated against general ethical standards such as agreements, laws, or human rights (the abused). CDS researchers are thus interested in “the way discourse (re)produces social domination, that is, the power abuse of one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist such abuse” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 9). As may be noted, the different mechanisms that social groups employ to deal with power are of particular importance for CDS. This justifies the inclination among CDS linguists to investigate the global textual features as represented in discourse and not only the individual resources or the specifics of single-exchange communicative situations (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Although the connection between CDS and power now seems clarified, further elaboration is necessary when trying to link the notions of language, discourse(s), power, and ideology. In other words, what makes possible the study of power abuse from a language perspective? To this end, it is noteworthy to include Fowler’s

understanding of language and its potential function to “continuously articulate ideology, [and] to insist on systems of belief that legitimate the institutions of power” (1991: 64). It should not be disregarded that ideologies are “representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation [...] which may be enacted in ways of interaction [...] and inculcated in ways of being identities” (Fairclough, 2003: 218). Due to the fact that these representations are transmitted linguistically, most CDS analysts thus adhere to Habermas’s understanding of language as “a medium of domination and social force [which] serves to legitimise relations of organised power” (Habermas, 1987: 259).

As argued by Wodak and Meyer, the connectedness between language and related social matters explains how language is entwined in social power. In their own words (2009: 10),

language indexes and expresses power, and is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not necessarily derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term. Language provides a finely articulated vehicle for establishing differences in power in hierarchical social structures.

Within CDS, language is therefore regarded as the medium through which ideological positions linked to power use/abuse are transmitted. This is partly possible due to the understanding of texts a manifestation of social action discussed in the previous section, which at the same time supports Fairclough’s idea that the analysis of texts is an important aspect of ideological analysis and critique (2003: 218). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the mechanisms used to exert power and control by textual terms are often conveyed in very subtle manners, which also clarifies why power traces in texts remain mostly invisible (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). What is more, CDS analysts tend to be less concerned about ideological hints lying on the surface of texts. Rather, CDS shows a greater interest in the unveiling of “more hidden and latent type of everyday beliefs” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 9), which may be disguised by less straightforward linguistic mechanisms such as conceptual metaphors, presuppositions or implicatures, to name just a few.

All in all, this section has sought to justify the suitability of investigating social inequalities, mostly underpinned by the disproportionate use of power, through the lens of CDS. As suggested throughout the paragraphs above, CDS is essentially interested in exploring “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 10) or, to put it differently, CDS aims to critically investigate “social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized [...] by language use” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 10). Nonetheless, despite the general agreement in their motivation research-wise, CDS is characterized by a wide range of approaches that may be used in the analysis of social imbalances, an outline of which is presented in the next section.

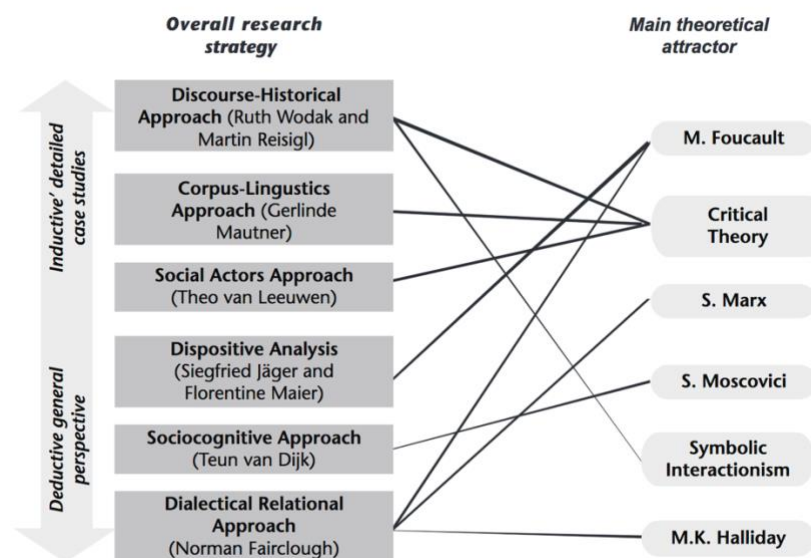
4.4 Common approaches to CDS

As the previous section suggested, CDS is mostly characterised for its tendency to investigate social inequalities as manifested in language. Interestingly though, neither does CDS adhere to one particular line of theoretical assumptions nor does it require a particular set of methodological rules from which to tackle its main objective. In fact, CDS “does not constitute a well-defined empirical methodology but rather a bulk of approaches with theoretical similarities and research questions of specific kinds” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 27). There are numerous approaches within CDS, an issue that has reportedly caused confusion among students and researchers with an interested in CDS (KhosraviNik, 2010). Despite this rich variety, however, there seems to be a general agreement on the basic pre-requisites that a CDS-driven study should incorporate. First, CDS-driven research needs to incorporate the ‘critical’ impetus as an essential part of its motivation (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; KhosraviNik, 2010) which is, in short, the traditional dividing line between DA and CDA. Second, there needs to be a focus on the discursive element as the main data source. In other words, claims within CDS have to be based on textual evidence, only to be attained by means of detailed semiotic analysis (linguistic, visual, multimodal, etc.) (KhosraviNik, 2010; Koller, 2014).

Notwithstanding this apparent openness in both theoretical and methodological terms, most of the attempts to map the common approaches within CDS have stemmed from the different methodological considerations prevailing in each of these

approaches and the theoretical assumptions they are built upon (Hart & Cap, 2014). To date, one of the most established outlines to present the most common approaches within CDS is that suggested by Ruth Wodak (Wodak & Meyer; 2009; Wodak, 2013), an undisputed reference for the creation and subsequent development of the field. As illustrated by Figure 13 below, Wodak and Meyer (2009) distinguish six main approaches in CDS on the basis of two tenets. On the one hand, they are arranged following their overall research strategy, listed from those taking a more inductive orientation (and thus linguistically detailed, focusing on the meso-level of discourse and relying on generous collection of data) to those which are reportedly more deductive, proposing “a closed theoretical framework” and higher likelihood to “illustrate their assumptions with few examples which seem to fit their claims” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 19). On the other hand, this classification is based upon the main theoretical attractor informing each of the six approaches.

Figure 13 | Common approaches within CDS (from Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Wodak, 2013)



Far from a mere graphic illustration of these common approaches, most of them are correspondingly elaborated in Wodak and Meyer’s popular volume edited in 2009. Given the widespread character of this reference work, and also due to the nature of this dissertation, details of each of these approaches will not be here supplied (but see Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 25-27). However, it seems necessary to engage with some of the criticism this taxonomy has faced in more recent seminal approaches to CDS, which align more adequately with the theoretical understandings of the field supporting this research.

Echoing Hart and Cap's words (2014), one of the most salient shortcomings of this taxonomy has to do with its failure to recognise the interconnectedness of these perspectives. By following the diagram included in Figure 13 above, one may presume a greater lack of connectedness among the many theoretical influences informing each of the above-mentioned research strategies. As an example of this rather disconnected representation, Hart and Cap (2014) dwell on how the Social Actors Approach (van Leeuwen, 1996; 2008) importantly contributes to the Discourse-Historical Approach especially by means of the referential strategies, widely employed in studies allegedly adhering the DHA approach. Likewise, the Social Actors Approach openly draws on Hallidayan perspectives of systemic functional grammar to elaborate its socio-semantic inventory of categories (van Leeuwen, 1996), a link that is again missing if Wodak and Meyer's proposal is borne in mind. As a matter of fact, the somewhat static representation of the different approaches within CDS as illustrated above is at odds with the trend followed by recent contributions to this field of study, always keen on celebrating the dynamicity that results from blending social and linguistics theories with a very fluid stance towards the methodologies to be employed in a given research scenario (KhosraviNik, 2010; Koller, 2012; Hart & Cap, 2014; Baker & McEneaney, 2015).

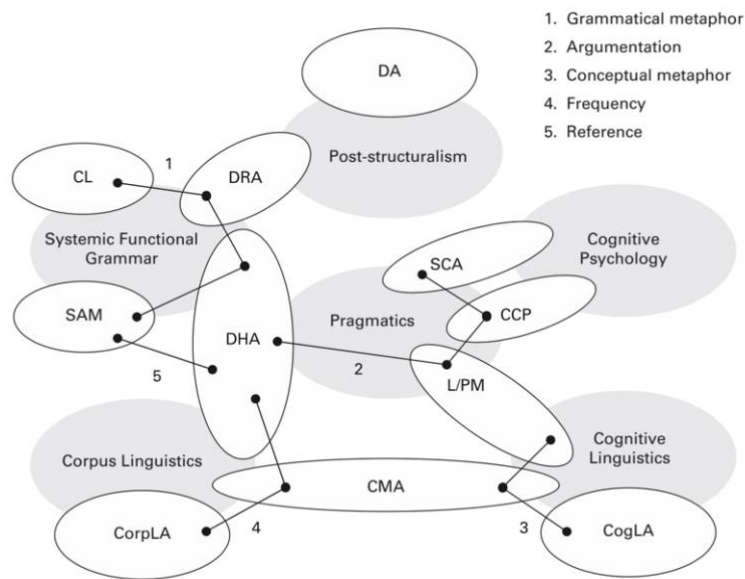
In addition to this, as defended by Hart and Cap (2014), a major controversy in this widespread representation of the common approaches within CDS is related to the need for widening the scope of perspectives that mirror the research trends across the discipline more accurately. In this line, one of the most salient claims in Hart and Cap's introductory section (2014) concentrates on adding more relevance to the role of Corpus Linguistics (CL) in contemporary CDS. After warning of the rather minor acknowledgment given to CL in Wodak and Meyer's proposal (2009), Hart and Cap (2014) recognise the significant development that CL has brought about in CDS by means of its own analytical techniques. As argued by the authors, a CL approach goes beyond the 'problem solving' role it has traditionally received when trying to face strong criticism usually ascribed to CDS, namely concerning bias and representativeness in data selection and the statistical significance of findings (Stubbs, 1997; Widdowson, 2004). Rather, the combination of CL and CDS should be seen as a great methodological synergy to reveal ideological traits in texts under scrutiny that would otherwise go unnoticed (Baker, 2006). Furthermore, CL has

proven to be of sheer utility when handling the many discursive manifestations in a digital format that undoubtedly characterise the ‘information age’ (Hart & Cap, 2014).

Apart from demanding a greater recognition of CL within CDS, Hart and Cap (2014) also identify four additional approaches that have gained greater prominence in recent developments of the field. They manage to identify “at least four contemporary [and] increasingly influential paradigms” (Hart & Cap, 2014: 5), which are briefly presented here due to their connection to this research, especially the first two. The first is *Critical metaphor studies*, with Charteris-Black (2004), Koller (2004) and Musolff (2004, 2010) as key representatives. In short, this approach relies on the importance that metaphorical accounts in discourse have when revealing ideological traces in language, which in turn provides structure and coherence to our experience. Second, the *cognitive linguistic approach* is also emphasised, with Hart (2013) and Marín-Arrese (2011) as main references. Based on cognitive processes that include, *inter alia*, categorisation, modality or *deixis* (and also metaphor), this approach sheds light on how ideological discursive strategies influence the conceptual processes they refer to and *vice versa*.

The third and fourth approaches are the *legitimation-proximation model* and the ‘*Neuchâtel/Fribourg*’ *school of critical cognitive semantics*, with Cap (2013), Chilton (2011), and Maillat and Oswald (2011) as main theoretical references correspondingly. Whereas the former is “more focused on the context-specific functions of a particular conceptual operation (*proximation*) and [its] different forms of realization” (Hart & Cap, 2014: 6), the latter focuses on how “the manipulative facility of language” is only possible due to a sort of cognitive illusion (Hart & Cap, 2014: 6).

In short, as can be inferred from the very brief description provided, what seems clear is that there seems to be a slight shift towards the cognitive component within CDS. As a matter of fact, these approaches coincide in not treating “the ideological, persuasive or manipulative potential of discourse as a property of language itself but of the cognitive processes which language is able to mobilize” (Hart & Cap, 2014: 6). Figure 14 below shows how Hart and Cap (2014) amalgamate and visually conceptualise the most common and contemporary approaches to CDS.

Figure 14 | Contemporary CDS: approaches and methodological attractors (from Hart & Cap, 2014: 7) ²⁵

Although the need to problematise this more recent focus on the cognitive link between ideologies and discourse itself will be addressed in following sections, I believe that Hart and Cap's representation of the more contemporary approaches to CDS is indeed more illustrative of the many possible ways in which CDS scholars engage with their research nowadays. In fact, as shown in Figure 14 above, the different approaches are organised taking into account their micro-level linguistic-analytical attractors, succeeding in depicting a more suitable representation of how central interdisciplinarity is for CDS. The adding of constellation-wise bridges based on potential common objects of analysis may be seen as another strength of this illustration, although room is left for alternative approaches coming from slightly different angles (Hart & Cap, 2014). One of the shortcomings, as indeed acknowledged by the authors (Hart & Cap, 2014) is concerned with the failure to account for the multimodal approach to CDS, a trend that is gradually gaining attention insofar as discourse is nowadays expressed in a complex array of integrated semiotic modes. Although the authors suggest that multimodality is best described as a *perspective* that might be potentially assumed within the approaches illustrated in the diagram (Hart & Cap, 2014: 11), I would still argue that both the nature and the peculiarities of multimodal data, together with the implications when

²⁵ CL: Critical Linguistics; DRA: Dialectical-relational approach; DA: Dispositive analysis; SAM: Social actor model; DHA: Discourse-historical approach; SCA: Socio-cognitive approach; CCP: Critical cognitive pragmatics; L/PM: Legitimization-proximization model; CogLA: Cognitive linguistics approach; CMA: Critical metaphor analysis, CorpLA: Corpus linguistics approach.

analysing it, would leave a significant mark on the way the mere idea of discourse (and hence CDS) is thought of, which would therefore have unavoidable implications on a theoretical level. As a matter of fact, the increasing tendency among language scholars to resort to online communicative contexts (Barton & Lee, 2013), indeed one of the most outstanding arenas for multimodal communication, is a clear indication of how the synergies between multimodality and discourse studies will have to be incorporated in forthcoming attempts to represent similar diagrams in the future.

Regardless of the rather secondary shortcomings, Hart and Cap's more recent insights into the current approaches within CDS manages to successfully represent CDS as an approach made of multiple perspectives which are not conceived as disjointed units. Rather, their understanding of CDS manages to efficiently evoke the many possible cross-fertilisations and fruitful dialogues which, despite their controversial character in some cases, have traditionally fostered discourse-based, multidisciplinary reactions to an always-evolving world. Interestingly however, this eclecticism embodies at the same time a piece of the most salient criticism CDS has had to deal with, a summary of which is discussed in the next section.

4.5 The drawbacks of CDS: major criticism

Given its establishment as one of the most prolific approaches to language studies and its gradual advancement to adopting a fundamental status within applied linguistics, it is not surprising to find considerable criticism against some of the basic tenets underpinning CDS. Quite arguably, Ruth Breeze's article (2011) is one of the most comprehensive and compact guides to understanding the various critiques directed at both CDA/CDS and its practitioners since its very outset. Without engaging in a fine-grained explanation of each of the pitfalls ascribed to CDS, they will be briefly discussed in what follows.

As stated in the closing part of the previous section, many scholars within CDS see this eclectic character as one of the strengths of this approach. However, this somewhat unorthodox stance to doing research is one of the most salient pieces of criticism levelled at CDS. For some, CDS research is not straightforward when showing a preference for a particular social theory (Slembrouck, 2001) and, instead,

resorts to an unsystematic blend of seemingly contradictory ideas about society drawing on a huge array of approaches to politics, sociology, philosophy and language. There seems to be no justification for this theoretical eclecticism other than exploring phenomena associated with late modernity (i.e., consumer capitalism or power abuse through ideological manipulation). As a result, as argued by Hammersley (1997) in a remarkable attempt to question the theoretical foundations of CDA, this heterogeneous origin of the intellectual sources sustaining the CDS programme can be seen as problematic because “[CDA] relies on a naïve sociological model and involves an overambition that undermines sound research” (Hammersley, 1997: 245). Quite relatedly, the very polysemous character of the term “critical” according to several lines of thought (namely Marxism or the Frankfurt School) and the different understanding of this notion are profoundly problematised to the extent that the commitment among CDS scholars to carry out ‘critical’ research is called into question. Using Habermas’s notion of ‘decisionism’, Hammersley (1997) contends that CDA researchers’ contributions are heavily determined by their own particular acts of will rather by the process of deliberation based on the examination of facts and issues. Thus, as rephrased by Breeze (2011: 501), “the whole scholarly project of CDA can be seen as heavily conditioned by political choice, rather than scientific criteria”, a tendency that readers need to take into account when confronted with data interpretation and so forth.

In addition to this fuzziness from a theoretical angle, as put forward by Blommaert and Bulcaen (2004), not all researchers find the open-ended approach toward methodology a strength of the field. Not surprisingly, a great bulk of criticism against CDS has focused on the questionability of the methods employed to pursue its scientific objectives. As generally acknowledged by CDS researchers themselves (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; KhosraviNik, 2010; Hart & Cap, 2014), criticism in this regard has mostly questioned issues related to the bias and representativeness of data under scrutiny as well as the failure to analyse data systematically. To this end, claims made by Widdowson are of particular relevance. In his own words, “[in CDS,] analysis is not the systematic application of a theoretical model, but a rather less rigorous operation, in effect a kind of *ad hoc* bricolage which takes from theory whatever concepts come useful to hand” (Widdowson, 1998: 136). More specifically, Widdowson argues that the exploration of certain grammatical features (such as the passive voice or nominalisations) in any given text is likely to trigger results that go

hand in hand with the ideological connotations that the researcher intuitively feels adequate for her research purposes, facing the risk of ignoring data that could possibly contain evidence in opposite directions. In this vein, the representativeness of analysed datasets has also been notoriously criticised. A classic reference in this regard is Stubbs (1994, 1997), who accuses CDS researchers of providing untenable analyses based on scarce quantitative evidence and driven by rather impressionistic methodological decisions. This evidences again the analytical bias thought to be found in many (namely early) articles with a CDA orientation, which explains why a great portion of scholars have urged to move towards a sounder methodological background in CDS (Swales, 2004; Rogers et al., 2005; Breeze, 2011). From a slightly different angle, some scholarly voices from the field of pragmatics have equally lambasted CDS for not looking at linguistic features at the micro-level and concentrating excessively on the macro-level of discourse, not paying enough attention to the immediate context from which one particular text may spring (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Rogers et al., 2005; Verschueren, 2011). This lack of anchorage brings about a disproportionate focus on decontextualised instances of discourse, which may again lead to rather partisan results (Breeze, 2011).

From the way criticism is presented above, one could possibly think that conducting research taking a CDS approach nowadays is certainly doomed to failure. Therefore, it seems necessary to briefly discuss the many ways in which CDS has managed to face this criticism, incorporating many of these arguments into their praxis to the extent of having a consolidated status within the field of applied linguistics.

As recognised by Breeze herself (2011), a great proportion of criticism addressed at CDS tends to focus on very early stages. In fact, even though Breeze's holistic outline of CDA's many critiques was published in 2011, many of the arguments included therein refer to academic voices raising concerns at the early 90s, when CDA was far from both theoretical and methodological maturity. From the theoretical point of view, CDS scholars have widely admitted that the garnering of different concepts from different theories cannot be seen as a limitation, as it would mean constraining the possibilities of CDA to one particular school of thought or to one specific theory of language and/or society. This is because, as argued by Weiss and Wodak (2002), this theoretical amalgamation works as a tool for CDS researchers to use in any given situation, especially when they are relevant to the social phenomenon under

investigation. This may of course bring about a lack of theoretical depth if these notions are to be assessed by specialists in sociology or politics. Likewise, linguists from different approaches may also feel that linguistic phenomena are dealt with superficially. Nonetheless, it needs to be remembered that, since the very outset, CDS is “not just another approach to language study [...] but [...] an alternative orientation to [it]” (Fairclough, 1989: 10).

As a matter of fact, this thesis is a clear example of how complex the taking of a CDS approach to language study may sometimes be. Given the peculiarities of CDS, one needs to provide a solid explanation of the social phenomenon being investigated. As suggested elsewhere, a CDS exploration of language should also account for the immediate context surrounding the language use under scrutiny, which has of course certain implications. Furthermore, it is also expected that any CDS investigation relies on textual evidence to make claims. As a result, it is sometimes not manageable to provide a thorough linguistic analysis (as thorough as we linguists may even wish for), but the multidisciplinary nature of CDS makes it difficult to ignore contextual details from both the macro- and the meso-level of discourse.

Arguments defending that the whole scholarly project underpinning CDS research lacks scientific rigour could be more pertinent if early instances of CDS research were to be considered. As stated by Hart and Cap (2014), a recent and steady tendency among CDS scholars is to triangulate results by means of different tools that are capable of providing quantitative insights into the language data under exploration. The synergies between CDS and Corpus Linguistics have fruitfully enabled many language researchers to back up their research with solid bases. Although established voices in CDS have warned of the perils to make language-related claims on the mere basis of quantification, which may be understood as a “positivist reduction of the ‘real’ to the ‘actual’” (Fairclough, 2015: 22), the tendency to adopt a mixed-method approach in CDS research is gradually growing. This is not at odds, as far as I am concerned, with the practice among CDS scholars to openly share with their readers the personal beliefs upon which their research is based. Although this has been criticised for being a threat to the scientific validity of the presented results, this ideological transparency can also be interpreted as a very honest attempt to avoid readers reach misleading conclusions and to use the

researcher's explicit beliefs as a guide to assist readers in the process of reaching their own assumptions instead.

Generally speaking, it can be argued that current scholars within CDS have successfully managed, by and large, to deal with critiques levelled at studies within this term (especially at early stages) and incorporate many innovations resulting from this to their own research *praxis*. As a result, CDS is still nowadays a well-established approach that continues to generate very thought-provoking research to the study of language in use. Nonetheless, CDS is still seeking to provide answers to criticism concerning issues that tackle how the connections between any text and its potential readers are generated. As Breeze puts it, "much CDA research proceeds on the basis that there is a simple, one-to-one relationship between the text and its reader, or the discourse and its recipient" (2011: 508).

Unlike some other related areas of inquiry, CDS research has also been severely criticised for not paying enough attention to the connections between text(s), addressor(s) and addressee(s). Drawing on the overt intention CDS analysts have to explore the connectedness between language and ideology, Stubbs claims that "if language and thought are to be related, then one needs data and theory pertinent to both. If we have no independent evidence, but infer beliefs from language use, then the theory is circular" (1997: 106). If CDS researchers are willing to make claims about the ideological processes on people's minds on the basis of what they read or listen to, then it is crucial to consider different sorts of data like non-linguistic evidence that seeks to analyse the cognitive effect of texts. This necessarily requires an ethnographic study of the social framework in which the phenomenon under scrutiny takes place (Stubbs 1997; Bouchard, 2017). Aware of the problems that arise from this controversy, prominent figures in CDS soon admitted the need to combine text analysis with the analysis of production and consumption practices (Fairclough, 1995). However, despite very recent attempts assisted by experimental techniques (Hart 2016, Hart 2017), the investigation of the effects of this missing link is still largely uncharted (Chilton, 2005). The socio-cognitive approach to the study of discourse can be seen as one of the first attempts to explore this bridge. Given its relevance both for the field and for this dissertation itself, some brief considerations will be included in the next section.

4.6 Strengthening ‘the missing link’: the socio-cognitive approach to discourse

As pointed out in Section 4.3 above, the critical impetus in the social sciences contributed to the development of the critical approach to linguistics proposed by, *inter alia*, Fowler et al. (1979) and Kress and Hodge (1979). In a very similar vein, the 80s also meant the forging of Cognitive Linguistics (CL), which also opposed to the traditional understanding of language as expressing meaning via abstract and arbitrary combination of syntactic rules, and approach that had for so long dominated the language sciences. By means of Lakoff and Johnson’s ground-breaking insights published in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), paving the way for equally pioneering subsequent research (Langacker, 1991; 2008; Gibbs & Gibbs, 1994), linguistic meaning began to be conceived as grounded in our bodily experience. In essence, this connection between discourse and embodiment advocates that sensory-motor experiences have an impact on cognition and, as a result, communicative beings are bound to express and understand the non-physical in terms of the physical. Furthermore, understanding discourse and embodiment as intertwined concepts would also justify how abstract notions are metaphorically grounded in embodied and situated knowledge. These ideas partly influenced many linguists to raise their concerns regarding the claims made by CDS scholars, who struggled to explain the link between the micro-, meso- and the macro-level of discourse. Chilton (2011: 711), one of first voices to detect that research among CDS and CL scholars was somewhat disconnected, puts it very straightforwardly as follows:

The fact is that language is not ‘out there’, disembodied, somehow ‘in society’. It is in your head and your head is part of your body. What you know about [language] and how to use it in situations is in your head and the rest of your body. It is surely acceptable to CDA to say that use of language in situations means engaging in social structures and social practices. How do they think this is possible unless, individuals, part of collectivities, [...] carry around in their memories understandings –changeable, variable, but intersubjectively coordinated and interacting knowledge frames, that is cognitive frames that are the representations of social structures and practices?

As can be read, Chilton problematises this taken-for-granted assumption among many CDS scholars between any given text and its connection to social structures and practices, resorting to cognitive frames as a very plausible solution. As a matter of fact, as Section 4.5 above anticipated, the absence of studies within CDS

investigating the connections between text(s) and its addresser(s) and addressee(s) has triggered severe criticism both from the outside and, most importantly, from very foundational figures for the development of CDS as a research programme. This is precisely why van Dijk (2014: 121), whose contribution to CDS has constantly shown a cognitive twist, argues that

most earlier and contemporary theories in CDS assume a direct link between discourse and society (or culture), [but] the problem is that the nature of these casual or similar direct relationships is not made explicit but taken for granted or reduced to unexplained correlations.

It is the unexplained nature of these correlations that van Dijk attempts to solve by endorsing the socio-cognitive approach to the understanding of discourse (van Dijk, 2014). While providing an accurate picture of this approach to discourse would challenge the space constraints of this chapter, it is noteworthy to mention some of its key tenets. In short, it is claimed that the accounts in which individual language users frame text and talk is based on socially shared representations of individual social actors as members of various social collectivities, thus implying that personal and social dimensions in discourse processing are inextricably intertwined (van Dijk, 2014). In contrast to approaches to CDS grounded in post-structuralist understandings, van Dijk has traditionally argued that any account seeking to relate discourse with social structures needs to be based on the explanation that connects structures in text and talk with structures in the mind (van Dijk, 1998). This is partly possible because, as he suggests, ideologies that support social action rely on the socially-shared “system of mental representations and processes of group members” (van Dijk, 1995: 18). In other words, “our ongoing experience and understanding of the events and situations of our environment take place in terms of mental models that segment, interpret and define reality as we ‘live it’” (Shiple & Zacks, 2008; van Dijk, 2014).

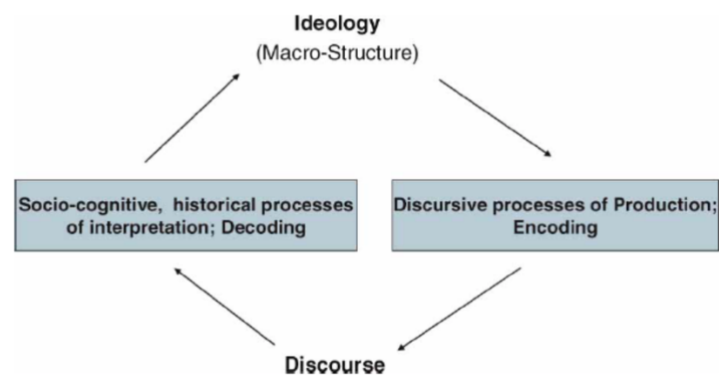
More specifically, the theoretical core underpinning the cognitive link between discourse and society heavily relies on mental models, which in turn can be classified in semantic situation models and pragmatic context models (van Dijk, 2014: 126). Broadly speaking, mental models can be defined as the “interface between discourse and the social or natural environment” (van Dijk, 2014: 124) and they are given the potential of having a fundamental role in the production and comprehension of

discourse. On the one hand, according to van Dijk (2014), semantic situation models have traditionally referred to both the referential and the representational aspects of language use (the 'aboutness', hence the inclusion of 'semantic'). Additionally, these models are multimodal in the sense that they represent the complex, embodied experience of events and situations as we experience them, which explains why they are also uniquely personal and encode "our evaluative personal opinion or emotions about an event, which again may be expressed (or not) in many ways in the sentences or stories about such an experience" (van Dijk, 2014: 124). On the other hand, and provided that language users are embedded within the ongoing communicative experience or situation in which they may be engaged, it is also possible to identify pragmatic context models. As put forward by van Dijk (2014), these allude to the communicative environment as they are deemed relevant by and for the participants. Furthermore, they have a crucial role in controlling "the ways language users are able to adapt their ongoing discourse and interaction to the current, [always] changing communicative situation" (2014: 125) and they are also multimodal insofar as they also feature both the emotional and evaluative aspects ascribed to any communicative situation.

Nonetheless, language users are not merely individuals but "part of collectivities" (Chilton, 2011: 711). To put it differently, language users are "social actors who are members of linguistic, epistemic, and social communities and societal groups, institutions or organisations" (van Dijk, 2014: 127), which means that socially-shared knowledge (in its many realisations) is an essential component in the process of constructing situation models about particular events and situations. The forging process of socially-shared knowledge, as suggested by van Dijk (2014), springs from the generalisations and abstraction of mental models as crystallised in specific instances of discourse, transmitted publicly and, in many cases, via different media. Interestingly, this is of great importance in the formation, reproduction and perpetuation of attitudes and ideologies. Apart from the widespread agreement that recognises their social nature (Jaspars & Fraser, 1984) and the schema-based fabric that characterises their cognitive structure, very little is known about *attitudes* (van Dijk, 2014). However, they are conceived as semantic archives that store general, socially-shared knowledge and beliefs that are needed to create mental models. As suggested by van Dijk (2014: 129), "attitudes represent the relationship between social groups, their members and the ways members as language users express

opinions about social events, situations people or group”, which explains how mental models of this kind play an active role in the creation of discriminatory discourse that is reproduced in social structures of domination. This link is also used to justify that imbalanced social practices and inequalities do not influence discourse directly (or *vice versa*), but rather this is accomplished by the mediation of socially-shared knowledge and personal mental models, which influences personal actions and discourses. A similar process is observed when acknowledging the influence of ideologies, understood here as the cognitive structures that combine beliefs, values, norms and goals which are central to the formation, acquisition and application of social attitudes (Koller, 2009; van Dijk, 2014). This dialogic interaction between macro-structures such as ideologies and discourse is represented graphically in Figure 15 below.

Figure 15 | Dialogicity between ideologies and discourse (KhosraviNik, 2010; based on van Dijk, 1987)



In sum, the different processes underlying of both personal mental models as well as socially-shared forms of cognition are of crucial importance to understand how “communities, social groups and power relations are reproduced by discourse and other social practices” (van Dijk, 2014: 130). This is thought to be particularly important when recognising that “the knowledge structures we take for granted as corresponding with reality in fact mediate and organise reality for us in ways which accord our language habits” (Hart, 2015). Despite the solid character of this approach, it should not be forgotten that, as van Dijk warns (2014: 21), “even the cognitive psychology of discourse until today has no explicit theory of how social and communicative ‘environments’ affect text and talk”, a caveat that is worth bearing in mind when these ideas are endorsed.

Adapted from social psychology theories (Jaspars & Fraser, 1984; Moscovici, 2000; Augoustinos et al., 2006), another related notion which has gained prominence in the socio-cognitive approach to discourse is that of *socio-cognitive representations*,²⁶ which is certainly foreseeable if the social motivation underlying CDS research is taken into account. Based on Augoustinos et al. (2006), Koller (2012: 20) understands socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) as “organised, coherent, socially shared sets of knowledge about an object, domain of objects [or group identities] which combine affective structures with inherent normative and evaluative dimensions”. What is more, socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) are “not individually held mental models, but cognitive structures shared by members of a particular group” (Koller, 2014: 151). Consequently, they are “socially and discursively constructed in the course of [...] communication [...] and are subject to continual transformation [...] through the ebb and flow of intergroup relations” (Augoustinos et al., 2006: 258-259). To put it differently, SCRs are negotiated discursively among the discourse communities in which they unfold, proving that their dynamic and cyclic character (unlike schemas, for instance) is not but a consequence of the many possible temporal variations they are likely to undergo (Koller, 2012; 2014).

Socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) have a crucial role in the forging of collective identities (Koller, 2014). Whereas individual personal identity is thought to emphasise self-representation independently from the social context in which it is embedded, collective identities are understood as “cognitive representations of the group itself, including its attributes, relational behaviour, goals and values, which are constituted and negotiated by the interactions within a discourse community” (Koller, 2014: 148) which, as stated before, are “projected, transformed and constituted in and through discourse” (Koller, 2014: 152). Accordingly, this approach defends a rather transformative account to the notion of identity in socio-cognitive terms, since “people engage in social, including discursive, practices and in doing so act on specific SCRs about themselves and others” (Koller, 2014: 152). Based on this, this socio-cognitive approach to CDS recognises

²⁶ This concept has been widely adopted by Veronika Koller in her application of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse (see Koller, 2008; 2009; 2012; 2014)

a mutually constitutive relationship between discourse and social cognition, where discourse is instantiated in texts that project and transform socio-cognitive representations (SCRs), both the discourse producers' and the recipients' (Koller, 2014: 152).

As specified in the previous chapter, this approach for CDS-motivated research gains more prominence if the communicative context this research pays attention to is taken into account. In fact, instead of analysing discourse by independent language users, this thesis examines how online users of an IPV forum engage in the construction of their (online) collective identity and the ways in which this is instantiated in their discursive production. This seems to fit nicely into the motivations of this approach, since as suggested indeed by Koller (2014: 153),

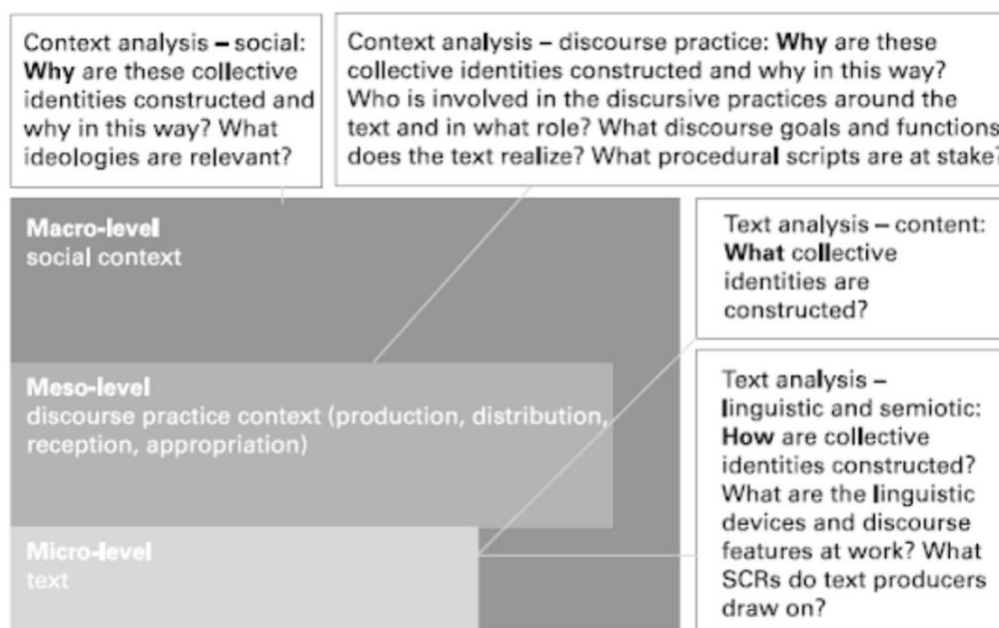
[a] socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse studies is well suited to analysing collective identities and is especially relevant at the interpretation stage of analysis, which addresses the questions as to why text producers have selected a range of linguistic devices to construct groups in a particular way.

As indicated in the quotation above, the socio-cognitive approach to discourse is also interested in the specific set of linguistic instantiations employed by a given community of discourse producers in order to position themselves and others discursively. As a matter of fact, as suggested elsewhere in this chapter, detailed textual analysis is required in CDS and socio-cognitively oriented research is therefore no exception. For these purposes, the main focus of this approach is to provide a thorough linguistic analysis in the attempt to reveal the kind of devices used to express SCRs (Koller, 2014: 150). Given the relevance of collective identities for the socio-cognitive approach, Koller redefined Fairclough's interconnected levels of discourse (see Figure 12 in Section 4.2 above) in her attempt to illustrate some of the parameters to be accounted for when discursively analysing collective identity, which is shown in Figure 16 below.

When looking at the micro-level of discourse, for instance, it is possible to ascertain a wide range of linguistic criteria whose textual identification is deemed beneficial for these purposes. As Koller warns (2012), there is no need to conceptualise this set as a closed taxonomy. Nevertheless, it is advisable to use it throughout the whole analysis systematically bearing in mind that new categories can occur at the iterative

stage of textual analysis. More specifically, one of the most valid taxonomies used to explore collective identity is the so-called Social Actors Approach (SAA), put forward by van Leeuwen (1996; 2008). This is mostly due to its potential to supply information about the SCRs used to represent different social actors socio-cognitively in discourse, including, *inter alia*, whose their beliefs are, the attitudes towards and expectations from them, and so forth (Koller, 2014). Despite the fact that the analysis of collective identity can also be done by means of concepts rooted in analogously fine-grained analytical frameworks like Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) patterns of transitivity framed in systemic-functional linguistics or Martin and White's appraisal theory (2005), the already-acknowledged twist among CDS scholars towards cognitive linguistics has prompted frequent approximations to collective identities on the basis of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory. This is based upon the accredited power of metaphors to make experience coherent (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and their potential to embody different ways of conceptualising (and hence communicating) a given reality (van Dijk, 2014). More recent research attempts have also highlighted the benefits of complementing these detailed analyses with broad perspectives regarding the discourse under scrutiny by means of corpus linguistics (Koller, 2012), which will be of help to pinpoint areas of linguistic interest within a particular corpus.

Figure 16 | Accounting for collective identity as represented in discourse (Koller, 2014; based on Fairclough, 1989)



Apart from this, it is also important to stress the need for considering the meso and the macro levels of discourse in the socio-cognitive approach. The meso-level, as Figure 16 above suggests, is concerned with the discourse practice context. In other words, this level of analysis will concentrate on the multiple conditions (and even conventions, especially if the concept of *genre* is recalled) surrounding the production, distribution, reception and appropriation processes around a set of texts. If this is of relevance in socio-cognitive terms it is because, as Koller points out, “discourse practices can also be seen as influenced by SCRs of discourse producers and recipients, including stereo- and ideal types” (Koller, 2012: 26). In fact, the different communicative motivations for discourse participants to follow the procedures provided by the discourse practice context will influence the linguistic features of texts produced therein. Likewise, CDS researchers should always approach the linguistic analysis of any discursive event by understanding the macro-level of social context as an overarching construction that envelops specific instances of discourse at the micro-level as well as the discourse practice contexts. These are embedded with the social, political and cultural circumstances that influence discourse participants at both cognitive (via complex cognitive structures such as attitudes or ideologies) and more tangible levels (such as the greater or lesser chances a given discourse participant may have to access the many procedures involved in the production of a set of texts, for instance).

In sum, this section has sought to sketch out some of the most significant aspects underpinning the socio-cognitive approach to discourse, especially considering its relevance for this research. Starting off by Chilton’s (2005) early problematisation of the taken-for-granted link between social structures and practices and different texts, this section has relied on van Dijk’s (2014) attempt to understand the rather unexplained nature of these correlations. Thus, attention has been paid to the role that both personal and social forms of cognition play in the dialogical process that mediates between aspects of socio-politico-cultural structures and textual manifestations. As explained elsewhere, the socio-cognitive approach to discourse relies upon socio-cognitive representations in the forging of collective identities (in most cases amidst power imbalances), which are of crucial salience in CDS research. In its final part, and following Koller (2012), this section singles out some of the most usual trends found in socio-cognitive approaches to explore the micro-textual level of discourse. It additionally provides further directions on how to equally

examine both the meso- and macro-levels of discourse. Broadly speaking now, this approach to discourse is problem-oriented and is motivated by a social phenomenon such as IPV, which fosters an unfair distribution of power and provokes inequalities.

4.7 Summary

The goal of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the main theoretical concepts within Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) that inform this research. The first section offered a succinct account of concepts of essential relevance for CDS, namely text, genre, and discourse. Having discussed the implications of conceptualising discourse as a form of social practice, the different considerations that intervene in the three-level model to understand the levels of discourse were dealt with. In an endeavour to justify the suitability of investigating a social phenomenon such as IPV from a CDS perspective, the second section offered a concise exploration of central tenets upon which CDS is built, such as critique or power, which sought to provide further evidence of the connectedness between language and social phenomena forged in power imbalances. The third section dealt with the most common approaches taken within CDS, putting an emphasis on earlier accounts of this and more up-to-date perspectives. Despite the multiple benefits of adopting a CDS perspective to the analysis of social issues, another section was devoted to address major criticism that researchers from different disciplines have targeted against CDS, especially at early stages. As a matter of fact, the final section in this chapter sought to briefly describe the socio-cognitive approach to discourse, which is central for the development of this study.

Broadly speaking, having shed sufficient light on the three levels of discourse this thesis is concerned with (IPV, DMC and CDS), this chapter is the last of the theoretical block underpinning this research. After the general methodological considerations are presented in the next chapter, the focus turns to the three different chapters that constitute the empirical part of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5 | DATA AND OVERVIEW OF METHODS

5.1 Introduction

As may be noticed, this chapter is intentionally located between the theoretical and the empirical part of this dissertation in the attempt to inform readers about the core methodological decisions that lie on the basis of this research. Thus, this chapter deals with methodological issues that have guided this project since its early stages from a rather broad perspective, addressing major details about the many relevant aspects that have characterised this study methods-wise. To this end, this chapter is divided into several sections.

First of all, Section 5.2 provides an overview of the research questions, hypotheses and research objectives. Then, Section 5.3 offers an overview of the Survivors' Forum, which entails the primary source of data. Thus, this section describes the online environment in which this forum is nested and the main three online communities that are at the kernel of this study. After this, Section 5.4 provides readers with a fine-grained description of the corpus analysed for this study. In fact, not only does it provide details about the process of constructing a specialised corpus of this sort but also apprises of the peculiarities of the dataset at hand as well as the research participants. Section 5.5 seeks to justify the suitability of adopting the mixed-method approach that characterises this study. As will be clarified, this methodological stance is not only deemed worthy at the stage of analysing data but it is also congruous with the rationale underlying this research and the decisions of this kind that CDS research frequently advocates. Additionally, an overview of the main methods employed at several stages of this project are summarised in this section. Then, and given the online nature of data analysed in this research, Section 5.6 pays attention to crucial ethical issues that have become central for appropriately handling the data under scrutiny. As anticipated in previous chapters, the data this research looks at are gathered from an online forum targeted at female survivors of IPV. Despite the public character of the data, many relevant points regarding these somewhat controversial issues are raised here.

As a whole, this chapter is thought to prepare the ground for the inclusion of multiple methodologies in the empirical part of this research. As a matter of fact, it should be

borne in mind that each of the empirical contributions in the next block will provide the specific methodological considerations that conveniently assisted each of these independently.

5.2 Hypotheses & research objectives

As anticipated in Chapter 1, the main objective of this dissertation is to explore the online discourse of female survivors at different stages within an IPV relationship in order to better understand these women's ideological, psychological and emotional traits are represented in their discourse.

This overarching objective has three more specific objectives. The first one is to examine if three online communities within the Survivors' Forum can be approached as representations of the three different stages in an abusive relationship they suggest. This specific objective can be operationalised in the following set of research questions, which will be dealt with in Chapter 6:

(RQ1.1) How can the online discourse of women undergoing IPV-related experiences be better understood through the application of text-analysis software tools such as LIWC?

(RQ1.2) How are the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny discursively characterised in the light of LIWC-provided categories?

(RQ1.3) Based on their discursive characterisation, to what extent do these online IPV communities differ from other non-violence motivated forum communities?

The main working assumption is that the online discourse of women undergoing IPV-related experiences can be better understood if approached from a corpus-assisted perspective. Additionally, this can shed interesting light on the large discursive picture of the dataset at hand. The application of text-analysis software tools such as LIWC may prove to be useful to draw conclusions about the discursive characterisation of both IPV survivors in the three online communities under scrutiny and of these IPV-related online communities in contrast to non-violence motivated forum ones.

Thus, it is hypothesised (H_1) that that discursive divergences are likely to occur between the three communities in the VIOL_CORPUS, which would be regarded as a sign of the distinctive character in ideological and/or emotional terms of these IPV-related communities. Furthermore, based on preliminary observations, it is believed that users contributing to the community 'Is it abuse?' (SB1 hereafter) will show more pessimistic traces in their discourse than users writing in 'Life after abuse' (SB3). Likewise, it is expected that women posting in SB1 will put more discursive emphasis on the perpetrator as a social actor than those contributing to SB3, as an indicator of the decreasing prominence of the perpetrator in these women's lives after abuse.

Although a more detailed account of the methodological procedure will be discussed in the corresponding chapter, this initial hypothesis will be tested by taking into account some of the most relevant semantic categories provided by the text-analysis software tool LIWC. These categories were chosen on the basis of their suitability to test the hypothesis mentioned before. For this reason, attention will be paid to categories included within 'language variables' (namely *analytical thinking*, *authenticity* and *tone*), those corresponding to emotionality (*positive emotions*, *negative emotions*), and categories concerning pronominal distribution (*I*, *he*, *they*).

The second specific objective concerns the discursive exploration of the two main social actors in IPV relationships of this kind: female survivors and male perpetrators. As already included in Chapter 1, this objective is operationalised in the following research questions, which will be fully addressed in Chapter 7:

(RQ2.1) How are female survivors of IPV discursively represented as social actors in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ2.2) How are male perpetrators discursively represented as social actors in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ2.3) To what extent do these discursive representations as social actors vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

It is hypothesised (H_2) that socio-cognitive representations of both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV as social actors will show relevant discursive divergences across the three communities within this online forum. Taking into account RQ2.2 and RQ2.3, and partly influenced by the results obtained in the text-

analysis using LIWC, it is expected that less discursive prominence will be given to perpetrators in SB3. In a similar vein, it is also supposed that the discursive representation of these women as survivors and of the male perpetrators will tend towards discursive collectivisation in the final stage. As far as categorisation is concerned, it is expected that women will use more functionalised representations (emphasis on what someone *does*) of the perpetrators when contributing to 'Life after abuse' (SB3). Less hypotheses can be formulated, however, when trying to predict how discursive self-representations will vary in categorisation terms. Nonetheless, non-neutral (positive) self-evaluations are expected to be more salient in SB3 than in SB1.

In order to test the previous set of hypotheses, van Leeuwen's (2008) proposed taxonomy for the textual analysis of social actors is regarded as a useful starting point. Nonetheless, due to some observed shortcomings in van Leeuwen's proposal, a revision of this taxonomy is favoured on the basis of several aspects that characterise the online corpus under scrutiny. As a result of this revision, all the posts gathered from the IPV-related online forum are analysed in the light of SARDDA (Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse) and on the basis of the six sets of analytical features integrated in this model.

Last but not least, the third specific objective is to explore the socio-cognitive representations of both survivors and perpetrators in this online forum by focusing on cases when they are textually instantiated by means of figurative mechanisms. This objective is operationalised in the following three research questions, which, in turn, will be discussed in Chapter 8:

(RQ3.1) How are female survivors of IPV figuratively represented in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ3.2) How are male perpetrators figuratively represented in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ3.3) To what extent do these figurative representations vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

It is hypothesised (H_3) that the different ideological, psychological and emotional characterisations of the three online communities under scrutiny will bring about a

conceptual shift when women in this online forum represent themselves and their perpetrators discursively. This hypothesis, therefore, assumes that socio-cognitive representations of the key social actors in these texts are likely to vary depending on the subcommunity. In other words, it is expected that these representations would be discursively instantiated through a change in the type of vehicle terms used to express these metaphorical mappings.

In order to test this hypothesis, posts collected from the Survivors' Forum are analysed looking for figurative mechanisms in general and metaphorical expressions in particular. As suggested elsewhere, it should be acknowledged that the huge potential of the data to contain metaphorical representations of key social actors was envisaged at an early stage of this research project. Mainly for this reason, the analytical framework designed to examine social actor representation in digital discourses of abuse (SARDDA) was equipped with a set of features that were used in the coding process. This facilitated the systematic treatment of figurative representations. Nonetheless, the wide range of non-literal representations found among the data made it necessary to handle them in more specific ways. Mostly following the recommendations proposed by the discourse-dynamics framework to metaphor analysis (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), metaphorical representations of the two main social actors were grouped according to the vehicle terms employed in these representations.

Now that the research questions have been revisited and the main hypotheses and research objectives have been outlined, information about the primary source of data for this research (the Survivors' Forum) is provided in the section.

5.3 Primary source of data: The Survivors' Forum

The Survivors' Forum is an online forum hosted by the Women's Aid Federation of England, registered both as a limited company and a charity in England (UK), "working together to provide life-saving services and build a future where domestic violence is not tolerated" (Women's Aid, 2017a).²⁷ This federation was founded back

²⁷ Interestingly, both this organisation and the content included in this website still opt for using the term "domestic violence" or "domestic abuse" all throughout. If the relevance of these theoretical differences is taken into account (discussed in Section 2.3), I will be making use of the term Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) for reasons stated therein.

in 1974 (as the National Women's Aid Federation), becoming the first national *domestic violence* organisation bringing together different services which enabled women and children experiencing violence at home to travel across the country to any of the 40 refuges scattered throughout the UK (Women's Aid, 2017). Furthermore, entrenched in women rights' movements, the organisation is run by women and seeks to help abused women and their children. In addition, more in line with the understanding of IPV put forward by Stark (2006) (cf. Section 2.4.2 in Chapter 2), they defend that IPV entails a violation of women and their children's human rights, since IPV is seen as the result of "an abuse of power and control [which] is rooted in the historical status and inequality of women in society" (Women's Aid, 2017b).

As claimed on their website, Women's Aid aims at empowering women affected by IPV in their right to live free from fear and abuse (Women's Aid, 2017c). Subsequently, they adopt a very clear stance towards helping women by placing the voice of the keeping survivors at the heart of every action they take, with a determined resolution to meet the needs of abused women and their children and providing services that "are based on listening to survivors and responding to what they define as their needs" (Women's Aid, 2017b). Additionally, they claim to promote "cohesive inter-agency responses" (Women's Aid, 2017b) to tackle IPV and develop joint strategies to foster a society in which this type of abuse is no longer tolerated. In the attempt to meet these goals, there are multiple services available either to female survivors or to different agents working with/for them. In this line, expert training, qualifications and consultancy are provided to agencies and professionals (Women's Aid, 2017c). Moreover, a more direct intervention is promoted by means of the 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline or the online-based services, among which the Survivors' Forum stands out.

As suggested by Figure 17 below, the Survivors' Forum can be easily and directly accessed via Women's Aid website's home (<https://www.womensaid.org.uk>). Accessibility to this forum is certainly visible then, together with different sections and services provided by this organisation. Users interested in the forum are then directed to the Survivors' Forum main page, where all the relevant information to become an active participant is stored and openly facilitated. Figure 18 below shows the first visual impact women willing to use this forum encounter.

Figure 17 | Women's Aid home layout (emphasis added; screenshot 23/04/2017)

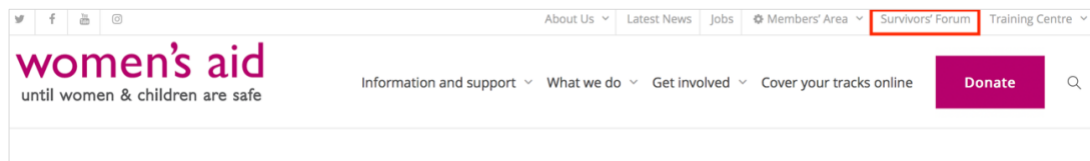
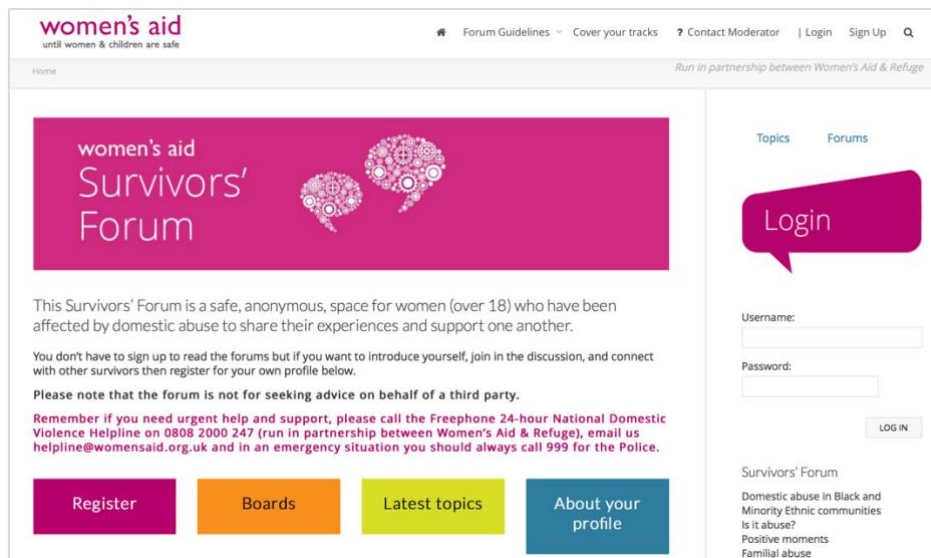


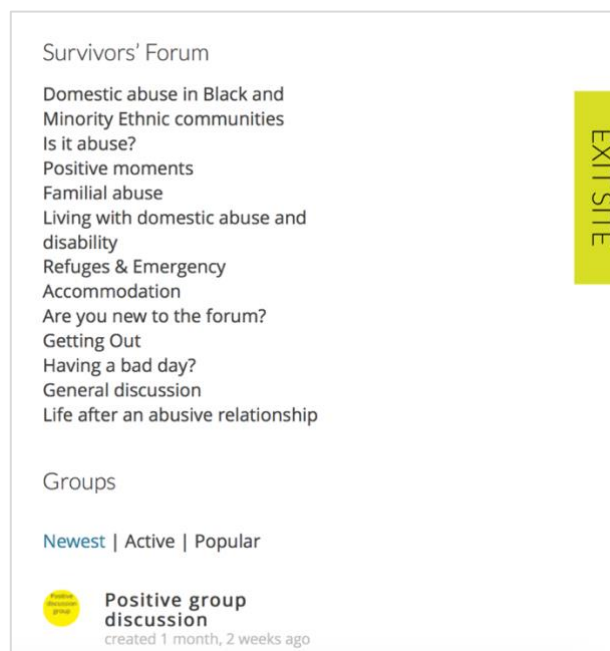
Figure 18 | Global view of the Survivors' Forum. First visual contact users have when accessing the forum's main site (screenshot 23/04/2017)



As depicted above, this first glance already conveys some points of key relevance for this study. The design of this website is mostly divided in two sections. First, it is possible to find an essential description of the forum itself. Apart from making specific reference to the social group for which this online forum hopes to be of use (women over 18 who have been affected by IPV willing to share their experiences), users are informed of its anonymous character. Second, it also provides useful information on how to make use of it appropriately. As can be noticed, there is no need to register to read the forums, but registration is obligatory to participate in the discussion actively. Hence, users who wish to register can do so by signing up and logging in afterwards, which is facilitated by the interface on the forum's main page (notice that the coloured squares seen in Figure 18 above also work as direct links to the sections they refer to). Likewise, potential users are warned of the rather informative nature of the forum, stressing the fact that the police must be contacted if an emergency situation is being faced.

Quite importantly, the nature of this online forum as being structured around several sub-communities is present straight away at the first glance. As illustrated in Figure 19 below, users accessing this forum come across (almost instantaneously) different communities to choose from when sharing their experiences. More specifically, there are eleven available communities that offer a wide spectrum of situations and contexts, which appears to facilitate a fine-grained filtering process for the general audience, helping individuals find the most suitable community to participate in.

Figure 19 | Different forum categories users may choose when deciding to share their experiences (screenshot 23/04/2017)



Interestingly, as argued by Bolander and Locher (2014), one of the challenges faced by researchers interested in online environments concerns their rapidly-changing disposition. In this vein, it is worth mentioning that some of the categories presented in Figure 19 did not even exist during early stages of this study.²⁸ Apart from the many possible effects this may have in broad terms, this is also likely to influence discourse-driven research. For instance, the community "Domestic abuse in Black and Minority Ethnic communities" was added at some point between May 2016 and September 2016. This can of course have implications for the language used on the website, since people with a different ethnic (and hence linguistic, at least in some

²⁸ Notwithstanding this volatile character, it should be clarified that the same eleven communities have been maintained a year later (02/04/2018), when this online forum was revisited for revision purposes only.

cases) background may perceive that that is the category where they may feel more at ease when sharing their experiences. Similarly, and connected with some of the findings offered by chapters below, communities like “Positive moments” or “Having a bad day?” are also likely to be characterised by more positive or more negative discourse respectively.

Despite the possible advantages this may have for users in general terms, it is important to reiterate the idea that the layout of the online forum had a huge methodological impact on this research as a whole. Owing to the existence of different categories in which users' messages could be grouped, it was possible to contrast three categories under the assumption that they could be unproblematically paired with three stages within a prototypical abusive relationship: an initial stage ('Is it abuse?'); (b) Intermediate stage ('Getting out'); (c) Final stage ('Life after an abusive relationship'). In addition, forum users were also assisted by the description each of these contrasted communities offered. This information, together with more explicit explanations resulting from a netnographic observation of them (Kozinets, 2010; 2016), is included in Table 11 below.

Table 11 | Online communities under analysis for this research

Forum subcategory (and reference to each community throughout this research)	Psychological stage in abusive relationship	
Is it abuse? (SB1)	<i>Forum description</i>	“Sometimes it’s difficult to decide whether what you are experiencing is actually abusive. Share your experiences here” (Women’s Aid, 2017)
	<i>Netnographic description</i>	Initial stage. Online users are not fully aware of the abusive character of the relationship. It is therefore common to find queries regarding male behaviour to check if that is generally considered abusive (especially on the eyes of users belonging to that community).
Getting out (SB2)	<i>Forum description</i>	“Leaving an abusive relationship” (Women’s Aid, 2017)
	<i>Netnographic description</i>	Intermediate stage. Coercive control taking place in its multiple variations. Woman knows abuse is taking place. Confusion. Trying to get out. Notice the progressive tense in the section of the title.
Life after an abusive relationship (SB3)	<i>Forum description</i>	“What happens when you have left” (Women’s Aid, 2017)
	<i>Netnographic description</i>	Final stage. Abuse is generally over. Abusive relationship is conceptualised as a previous stage (before).

All in all, as suggested above, this triggered the creation of three sub-corpora, all of them containing posts belonging to each of the three categories above. The possibility of dividing the final corpus into three different subcorpora (more specifically described in the next section) facilitated the making of a more in-depth analysis of language choices in each subcorpus, which at the same time would enable this study to find discursive strategies (or the absence of them) that define each psychological stage broadly represented in each forum subcategory.

Nonetheless, straightforward though the collection of data may seem, there were several challenges that characterised this research stage. The most salient ones are discussed in the next section, which deals with relevant issues in the process of collecting the data. Furthermore, given the fact that many of them are connected to ethical dimensions, Section 5.6 will specifically focus on the ethical considerations this study takes into account.

5.4 Data collection: the corpus under scrutiny

This section seeks to offer insights into some of the most relevant methodological points concerning the main corpus this study investigates. With this mind, this section first concentrates on the process of creating a specialised corpus and provides essential information about some of its core aspects. Additionally, and based upon netnographic accounts (Kozinets, 2010), interesting observations on the (digital) participants will also be outlined. Lastly, as anticipated in the previous chapter, attention will be paid to the specific links between how the medium factors (Herring, 2007) of the Survivors' Forum influence the online discourse this research analyses.

The total corpus upon which this research is built easily lends itself to be considered a specialised corpus. According to Baker (2006: 147), this is defined as “a corpus which has been designed for a particular research project [...] or to study particular specialist genres of language”. Although the type of discourse this corpus is representative of may not be considered a genre *per se*, it is true that the linguistic output included therein is clearly nuanced. Unlike general corpora of a given language, which are thought “to capture the full range of varieties of language use” (Aston & Burnard, 1998: 5), the corpus collected for this research is nurtured by a community of women who use English to share their experiences with IPV in an

online forum. Unsurprisingly, topics that spring from this compilation of online texts are to a great extent uniform and therefore constitutive of a specialised variety of the language. It should be also taken into account that in this process of creating a specialised corpus, some external factors were also of pivotal importance.

Mostly due to the temporal constraints this research is framed in, collecting online data was totally dependent on its actual production. As will be clarified later on, data was collected in two different temporal spans to guarantee a richer variety of online users contributing to the online forum. Thus, the mere compilation of data was always at the mercy of each community's discursive expansion, which heavily influenced the size of the corpus. Regardless of this, the Survivors' Forum was visited on a regular basis to collect relevant messages. Table 12 below illustrates how these messages were stored (by means of a desktop version of Microsoft Word, avoiding online media of data storage to protect the users' anonymity and security) and the type of information that was simultaneously annotated.

Table 12 | Illustrative excerpt of collected corpus and information gathered simultaneously

CORPUS REF	THREAD - TITLE	USER - POSTER	Nº REAC	DATE POSTED	TEXT ²⁹
SB1.2_11	Am I just overreacting?	UUSx	13	150116	Hi everyone, I'm new here. First post. I feel like I'm in an abusive relationship but I feel like I'm overreacting. I do have an anxiety disorder and he says I make mountains out of mole hills all of the time. Things have been really bad the past few months, right after we got married everything got worse. There had always been signs of abuse, I guess. I had to stop wearing make up, and certain tops that he deemed showed my cleavage too much, he's pushed a lot of things in the relationship, even when I wasn't ready and he's had bad jealousy too. But I never really thought it was too bad. The worst was if we argued and I planned on leaving, even just for a little bit, he would threaten to kill himself or self harm. Yesterday was an eye opener though. Yesterday he threatened to hit me. That is a line he has never crossed. So now, I don't know what to do. Am I just overreacting and it's not that bad? Or is this abuse?

²⁹ All textual evidence included along the chapters has not been altered in any form and it literally reflects forum posts. Typos or spelling mistakes have not been corrected either.

As shown in Table 12 above, several details were included in this process of corpus collection. Obviously, the most important part to be collected was the message itself. It is crucial to note that only original posts were included in this corpus, leaving out the reactions to them and by which users engaged in further interaction. Nonetheless, some threads were still stored for different studies that focus the type of interaction found here, but again this was not part of the main motivations of this study.

Additionally, all original messages were automatically given a 'corpus reference' to facilitate handling the posts throughout the different research stages. Information about the user posting each message was also gathered, again seeking to comply with ethical standards by anonymising online users' online identity to the further degree possible. This was done in order to guarantee these users' confidentiality even among members within the community by utilising the acronym UUS [Unique USer] and a corresponding number to mark this uniqueness. Apart from the date in which the message was originally posted, additional information collected also considered the text included in the title users gave to their original post (which in most cases would become a thread) and the number of reactions each message had originated at the time of collection. Very importantly, it should be specified that collected posts are always those initiating an online thread within the forum. Although interesting communicative phenomena can be observed when interaction is taken into account, it was thought that the collection of originally-posted messages only would also add internal validity and uniformity to the whole corpus.

Table 13 below makes explicit the multiple components that comprise the corpus as a whole. Due to their ubiquitous appearance throughout this study, it should be clear that the entire corpus is formed by the three different online communities under investigation: 'Is it Abuse?' (SB1), 'Getting out' (SB2) and 'Life after an abusive relationship' (SB3). In an attempt to make the data from these three online communities more suitable for contrastive purposes, a balanced number of posts was collected for each community.

Another decision adopted at this stage was to collect corpus from two different temporal spans. Taking into account that virtual communities (as anticipated in Chapter 3) usually gather a specific number of online users around similar purposes

during certain periods of time, a less varied number of unique users was thought to be found if the corpus had been collected more synchronously. Therefore, collecting online posts from two different (and separated from each other) periods of time was considered a reasonable way to facilitate the inclusion of a wider range of unique users, which would also have a positive impact on issues regarding data representativeness. As a result, each forum community (SB1, for example) amalgamates two different temporal cohorts, with a seven-month gap in between which was left intentionally for the above-mentioned ends. The first temporal cohort was collected from December 2014 to April 2015, whereas the second span oscillated between December 2015 to May 2016. Both of them were marked by means of SBX_1 and SBX_2 correspondingly.

Nonetheless, as suggested elsewhere, the inclusion of words/messages from some communities was always dependant on users posting therein, which in a way influenced the amount of words to be collected from the other two communities. As an example, as Table 13 below pinpoints, community SB2_2 contains 15,904 words just because no more messages were posted in that particular community during that time span.

Table 13 | Corpus details on the basis of the three major communities and their corresponding number of words and posts

SUBCORPUS / ONLINE COMMUNITY	CODES FOR ONLINE COMMUNITIES / TEMPORAL FRAMES		Nº words	Nº posts
SB1 Is it abuse?	SB1_1 (Dec 2014-Apr 2015)	SB1_1.x	21,108	56
	SB1_2 (Dec 2015-May 2016)	SB1_2.y	25,625	49
	TOTAL SB1		46,733	105
SB2 Getting out	SB2_1 (Dec 2014-Apr 2015)	SB2_1.x	24,420	97
	SB2_2 (Dec 2015-May 2016)	SB2_2.y	15,904	71
	TOTAL SB2		40,324	168
SB3 Life after AB R	SB3_1 (Dec 2014-Apr 2015)	SB3_1.x	19,033	104
	SB3_2 (Dec 2015-May 2016)	SB3_2.y	23,833	97
	TOTAL SB3		42,866	201
TOTAL CORPUS			129,923	474

All in all, as shown in Table 13, the total corpus explored for this study contains *circa* 130,000 words and 474 original online posts. This amount of words was believed to

be convenient given the circumstances around its collection, although the same number would be considered controversial for some applied linguistics scholars, especially some within corpus linguistics. In fact, as Baker puts it, “one of the most common questions concerning corpus building is ‘how large should a corpus be?’” (2006: 146). As he claims, it should be taken into account that a number of factors need to be considered in this regard. By making use of several examples (Stubbs, 1996; Kennedy, 1998), Baker highlights the idea that aspects such as genre restriction or the motivations behind a particular study are bound to influence the size of a given corpus. Thus, whereas studies aiming at, for instance, comparing two varieties of English or testing morphological patterns should always hone in on larger corpora, a relatively small, 100,000-word corpus would suffice to investigate discursive phenomena such as prosody in spontaneous speech.

As far as this corpus is concerned, there are several factors that condition its size. First and foremost, notions related to genre restriction are of paramount importance. Given the temporal framework of this research, corpus collection had to be completed at some point before proceeding with the several empirical investigations carried out afterwards. Granting a wider range of users/research participants was possible by accessing the online forum in different time spans, and collection was solely dependent on users’ posting. Although a similar forum could have been considered, the specific nature of this online site was thought to guarantee more uniformity across the many different online posts. In addition, as argued below, there is a great number of medium factors (and affordances) which were likely to alter the discursive output under examination. Second, another interesting dilemma called into question the measure to be used as the reference to provide a balanced proportion across the three communities (that is, the number of words *versus* the number of posts). One striking feature of this corpus is linked to this notion, since a higher number of words does not necessarily stand for a higher number of posts. In fact, SB1 (*Is it domestic abuse?*) is the online community with the highest number of words but the lowest number of posts, which is explained by the need users in this community have to expand as much as they can when sharing with others their doubts as to whether they are being abused or not.

However, there were more relevant aspects when validating the suitability of this corpus that went beyond matters of size. One of the most central ones pertained to

online users in charge of posting the analysed messages, this is, research participants. As may be recalled from previous sections, one of the main reasons why this research originated was the possibility of drawing a parallel between the three online communities and the three temporal stages that research on IPV has prototypically identified. It is true, though, that no abusive relationship is thought to adhere to one clear-cut pattern (behavioural or of any kind). Nevertheless, arguing that these online communities constituted three different communities in discursive terms would have been far more complex had participants in each community contributed to them in completely irregular, unrelated ways. Therefore, a fundamental issue was to find out the number of unique users posting in each community in order to stick to the above-mentioned standards of balance between the three groups. In fact, as Table 14 below details, there was an even distribution of unique users if the three groups were contrasted, ranging from 87 in SB2 to 78 UUS in SB3. This slight fluctuation of nine unique users among these online communities was taken as another positive trait of the total corpus as a whole in terms of both reliability and validity.

Table 14 | Total number of unique users (UUS) across the three observed communities

SUBCORPUS / ONLINE COMMUNITY	TEMPORAL RANGE		USER ID RANGE	<i>n</i>
SB1 Is it abuse?	SB1_1	14/15	UUS1 > UUS45	45
	SB1_2	15/16	UUS46 > UUS82	37
	TOTAL SB1			82
SB2 Getting out	SB2_1	14/15	UUS83 > UUS134	52
	SB2_2	15/16	UUS135 > UUS169	35
	TOTAL SB2			87
SB3 Life after abuse	SB3_1	14/15	UUS170 > UUS204	35
	SB3_2	15/16	UUS205 > UUS247	43
	TOTAL SB3			78
TOTAL CORPUS	Total unique users (UUS) in corpus			247

Despite its 247 unique users, another crucial corroboration of the corpus sought to shed light on these users' online behaviour in terms of their participation patterns. This was done in order to make a difference between users contributing to just one community from those posting in more than one group. In the case of the latter, it was deemed convenient to find out which was the most recurrent pattern to grasp a better understanding of these users' online communicative practices. This information is summarised in Table 15 below. Additionally, Table 16 afterwards fully represents the patterns online users contributing to more than one community followed, which reveals interesting insights that are discussed in what follows.

As both tables below suggest, the vast majority of users (81.3%) in this online forum sent their written contributions to just one of the three above-mentioned communities. Although this is subject to multiple interpretations, one of the most straightforward ones suggests a rather unidirectional tendency among online users to be part of only one community online, which may emphasise the correlation between these digital constructions and their corresponding emotional stages. Interestingly enough, the most frequent pattern afterwards suggests a trend among these online users to be simultaneous contributors of either SB2-SB3 (6.2%) or SB1-SB2 (5.6%), which may again imply a greater degree of proximity (in both emotional and discursive terms) between the aforementioned communities. Quite expectedly, this analysis backs up a rather logical behaviour in this online community (although these may not always resemble offline ones in this regard), since it would be surprising (and problematic for this research) to find a high proportion of users actively participating in SB1 and SB3 at the same time. Nonetheless, 3.2% of users (8/247) show a ubiquitous presence across the three groups, and 2.8% (7/247) seem to endorse more irregular ways of participating in this digital environment.

Table 15 | Observed patterns in users' participation across different communities (N / %)

PARTICIPATION PATTERNS ACROSS DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES	Nº USERS IN SB 2014/15 [1]	Nº USERS IN SB 2015/16 [2]	TOTAL (N)	TOTAL (%)
SB1 - SB2	3	11	14	5.6%
SB2 - SB3	9	8	17	6.2%
SB1 - SB2 - SB3	6	2	8	3.2%
IRREGULAR PATTERN	5	2	7	2.8%
UNIQUE TO EACH SB			201	81.3%
TOTAL UNIQUE USERS [UUS]			247	100%

Table 16| Users' distribution according to their presence in different subcommunities based on the threads they initiated (presence marked by x)

USER	2014/2015 [1]			USER	2015/2016 [2]		
	SB1_1	SB2_1	SB3_1		SB1_2	SB2_2	SB3_2
UUS6	x	x	x				
UUS9	x	x	x				
UUS16	x	x	x				
UUS17	x	x	x				
UUS19	x	x	x				
UUS22	x	x	x				
				UUS49	x	x	x
				UUS66	x	x	x
UUS24	x	x					
UUS25	x	x					
UUS34	x	x					
				UUS46	x	x	
				UUS50	x	x	
				UUS51	x	x	
				UUS52	x	x	
				UUS56	x	x	
				UUS62	x	x	
				UUS73	x	x	
				UUS74	x	x	
				UUS77	x	x	
				UUS78	x	x	
				UUS130	x	x	
UUS86		x	x				
UUS88		x	x				
UUS93		x	x				
UUS95		x	x				
UUS100		x	x				
UUS111		x	x				
UUS113		x	x				
UUS127		x	x				
UUS133		x	x				
				UUS136		x	x
				UUS145		x	x
				UUS150		x	x
				UUS155		x	x
				UUS157		x	x
				UUS160		x	x
				UUS163		x	x
				UUS169		x	x
USER	2014/2015			USER	2015/2016		
UUS7	x		x				
UUS13	x		x				x
UUS29	x	x					x
				UUS58	x		x
				UUS76	x		x
UUS91		x	x				x
UUS122		x	x				x

All in all then, it is possible to confirm that this corpus is formed by three different online communities whose balanced measures have been confirmed in several regards. Therefore, it seems that the corpus under scrutiny shows a great degree of internal validity, an issue that was crucial for complying with core methodological considerations. Apart from this rather *socio-netological* uniformity,³⁰ it is also convenient to consider the different factors that are thought to influence language use in computer-mediated environments, which this section turns to now.

As anticipated in Chapter 3, Herring (2007) put forward a faceted classification scheme which outlined a series of both medium (M) and situational (S) factors that are thought to leave an impact on digitally-mediated communication. Considering this chapter aims at offering a detailed picture of the dataset at hand, this framework is utilised here to describe the diverse properties of computer-mediated data included in the Survivors' Forum.

To this end, combining both Herring (2007) and Bolander and Locher (2014)'s proposed guidelines, Table 17 below provides succinct explanations on how these ten medium factors do impact the corpus that this research concentrates on. This is valuable information indeed, since the discursive output here studied is an unavoidable result of these technical influences.

Table 17 | Discursive features of data under investigation following Herring's ten medium factor with an influence on language use online (adapted from Herring, 2007; Bolander & Locher, 2014)

Herring's medium factors (2007)	Data from Women's Aid forum (online posts)
1. SYNCHRONICITY <i>Are messages synchronous or asynchronous?</i>	Forum posts are asynchronous, since posters find a time lag between the production and the receipt of their messages. Additionally, there is no way to find out if messages are read by other users or not.
2. MESSAGE TRANSMISSION <i>Are messages transmitted via one-way or two-way message schemes? (transmitted as whole entities or line-by-line as they are produced?)</i>	Forum posts are transmitted via one-way message schemes, since they are sent as whole entities. Simultaneous exchanges are therefore scarce. Cross-reference to previous posters' messages are possible though since replies to a particular message are nested within the same forum thread.

³⁰ I use the term "socio-netological" here using Kozinets (2010; 2016) "netnography" as a starting point. The prefix "socio" is thought to emphasise the role of virtual communities as groups that share many conventions to more conventional societal structures, as widely discussed in Chapter 3.

3. PERSISTENCE OF TRANSCRIPT	Written records of interaction remain accessible on site for other users to read. Forum threads containing the newest answers get top positions in a given subcategory within the forum. Nonetheless, users can always start a new thread by sending a new post.
<i>How long does a written record of the interaction remain accessible on the site for other users to read?</i>	
4. SIZE OF MESSAGE BUFFER	Accurate knowledge regarding this point is only accessible to registered users who make use of the message-writing tools. However, based on the multiple variation in terms of word-count in the collected data, I would argue that there are neither spatial constraints nor technical restrictions on the length of messages.
<i>Are there technical restrictions on the number of characters a message has?</i>	
5. CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION	Submitted forum posts appear listed in a general board within the forum. Messages can however be accessed by accessing different categories, their newness, etc. One ulterior addendum to these possibilities included private messaging as another channel of communication available to only registered users, proof of which cannot be supported here.
<i>Via what medium are messages produced and received?</i>	
6. ANONYMOUS MESSAGING	Due to privacy issues, this forum is highly concerned about these particular issues. Users have no options when posting rather than using nicknames they use themselves. Likewise, it is relevant to mention that public posts can be edited by an online moderator, since any detail which is thought to include information that could compromise the 'physical' person behind the 'online persona' is automatically deleted.
<i>Does the system provide, encourage, or inhibit the production of anonymous messages?</i>	
7. PRIVATE MESSAGING	
<i>Does the system provide, encourage or inhibit the production and reception of messages via a private channel only accessible to particular participants?</i>	The Survivors' Forum does allow users to use private messaging services within the forum. This affordance was incorporated during the period of this research, and little difference has been observed in the number of public messages available in the general board.
8. FILTERING	
<i>Do individuals have the technical possibility to filter out messages they do not wish to read?</i>	Public posts are ordered depending on their so-called "freshness". This means that posts at top positions are those that have either been started in recent times or have been recently contributed to by another member. This may differ for registered users, although this is not thought to influence the purposes of this study.
9. QUOTING	
<i>Does the system provide an in-built system to quote parts of the messages or entire messages without having to copy/paste them or manually type them?</i>	Quoting does not seem to be an option for users contributing in this forum, or at least there is no evidence to prove this is the case. Although answers to one particular contribution are marked by a slightly indented graphic alteration, parts of previous messages cannot be quoted (as it is the case in some other online forums).
10. MESSAGE FORMAT	
<i>How do the messages appear on the screen; in what order?</i>	Although the overarching thread is ordered following 'freshness' criteria, messages within the same thread are order in a chronological fashion.

By and large, this ten-item model covers the most relevant medium factors with a clear influence on the way discourse produced in the auspices of any digital environment can be affected. Surely due to the fact that these medium factors were put forward when digitally-mediated communication was still at its earliest stages, less emphasis is put on how different modes can be interrelated in the production of a given message. As a matter of fact, even though instances of this would still be minor, some of the posts collected for this research included a rather simple range of emojis to reinforce some of the semantic nuances expressed textually in the message. Although these *emojis* seem to be incorporated as an option in the writing tools panel, more recently collected posts do show an increasing number of emojis which are part of the keyboard in the device users from which some users are composing their messages. Herring's model (2007) could be adjusted then to this greater degree of multimodality, which is gradually becoming a central feature of many digitally-mediated exchanges.

This section comes to an end now having clarified some of the most relevant considerations about the process of corpus collection and the data this study investigates. Thus, it has paid attention to major issues underneath the collection of this specialised corpus, trying to specify in a clear fashion details about its size (both in terms of words and posts) and the three subcomponents that characterise the corpus as a whole. More interestingly, it has also offered both a detailed description and an analysis of online users/research participants, identifying the number of total unique users and elucidating key patterns in the ways these users communicate in this online forum. Last but not least, it was also deemed suitable to dwell on how the Survivors' Forum as a site, together with its particular affordances and technical peculiarities, has in fact influenced the type of textual data investigated here. These detailed specifications have been pursued to offer a transparent account of the many methodological levels that had to be adopted at this stage, following Barton and Lee's advice (2013) regarding the need for scholars in Internet research to share with their readers the many decisions accompanying this process, especially in cases where methodological frameworks are still under development. Following a similar fashion, the next section explains some of the most important reasons why this study ascribes to a mixed-method methodological approach.

5.5 Overview of methods and approaches: the need for a mixed-method account

As anticipated in its title, this section intends to justify the reasons why a mixed-method approximation was believed to suit the purposes of this study. Before engaging with more particular details pertaining to this research, it is worth sketching some points on how mixed methods are both understood and accounted for in this study. Apart from this, this section offers a brief overview of the methods applied at different stages of this research, which will be explored more in depth in each of the following chapters.

A great extent of research in social science methodological literature seems to concur with identifying Campbell and Fiske's article (1959) as the first formal encouragement to incorporate multiple research methods. Although the term *triangulation* itself was not coined until some years later (Webb et al., 1966), Campbell and Fiske promoted the use of "multiple operationalism" as a validation process to ensure that the phenomenon under scrutiny did not merely result from applying one method or another (Johnson et al, 2007). It was not until some years later when Denzin (1978) explicitly supported the use of triangulation in order to validate hypotheses by examining them through multiple methods, always regarding triangulation as a valuable help to reduce the weaknesses of individual methods, as a mechanism to strengthen both the internal and external validity of any study (Dörnyei, 2007). Additionally, not only did Denzin claim (1978) that triangulation was possible at four different stages (data, investigator, theory and methodological triangulation), but he also distinguished between within-methods (i.e., using either multiple quantitative or multiple qualitative approaches) and between-methods triangulation (which essentially requires making use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches).

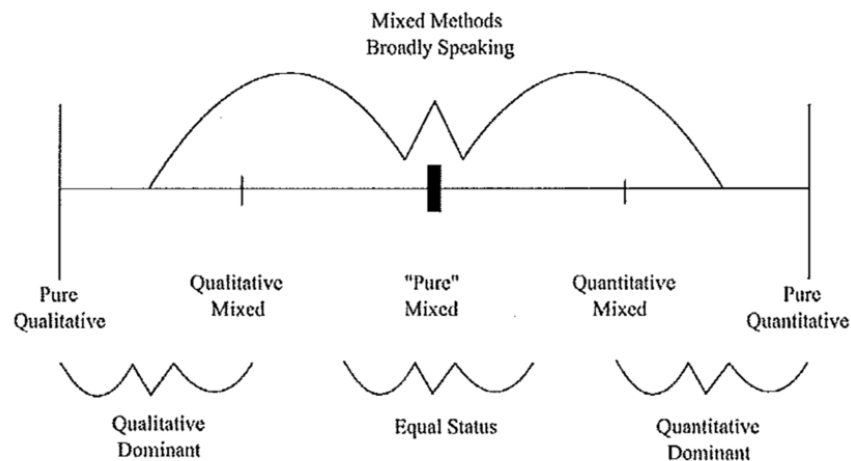
Since early stages, between-method triangulation has shown a clear determination to minimise the intrinsic unfairness prevailing in any type of method. As a matter of fact, as Denzin himself stated, mixed methods are particularly relevant because "the bias inherent in any particular data source, investigators, and particularly method will be cancelled out when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators and methods [...] and the result will be a convergence upon the truth about some social phenomena" (1978: 14). Coherent though this understanding may seem, and partly

due to the influence of some of the ideological assumptions defended by the school of pragmatism (Cherryholmes, 1992), it was not till the 1990s that mixed methods became established as the third major research paradigm that it represents today, beginning to breach the binarism that very heavily had governed methodological accounts in the social sciences until then and questioning the usefulness of the so-called 'paradigm war' (or, to put it differently, the 'either qualitative or quantitative' approach).

This dual opposition represented by the methodological 'paradigm war' has been criticised by scholars who question the need for dividing research based on this quantitative-qualitative opposition (Schwandt, 2000; 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In fact, it is believed that radically adopting one approach or the other "is no longer meaningful for helping us understand the purpose and means of human inquiry [to the extent that it is indeed necessary to] get rid of that distinction [...] if we are to go forward" (Schwandt, 2000: 210). Furthermore, based upon the notion that all research is interpretative, Schwandt argues that a multiplicity of methods is always useful to foster different kinds of understandings, emphasising that "the traditional means of coming to grips with one's identity as a research by aligning oneself with a particular set of methods [...] is no longer very useful" (2000: 210).

On these grounds, it is unsurprising to come across scholars within applied linguistics with a resolute commitment to move beyond the "either/or" and explore the many possible combinations offered by the "both/and" methodological standpoint, advocating for a more dynamic approach to research methods (Sandelowski, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuize, 2004; Onwuegbuize & Leech, 2005; Angouri, 2010). Rather than conceptualising these two main approaches as monolithic blocks, Johnson and Onwuegbuize (2004) argued for a contingency theory of research methods where multiple methodological nuances could be adequately organised as part of the same spectrum (see Figure 20 below) that any researcher could move through depending on her/his research interests or needs.

Figure 20 | Johnson and Onwuegbuize's contingency theory of research methods (2004)



Using Figure 20 above as a trigger, it seems adequate to try to locate this particular research in the light of the multiple methodological viewpoints illustrated therein. Given the straightforward of this graphic representation, it should be enough to place this study in the 'qualitative mixed' side of the spectrum or, in other words, the 'qualitative dominant mixed methods research' (Johnson et al., 2007). In their own words, this type of mixed research in which "one relies on a qualitative, constructivist-poststructuralist-critical view of the research process, while concurrently recognising that the addition of quantitative data and approaches are likely to benefit [the] research project" (Johnson et al., 2007: 124).

Interestingly, although my own identity would be closer to a mixed-method researcher, it is the nature of the project itself which led this study in more qualitative terms, especially because this approach is of special relevance for uncharted research topics in which researchers need to adopt a flexible approach to unexpected details as the research process unfolds (Dörnyei, 2007). Similarly, as agreed by a great number of scholars attempting to define mixed research methods (Johnson et al., 2007), this study was primarily led by a top-down approach in which I sought to avoid research questions to 'straightjacket' (Sunderland, 2010: 10) the peculiarities of the data, and rather to move in more circular, iterative patterns. This approach is that adopted by the so-called transformative-emancipatory research (Mertens, 2007), in which the researcher's

quest is driven more by the lives and experiences of groups undergoing power abuse and discrimination, like survivors of IPV certainly are.

Furthermore, this pragmatic mixed-method approach to research methods can be said to fit well in the eclectic methodological stance of many scholars within Critical Discourse Studies. As a matter of fact, if we recall Chapter 4, key figures within the socio-cognitive approach to discourse have advocated the multiple benefits of employing a large number of methods sourcing from the human, social and cognitive sciences which, used eclectically and on the basis of textual evidence, manifest an enormous degree of potential to address particular research questions (Hart & Cap, 2014; Koller, 2014). Last but not least, as the empirical section of this research will seek to illustrate, the mixed-method approach here adopted goes beyond the exercise of testing findings against each other depending on how they are tackled. Rather, as claimed by Bryman (2007), investigating this data with this methodological dynamicity in mind mostly attempts to bring together both components of the debate in such a way that both approaches can be equally informative and complementary.

As already suggested, the next three chapters take different methodological perspectives to the analysis of data. It should come as no surprise then to find out that a wide range of method-wise considerations (coding decisions, employed software tools, etc.) have informed each of these chapters separately. Readers should be aware of the fact that a detailed account of these decisions is provided in each corresponding chapter. However, and given the nature of this chapter, Table 18 below provides an outline of how these different methodological aspects were combined and treated in the flow of this study.

Table 18 | Overview of methods / methodological issues

Methodological issues	Chapter 6
Main objective(s)	(1) To better understand the online discourse of women undergoing IPV-related experiences via the application of text-analysis software tools (2) To shed light on the discursive characterisation of the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny (3) To investigate to what extent these online communities differ discursively from other non-violence motivated forums
Theoretical/ Analytical framework	Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Partington et al., 2013) Corpus Linguistics (CL) (Baker & McEnery, 2015)
Software tools	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) (Pennebaker et al., 2015)
Comments	(a) In the attempt to find out the discursive peculiarities of the main corpus, another corpus of digital discourse was created <i>ad hoc</i> . Data collected from the Survivors' Forum was labelled as VIOL_CORPUS and acted as the experimental corpus. Data collected from three non-violence related online websites was labelled as NONVIOL_CORPUS and acted as a reference corpus. The latter was only used in this chapter, so specific details about it are addressed in Chapter 6. (b) Several statistical measures were carried out in this chapter, especially when investigating the three communities in the VIOL_CORPUS. Guidance was provided by two statisticians at different stages of this research project (acknowledged below).
Methodological issues	Chapter 7
Main objective(s)	(1) To investigate how female survivors of IPV represent themselves as social actors in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV (2) To investigate how male perpetrators of IPV are represented as social actors in survivors' digitally-recounted experiences with IPV (3) To investigate the extent to which these discursive representations vary across the online communities under scrutiny (SB1, SB2, SB3)
Theoretical/ Analytical framework	Social Actors Approach (SAA) (van Leeuwen, 1996; 2008) Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse (SARDDA)
Software tools	Atlas.ti (for coding purposes, based on SARDDA features) Microsoft Word (for dealing with issues arising from the coding process)
Comments	(a) For the purposes of this study, attention was paid to the five sets of discursive features (see Section 7.3 below) (b) Statistical measures were carried out in order to test the degree of significance of the similarities/differences between frequencies of each variable [SARDDA features] among the online communities [SB1 to SB2; SB2 to SB3 and SB1 to SB3]. The following calculators were used for χ^2 and <i>p</i> -value (http://sigil.collocations.de/wizard.html) and for log-likelihood (LL) (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html)
Methodological issues	Chapter 8
Main objective(s)	1) To investigate how female survivors of IPV represent themselves figuratively in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV (2) To investigate how male perpetrators of IPV are figuratively represented in survivors' digitally-recounted experiences with IPV (3) To investigate the extent to which these figurative representations vary across the online communities under scrutiny (SB1, SB2, SB3)
Theoretical/ Analytical framework	Critical Metaphor Studies Discourse Dynamics Framework (Cameron & Maslen, 2010)
Software tools	Atlas.ti (for coding purposes, based on metaphor-related SARDDA features) Microsoft Excel (for data arrangement and sorting)
Comments	(a) Figurative representations for both survivors and perpetrators were sorted on the basis of the vehicle terms used. (a) For the purposes of this study, attention was paid to the five sets of discursive features (see Section 7.3 below) (b) Statistical measures were carried out in order to test the degree of significance of the similarities/differences between frequencies of each variable [vehicle terms/source domains] among the online communities [SB1 to SB2; SB2 to SB3 and SB1 to SB3]. The following calculators were used for χ^2 and <i>p</i> -value (http://sigil.collocations.de/wizard.html) and for log-likelihood (LL) (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html)

5.6 Ethical issues underlying research on online discourse

As already anticipated in Chapter 3, a growing number of researchers interested in applied linguistics are gradually recognising the many potentials of resorting to digital environments to explore the plethora of opportunities linked to digitally-mediated communication and the practices associated with it. Despite widespread beliefs even among researchers within the field to stress the relatively simple character of data collection in these realms, these research opportunities have also become the source of considerable concerns. This is particularly true when ethical aspects regarding the human participants that generate these data and their right to privacy are taken into account.³¹

Early examples of scholarly work seeking to shed light on key ethical issues in online environments already warned of some of the specific aspects that characterise these contexts (Elgesem, 2002). Nonetheless, the Internet as such has drastically changed since then, and the ethical delicacy with which these new venues need to be handled has been equally altered. Nevertheless, there seems to be relatively ample agreement that the readers of scholarly output should be made aware of the many decisions that online researchers took regarding the ethical dimension of their work (Barton & Lee, 2013).

Following this trend, Markham and Buchanan (2012) have identified three major tensions underlying research in online contexts: the controversy dealing with the private/public character of online data, to extent to which research participants should be treated either as participants or human subjects, and, quite relatedly, if data deriving from Internet contexts is to be seen merely as textual data or as the discursive output of the more traditional understanding of 'people'. In what follows, the tension between the public/private nature of online data will be discussed in depth, incorporating the two most outstanding perspectives in this regard. Likewise, attention will be paid to different ontological attitudes towards the role of participants

³¹ This is proving to be more and more central as online sites and the online practices related to them are becoming crucial for major offline socio-political events. It was precisely within the temporal span this research was being carried out when a major data breach was revealed, accusing the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica of harvesting 50 million Facebook profiles "to build a powerful software programme to predict and influence choices" (Cadwallard & Graham-Harrison, 2018) at separate, yet crucial, electoral events (the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America and Brexit).

(again in a more traditional sense) in digital scenarios. Having presented the most significant arguments along these lines, this section will henceforth be devoted to delineating the ethical issues affecting the online site under scrutiny, as well as the many decisions ethics-wise that were adopted when conducting this research.

5.6.1 Ongoing ethical controversies in Internet research

To date, many scholars interested in online communication have proved that the relationship between Internet data and the 'private-public' binary to define its character is far from clear-cut (McKee & Porter, 2009; Barton & Lee, 2013; Mackenzie, 2017). This fuzziness is certainly rooted in the four basic affordances of Internet data *per se* (boyd, 2011), since it benefits from 'persistence' (it can be automatically recorded and archived), 'replicability' (it can be duplicated and shared), 'scalability' (it is visible to known and unknown audiences) and 'searchability' (since it can be searched and found). The impact of these affordances on key elements of any communicative situation (audiences becoming invisible, for instance) has brought about the collapse of *context* as understood in traditional ways (Marwick & boyd, 2011), and spatial, social and temporal boundaries have therefore become harder to define (although see Szabla & Blommaert, 2017). Quite expectedly, this has also had an influence on assumptions about the private-public distinction or users' control over content (Spilioti & Tagg, 2017), to name just a few.

It is therefore not surprising to find out that some voices have questioned the usefulness of the private-public binary, acknowledging the existence of grey areas in between these two controversial constructs (Barton & Lee, 2013). As a matter of fact, its representation by means of a continuum has been said to reinforce the perpetuation of this binary construct, which has prompted moving from the question "is this public or private?" towards "how public or private is it?" (Markham & Buchanan 2015). It should be borne in mind that this controversy also applies regardless of the fact that the online site under investigation declares itself to be "public", which problematises this notion even further. This is partly because, as argued by some researchers (Danet et al., 1997; Rosenberg, 2010; Lüders, 2015), online users' perceptions about privacy, audience and information sharing are also integral parts of this ethical dilemma. More specifically, as Lüders suggests (2015), users of online media may conceptualise the context in which they are communicating as ruled by strong expectations of privacy, which may undermine the public character of a given

online site. To put it differently, as claimed by others (Dürscheid, 2007; Landert & Jucker, 2010), most conversations taking place in settings of this sort concern personal matters of no relevance to others, despite their alleged public nature. This is also related to the concept of “intended public” (boyd 2011: 44), which suggests that Internet users tend to have an imagined audience according to which their communicative practices are unavoidably adjusted.

As tends to be the case, there are a number of alternative understandings of this controversy worth taking into account. On the one hand, one of these options presents a rather different version of Internet data and privacy issues surrounding it, defending that doing research online does not put individuals’ privacy at risk because most online researchers concentrate on investigating activities which are typical of daily behaviour, and the research process does not involve the collection of specific traits of identity associated with this type of data (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Kozinets, 2010). This of course only applies when effective action is taken to grant that collected data meets the criteria for it to be treated in completely anonymous and confidential ways. Quite relatedly, and perhaps embodying a slightly less neutral stance, Walther emphasises online users’ responsibility to be cognisant of the nature of the virtual communities in which they are participating, even suggesting that “any person who uses publicly-available communication systems on the Internet must be aware that these systems are, at their foundation and by definition, mechanisms for the storage, transmission, and retrieval of comments” (2002: 207). This argument is taken even further when Walther (2002) problematises the analysis of Internet data as a process that does not constitute interaction with human subjects (another controversy that will be dealt with afterwards) in the traditional sense, advocating that the use of retrieved data is no different to the kind of research using newspaper stories, broadcasts, Parliamentary records or similar archival data. This is of great relevance for applied linguistics as a discipline, since most studies therein do rely on data of this sort.

On the other hand, another line of thought to address this controversy adopts a more dynamic, flexible approach. One of the most remarkable efforts to address the otherwise complex process of grouping all Internet data following the same criteria ethics-wise is that proposed by Nissenbaum (2010). By means of putting forward her “contextual integrity” framework, she relies on what she calls “informational norms” in the attempt to move from the restrictions resulting from the public-private binary.

As a whole, this contextual integrity approach presupposes “a multiplicity of social contexts, each with a distinctive set of rules governing information flows” (2010: 141). Based upon four variables (the context of the flow of information, the capacities in which the individuals sending/receiving the information act, the types of information involved and the principle of transmission), Nissenbaum defends that these informational flows are at the kernel of the contextual appropriateness of particular behaviours, among which are included ethical decisions of this kind. This does not but contribute to adding a nuance of dynamicity to the process of decision making, which has undoubtedly influenced the most up-to-date understanding when the combination of Internet research, privacy and ethics is considered (Mackenzie, 2017) as a necessarily case-based, context-attentive, iterative process (Markham & Buchanan 2012; 2015).

As signalled elsewhere in this section, another major controversy of Internet research (which interestingly also fuels the public/private discussion presented so far) is rooted in the conceptualisation of research participants (in a more traditional sense) and their associated practices in novel scenarios like online environments. In a very timely and recent paper, Metcalf and Crawford (2016) stress the real urgency to define what is meant by ‘human subject’ in (big) data science and critically interrogate what is owed to ‘data subjects’, suggesting that much research ethics and regulations are still trying to fit in methodological paradigm employed by data driven research. As a result, as also supported by similar studies (boyd & Crawford, 2012), traditional concepts in ethical terms (such as physical or psychological distress) are now being influenced by less tangible concepts such as information and data privacy. In their view, this is partly due to the fact that disciplines in which data science is central (i.e. statistics) have been traditionally less attached to human-subjects research (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). As human communication continues to migrate to online environments (see Chapter 3), human interaction in its digital form is also becoming part of big data (despite the fact that this happens even unconsciously for many users). Digital interaction between two subjects is therefore persistent, replicable, scalable and searchable (boyd, 2011).

With these ideas in mind, it seems clear that concepts such as ‘human subject’ “no longer enjoy a straightforward definitional status as in the past” (Markham & Buchanan, 2012: n/p). Therefore, research along these lines needs to keep progressing towards what constitutes a ‘human subject’ (although there might be

necessary to revisit the terminological assumptions underneath) in Internet research and the implication of users' presence and behaviour online. Even if human subjects are to be considered avatars, as suggested by Fairfield (2012), should it be assumed that one's digital information is an extension of the offline self, or the outcome of one's online self? In a similar vein, the potential harm to which online users are exposed may also need redefinition. As an example, more research should investigate the connection between how one's online data and her/his physical (offline) person can lead to psychological and/or physical damage, raising questions as to what extent the physical dimension of a person is removed (or not) from digital datasets (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Although general consensus along these lines is far from being reached, it may be convenient to think of "online personas", as used by some researchers in the field (Sirivianos et al., 2008; Williams, 2008; Thorne et al., 2015), in the attempt to address in more convenient ways the many voids that these boundaries still create nowadays. Interestingly, some of these voices link this process of creating an *online persona* to the very nature of online environments, which are said to "constitute primary settings through which routine constructions of identity are created, and curated, through the use of textual and multimodal expression" (Thorne et al., 2015: 216). It can thus be argued that the central role of discourse in the development of an online persona can also influence decision making in ethical terms. In other words, treating one's textual/multimodal discursive production as the entire representation of the offline self can turn collected data into a compilation of depersonalised online discourse. This shift in assuming that digital discourse is a collection of textual data not unattached from the offline self may have repercussions that may seem certainly fictional nowadays. As Metcalf and Crawford suggest (2016: 9) using Twitter as an example,

Should Twitter users now expect that their social media activities could affect their ability to get a loan? Is it reasonable to assume that social behaviour on Twitter is the same as social relationship outside of Twitter, or is this a spurious correlation that might cause economic harm to particular individuals and communities?

All in all, as this section has tried to foreground, the ethical dimension of doing Internet research has not ceased to develop and relevant discussion in many different directions is still proliferating. Partly influenced by the relatively recent nature of studies on digital environments (and its dynamic and heterogeneous character), subscribing a static set of ethical guidelines seems far from appropriate.

Rather, as anticipated elsewhere, there is a need to make ethical decisions following an iterative process, addressing and emphasising them as each research project on its own uniqueness gradually unfolds. To this end, the next section turns to consider the ethical decisions that were adapted to carry out this research in the light of the online site under investigation.

5.6.2 The Survivors' Forum: major ethical concerns

Research on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is by no means a simple endeavour. Additionally, IPV as a social phenomenon itself has only received relatively recent attention (from research in general and linguistic-driven disciplines in particular), which contributes to rather controversial discussions in the methodological arena. Thus, it should come as no surprise to find out that this research project has quite understandably devoted attention to its methodological articulation in general, although the awareness of the ethical requirements around this issue has thoroughly guided this project since the first explorations of this type of data. Although the willingness to gain a better understanding of this type of violence by examining female survivors' discourse remains the same, the first exploration focused on spoken data obtained by means of face-to-face interviews with volunteer women (Sánchez-Moya, 2013). To carry out this study, it was necessary to account for the most important ethical issues and obtain the approval of the Research Ethics Committee, which was granted.³²

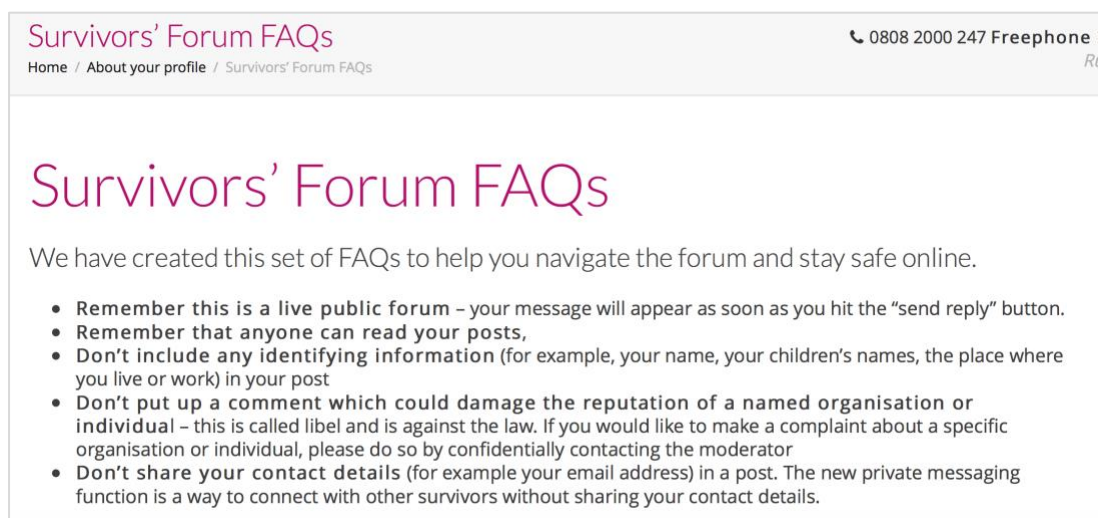
In fact, this first study already mentioned the intention to explore the Survivors' Forum as a future line of research. In fact, the option to combine offline and online aspects of this type of discourse was a possibility which the ethics report contemplated. The shift to this forum was facilitated by several aspects. Apart from more practical issues (such as data accessibility), analysing data from the Survivors' Forum was thought to comply more suitably with ethical requirements. As a matter of fact, this study has been deeply concerned with meeting the recommendations for good research on Internet environments, as the forthcoming sections will further elaborate. Broadly speaking, though, the three Belmont Report principles of ethical research (Clark &

³² This research was carried out at Lancaster University (2012/2013). It was therefore its by-then Research Ethics Committee that granted permission to carry out this research, having completed all the necessary application forms and guaranteeing that participants in this research were informed of its characteristics and volunteered to do so.

Walker, 2011) have been taken into account.³³ Likewise, the WHO guidelines for ensuring participants' safety in IPV research were carefully considered (WHO, 2001; Ellsberg & Heise, 2002), in which the most central aspect for studies of this kind is the safety of respondents themselves. On top of that, this study was also explained and approved by the Research Ethics Office at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Having these broad considerations in mind, it is now convenient to discuss the many ethical decisions that are related to the primary source of data for this research. To start with, and as Figure 21 below depicts, the Survivors' Forum devotes a FAQs section which provides help to “navigate the forum and stay safe online” (Women's Aid, 2017). Quite straightforwardly, the first bullet point reminds its users of the “live public” character of the forum, warning them of the immediacy with which messages will be included in the general board. Likewise, users are informed of the open character their posts possess, highlighting by means of a rather broad lexical choice that “anyone” can read their posts. As can be noticed, emphasis is put on the precautions users must take not to include any identifying information (from personal or children's names to spatial locations) or contact details that can facilitate tracking online users' offline identity. Very importantly, potential users are told about the possibility of resorting to private messaging to contact directly with other survivors who make use of the forum (although, as suggested by the wording, anonymity is also guaranteed there).

Figure 21 | The Survivors' Forum FAQs (screenshot 25/04/2017)



³³ See Appendix 2 for more information.

Apart from the informational norms that already stand out from the Survivors' Forum FAQs section, there are several points in this regard that are worth raising here. First, it should not be forgotten that despite the open nature of forum threads, registration is obligatory for those who wish to contribute actively in the development of the forum. Given the fact that this forum is part of the services offered by an organisation, the registration process requires providing sensible information, together with a validated e-mail account; access to this online service thus needs to be granted. Second, one of the factors that also contributes to the ethical principle of minimising harm is related to the moderated nature of the Survivors' Forum. This means that a number of professionally-qualified members of Women's Aid staff have a crucial role in making sure that messages posted do not include personal details that can help reveal any user's offline identity. Last but not least, the possibility that users of this online forum have to engage in private-messaging practices with other users also has implications for the ethical decision-making process in this study. In short, it is possible to argue that the discursive output submitted to the online communities under scrutiny may have an 'intentionally-public' character. At this point, it is convenient to return to key informational notions included in Chapter 2. As suggested by respondents to the FRA survey (FRA, 2014: 67), female survivors of IPV may have appreciated any type of assistance (from practical help to someone to talk to) following the most serious violent event they had experienced. In fact, "someone to talk to/moral support" (39% of physically-abused women; 54% of sexually-abused women) was the most demanded need for assistance, which suggests that a need to publicly engage in sharing their experiences with IPV may also be part of a conscious decision by these users and their needs.

Thus far, it would be unproblematic to suggest that the discursive output included in this online forum results from online users who have been informed about the conditions in which they are using, and posting in, this particular online space. As suggested before, emphasis is made on the public character of the forum as well as on the many actions users should supposedly adhere to when making use of it. Nevertheless, especially if the sensitive character of IPV as social issue is taken into account, the suitability of researching this space can also be challenged by arguments related to the concept of "intended audience" (boyd, 2011) and the strong expectations of privacy these users may feel when writing there (Lüders, 2015). The

dilemma underpinning this idea of ‘public in form but private in content’ could be also approached from Nissenbaum’s ‘contextual integrity’. In this vein, and relying on the “informational norms” that the above-explained guidelines convey, individuals interacting in this space do share the same “informational norms” (Nissenbaum, 2010), an issue that should be taken into account when measuring the ethical suitability of researching this space.

Despite this, related research has questioned Nissenbaum’s overreliance on users’ awareness of the context in which they are communicating. An example of this critique is found in an interesting article by Mackenzie (2017), which thoroughly examines similar ethical dilemmas in an online forum conceived to support women at different stages of motherhood. In what she calls a “reflexive-linguistic approach” to Internet research ethics, Mackenzie encourages researchers to follow a five-method procedure (although following them all is not strictly necessary) to investigate contexts of this sort “to mitigate potential causes of harm” (Mackenzie, 2017: 299). These five methods are: (1) systematic observation; (2) memo writing; (3) adopting a participant stance; (4) engagement with participants and gatekeepers and; (5) linguistic analysis. Useful though this procedure indeed is, there are a number of observed shortcomings in it that some researchers may as well feel when trying to investigate similar contexts.

Broadly speaking, Mackenzie’s proposed framework to comply with good ethical standards when carrying out Internet research shows coherence and its systematic application is certainly feasible. However, the encouragement of adopting a participatory stance is likely to pose problems when there is not a total alignment between the researcher and the online site s/he is willing to explore. In a very honest account of the ethical process, Mackenzie reveals that her condition as a mother made her understand that from an observer point of view she was failing to acknowledge her “growing affinity with Mumsnet users and [her] very real engagement with the site” (2017: 301). Paradoxically enough, although becoming a member of the community situated her within the research site, she confesses that she still remained a silent user and did not contribute to the threads (Mackenzie, 2017). Nonetheless, registering as a member allowed her to use affordances like private messaging to contact other users and request permission to reproduce their posts in published research. This argument seems to support the idea that only those

researchers who are capable of completely identifying themselves with similar experiences undergone by the communities under investigation would ascribe to good research practices in ethical terms. In a very similar fashion, and based on information shared via private-messaging with other users, Mackenzie suggests that ‘outsiders’ (or those who are not part of the online community) are likely to misunderstand the community (2017: 309), which is in theory solved by means of legitimising one’s research by becoming a part of it. Again, this argument would advocate the compulsory necessity to identify as part of a community to conduct legitimate research on it. Were this argument to be adopted, it is worth questioning who would be entitled to do research on cyber-bullying among school teenagers, for example. Additionally, this claim fails to elaborate the reasons why making online users aware of the type of research being carried out prevents researchers (or different voices in the media, for example) from misunderstanding what is said in a forum thread.

As the previous arguments may suggest, Mackenzie’s ‘reflexive-linguistic’ approach to Internet research did not entirely fit some of the central assumptions this research is built upon. In fact, if we recall Chapter 2 here, this study defends that Intimate Partner Violence cannot be solely explained from a single perspective and a more holistic approach is deemed more appropriate when trying to gain a better understanding of it. This does not of course mean that good practice in ethical terms should be disregarded. For this reason, Table 19 below proposes a research protocol that could be potentially used by researchers who seek to approach the online communities they investigate relying on convenient measures to mitigate potentially harmful practices. This procedure is not numerically ordered since it is not necessary to follow these recommendations in order. Similarly, each of the steps below are further elaborated on the basis of the many ethical concerns taken during the development of this research, which is openly discourse-oriented. Therefore, the proposed framework is likely to be more useful for researchers with a similar focus.

Table 19 | Proposed research protocol to ensure online users’ safety and engage with good research practices in ethical terms

(A) The online site eliciting research interests is not restricted or password-protected; access to online access is therefore digitally-open

Quite arguably, the first limitation that an Internet researcher is likely to find deals with the technical features of the online site itself. In some cases, online forums are completely password-protected and registration is therefore essential to become a

member of that community. Although self-identification with the community may justify access via registration, ethical concerns are likely to arise if protected data included therein is employed without consent. As clarified in the previous sections, posts analysed for this research are not password-protected and the affordance of private messaging is an option in the site.

(B) The online site under scrutiny makes an explicit reference to its public character

As discussed elsewhere in this section, the alleged public nature of an online community does not entirely grant permission to research discourse produced in these circumstances, and notions like online users' expected privacy (Lüders, 2015) or "intended public" (boyd, 2011) should be taken into account. However, if an online space does rely on clearly-specified "informational norms" (Nissenbaum, 2010), "contextual integrity" can be said to apply to the site under scrutiny. As illustrated in Figure 21 above, the fact that the Survivors' Forum clarifies in one of its central sections the different points to bear in mind when posting there facilitates this research's compliance with good practice in ethical terms.

(C) If the online site is devoted to collectives in vulnerable contexts, it must always guarantee users' confidentiality

Although this principle should apply in all cases, online sites that unite users around sensible situations must always grant the users' anonymity and confidentiality. This can be achieved in several ways. A very suitable indicator to accomplish this criterion is the analysis of a moderated forum. Having the forum moderated by a professional can supply the online site with suitable measures to protect its users. If the forum is not moderated, the research should always make sure no personal details are revealed in the analysed discursive data, removing all instances of data that can help identify the offline self. In this particular case, the Survivors' Forum is strictly (and very efficiently) moderated, leaving no trace whatsoever of its users' offline identity.

(D) If the online site does not do it itself, anonymise the linguistic production to its maximum degree

In some cases, the online site itself tries to guarantee users' confidentiality by removing any detail that can be potentially associated with the user's offline identity. If this is not the case, the researcher should always make use of any possible mechanism to further anonymise the discursive output. As a matter of fact, this research took the anonymisation of users in the Survivors' Forum one step further. Provided that online users need to register to post in any public thread, users employ a nickname of their choice to communicate in the forum. In the attempt to avoid any connection between these online nicknames and any user's offline identity, all users were further anonymised by following the same mechanism. Users were uniquely identified by means of UUSx (i.e., UUS1, UUS2, and so forth), decreasing the chances to be recognised by any other member even within the online community.

(E) Data collected from the online site is securely stored

Once the previous stages have been accomplished, attention has to be paid to issues related to the storage of collected data. Storages that rely on third parties 'clouds' are to be avoided in order to protect users' discursive output as securely as possible. This also applies when the excerpts of the corpus need to be shared with academic authorities or reproduced in published research, making sure that all data included therein has been anonymised to its furthest degree.

(F) Internet researchers (especially those exploring vulnerable online communities) are openly committed to safeguard the interests of the community under investigation

Regardless of notions like membership, Internet researchers will always work towards benefiting the investigated communities' objectives and goals without exposing their users to potential harms.

Although Internet researchers may find these six principles useful for complying with adequate ethical standards in studies driven by an online discourse orientation, it should be emphasised again that adopting a set of fixed guidelines may seem inconvenient. Rather, ethical issues should be addressed and emphasised as they appear in each state of the research project, especially if the topic under investigation is generally considered socially/culturally sensitive. As a matter of fact, the mere conceptualisation of the social phenomenon as a public/private issue is likely to interfere with the understanding of research projects in this vein. This is the case when dealing with IPV, which is still nowadays a private matter for many in some cultural contexts (both inside and outside Europe). Furthermore, it is important not to forget that a vast majority of Internet research (at least that related to language and linguistics) does rest on the assumption that online discourse is publicly available, especially if both the user and the medium used to transmit these messages enable public sharing. To put it differently, different ethical questions would arise if data were collected from Twitter, Facebook or Instagram (especially if users decide to share digital content in a public way) or whether data collection means accessing users' WhatsApp private conversations without informed consent.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has attempted to provide a detailed account of the core methodological decisions that have been taken during this research process. In essence, this chapter first focuses on describing the online forum that serves as the main source of data for this study, not only dwelling on both the digital context *per se* but also giving details of Women's Aid as the organisation in charge of this online help service. After this, specific emphasis has been put on the process of data collection as such, elucidating important concerns pertaining to the nature of this corpus; namely in terms of size, the number of participants represented in the corpus and their communicative patterns, etc. Additionally, another section in the chapter has determined to justify the mixed-method approach this research is based upon,

explaining how this investigation is embedded within both quantitative and qualitative methodological approximations. Although more specific methodological considerations will be addressed in the forthcoming chapters, an overview of the employed methods has also been included in this chapter. Finally, given the relevance of the Survivors' Forum as the online space this research looks at, this chapter also embarked on a very timely discussion on the necessary ethical dimensions that inform this research.

(II) EMPIRICAL EXPLORATIONS

Now that both the theoretical foundations and the general methodological scaffolding that this research is built upon have been put forward, this second part provides several empirical investigations that seek to contribute to how a better understanding of IPV can be grasped from discourse-driven explorations of this social phenomenon. To this end, this part is again structured in three chapters that address IPV from different empirical standpoints. Despite the fact that these three chapters can be dealt with independently from one another, it should be borne in mind that they are presented following a particular logic. This is explained in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Chapter 6 entails a first approximation to the online discourse of IPV survivors by means of corpus linguistics techniques and software. As will be specified afterwards, the application of corpus tools aims at obtaining a larger picture of the data under scrutiny, which is taken as a solid starting point from which the subsequent studies develop. Despite the richness of discourse-driven claims that this first exploration puts forward, this chapter also serves to confirm the possibility of considering the three online communities contrasted in this study as groups standing on their own, as the *socio-netological* accounts included in the previous chapter also demonstrated. Not least importantly, the corpus-assisted arguments claimed in this chapter are taken as solid evidence of the discursive morphology of the dataset at hand. This is mostly undertaken in the attempt to mitigate as much as possible the bias CDS research is usually criticised for (as widely discussed in Chapter 4 within the theoretical part above).

Once a general (but still discursive) picture of the data is presented, Chapter 7 moves on to consider the representation of key social actors in these online accounts of IPV. More specifically, this chapter seeks to illustrate the mechanisms that female survivors participating in this forum employ to represent themselves and their perpetrators. Furthermore, it aims at exploring the correlation between the type of mechanisms used in each online community that integrates this study. Given that social actor representations of both survivors and perpetrators of IPV are taken into account, this analysis relies on previous approaches to the investigation of collective identity in discourse from a socio-cognitive standpoint (Koller, 2009; 2012; 2014).

Although this operationalisation springs from van Leeuwen's Social Actors Approach (2008), the analytical framework that is eventually applied results from an adaption of van Leeuwen's taxonomy bearing in mind the motivations behind this research and some other methodological aspects, such as the type of discourse under scrutiny.

Then, Chapter 8 constitutes the investigation of discourse by IPV survivors from a critical metaphor approach. The need for this type of analysis derived from having scrutinised the corpus more qualitatively, coming to the realisation that metaphorical accounts of both the victims and the perpetrators were strikingly abundant. As already suggested by van Dijk (1995, 1998), metaphors play a crucial role in the representation of social actors from a CDS perspective. Not surprisingly then, it is worth highlighting that encounters between CDS research and (critical) metaphor studies are not unusual (Charteris-Black, 2005; Koller, 2012; Musolff, 2012), especially due to the cognitive turn that to a great degree has influenced CDS research in recent years (Hart & Cap, 2014).

CHAPTER 6 | A CORPUS-ASSISTED ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ONLINE ACCOUNTED EXPERIENCES WITH IPV: THE BIGGER PICTURE

6.1 Introduction

This chapter embodies the first empirical exploration of female survivors' online accounts with IPV that this research concentrates on. As tends to be the case (Baker & McEnery, 2015), the earliest stages in studies influenced by corpus linguistics place a greater emphasis on its quantitative component, which gradually becomes more qualitative and context-led as the project itself progresses. In short, this chapter sets out to investigate how text-analysis software tools used in corpus linguistics can help CDS researchers to grasp a general (and ideally better) understanding of the discourse type under scrutiny.

To this end, this chapter is divided in several sections. Section 6.2 below provides a succinct overview on the methodological usefulness accomplished by the synergy of combining research tenets of both Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and Corpus Linguistics (CL). Given the motivations of this current research, this section devotes careful attention to the so-called Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), a subset within CL that is deemed to fit the purposes of this study adequately. Then, and having elucidated key tenets of the former, Section 6.3 and Section 6.4 strive for a detailed account of the text analysis software tool this study namely relies on (LIWC), outlining its main technical specifications as well as justifying its suitability for this particular exploration. Section 6.5 furnishes readers with a thorough presentation of the analyses reached by means of applying this corpus tool, and it also engages with discussing the repercussions of these results. All in all, then, this chapter is intended to set the ground for a general understanding of the discursive characterisation of the corpus under scrutiny, building upon it to further elaborate the forthcoming, more-detailed and qualitative explorations of the dataset at hand.

6.2 On the (methodological) usefulness of a synergy: CDS, CL & CADS

To date, a great amount of research within applied linguistics tends to rely on *corpora*. As widely acknowledged, this term derives from the Latin term "body" and stands for a body of language (Baker & McEnery, 2015). It is certainly unimaginable

for many researchers interested in language use to think of those times when language analysis (and therefore linguistic evidence and claims) was mostly centred on the discursive production of a couple of users or at the mercy of not naturally-elicited examples that would fit the theoretical tenets put forward by some.

It is generally accepted that the forerunners of what we understand as corpus linguistics today were mostly linked to the University of Birmingham during the early 1990s. Soon after corpus linguistics techniques were recognised for the potential they offered in assisting both grammar and dictionary building (Sinclair, 1991; Close-Subtirely & Baker, 2018), very modest studies could already foresee the many advantages of approaching research within critical linguistics by means of corpus tools and techniques, especially those concerned with the notion of typicality and its role in CDS studies. This was mainly because

critical discourse analysis is best suited to deal with small corpora the question of representativeness obviously looms large. There may be a temptation to proclaim features as typical rather than build up the notion of “typicality” on the basis of frequency. The hidden danger is that the reason why texts concerned were singled out for analysis in the first place was precisely that they are not typical, but in fact quite unusual instances which aroused the analyst’s attention (Hardt-Mautner, 1995: 3)

As a matter of fact, many identify Hardt-Mautner’s study (1995) as the first formal claim praising the combination of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, a trend which began to be replicated soon afterwards by means of the linguistics of representation in media discourse (Stubbs, 1994; Caldas-Coulthard, 1995). This type of academic work kept progressing and proliferating, proving that corpus linguistics methods (namely collocations, concordances and key words) could be successfully applied to CDS-motivated objectives such as the press representation of both refugees, asylum seekers or (im)migrants (Baker et al., 2008) and Muslims and Islam (Baker et al., 2013). These projects heightened Lancaster University’s reputation as the paragon of this type of research, since renowned groups of both CDS and CL scholars managed to fruitfully accommodate their research and justify that “neither CDA nor CL need be subservient to the other [...] but each contributes equally and distinctly to a methodological synergy” (Baker et al., 2008: 274).

Mostly due to Lancaster's influence, corpus linguistics is widely recognised as a "powerful methodology [...] to assist the analysis of language so that regularities among *many millions of words* can be quickly and accurately identified" (Baker & McEnery, 2015: 1; italics added). Interestingly, and more in line with my own understanding of it, more recent attempts to define the rationale behind CL seem to relativise issues of size, claiming that the objective of CL is to "better understand language production if we use computer software to identify linguistic patterns that occur across large sets of texts that have been collected in order to be representative of a particular language variety" (Close-Subtirely & Baker, 2018: 106).

Suitable though Lancaster's understanding of this methodological synergy may seem, a similarly-related approach appears to be more in line with the orientation of this research. Coined by Partington (2004) and epitomised by his research at the University of Bologna, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) was forged in parallel as scholars interested in these methodological combinations felt the need to emphasise the eclectic nature of the approach, identifying corpus techniques as some of the many techniques CDS/CADS analysts could make use of in order to obtain the most adequate results (Partington et al., 2013). Despite their overt claim to untwine their research from any political agenda (whose validity is certainly overridden once some of the political motivations of their studies are considered), it can be argued that CADS is genuinely appropriate to frame the role of corpus linguistics tools in this study.

In a nutshell, the aim of the CADS approach is "the uncovering, in the discourse type under study, of what we might call "non-obvious meaning", that is, meaning which might not be readily available for the naked-eyed perusal" (Partington et al., 2013: 11). In contrast with the tendency among traditional corpus linguistics to privilege the quantitative approach, the whole motivation behind the incorporation of corpus techniques in CADS is "to acquaint ourselves as much as possible with the discourse type(s) in hand" (Partington et al., 2013: 12). To this end, a wide range of tools (among which wordlists and concordances stand out) may be at the researcher's disposal to gain a better understanding of how things are done linguistically in the discourse-type being studied (Partington et al., 2013: 12). As stated elsewhere, this is precisely the main objective this chapter follows, somewhere in between the methodological validation of whether the three online communities could be treated

as such and the attempt to obtain the larger (discursive) picture that characterised them at the same time. Furthermore, as put forward by its main representatives, a common tendency among CADS research is the *ad hoc* compilation of specialised corpora, since chances are that there exists no previously available collection of the discourse type under scrutiny (Partington et al., 2013). At this stage, readers should be certainly familiar with the multiple considerations that accompanied the creation of the specialised corpus this study is built upon. In a similar vein, CADS is also characterised for being comparative in nature. As suggested by Partington et al. (2013), contrast can be established either between more local levels (especially when seeking to evaluate the distinctive features of a discourse type with similar kinds) or larger, more heterogeneric corpora.

There should be very little hesitation now to comprehend the reasons why this research fits in the paradigm proposed by CADS, whose main tenets are very closely followed and applied throughout. Nonetheless, regardless of the approach one ascribes to, there seems to be a common agreement on the most representative challenges and discussions that the application of corpus methods is triggering among current scholars. These are neatly identified by Baker and McEnery (2015) and briefly discussed in what follows, as they also pertain this study in particular.

One of the pitfalls of dealing with large bodies of language data is closely linked to issues of data collection. Bearing in mind both the painstaking process behind the compilation of spoken discourse and the gradual migration of communicative practices to online environments, researchers among applied linguistics are quite understandably enticed to navigate through digital platforms and collect data from there in order to build their corpora. This seemingly innocent and well-intended practice is bringing about issues related to intellectual property, copyright issues and research ethics that researchers within corpus linguistics need to handle. Although issues related to research ethics were fully addressed in Section 5.6 above, aspects concerning intellectual property and copyright are also worth taking into account. Despite the still ongoing discussion around it, pertinent institutions seem to be aware of this controversy, showing a certain flexibility when non-profit research involving text and data mining is concerned (Baker & McEnery, 2015). More specifically, as also noted by Baker and McEnery (2015), the UK Intellectual Property Office has recently adopted a stance in this regard, allowing “researchers to make copies of any

copyright material for the purpose of computational analysis if they already have the right to read the work (that is, work that they have “lawful access” to). They will be able to do this without having to obtain additional permission to make these copies from the rights holder” (Intellectual Property Office, 2014: 6).

Another shortcoming concerns what Baker and McEnery (2015) call the “so-what” findings. In their words, a tendency that stems from scholars in adjacent disciplines tends to call into question the usefulness of analyses obtained via corpus-driven explorations, warning of the somewhat expected conclusions reached by some of them. Nonetheless, Baker and McEnery (2015) successfully neutralise this criticism by outlining the three main benefits of applying corpus techniques to linguistic research. First, they argue that corpus-oriented analyses (mostly conducted by means of large-scale grounding and credibility) can add validity to these claims, despite their supposed obviousness. Second, they also bring to the fore the special ability that corpus investigations have to reveal more subtle patterns a human analysis would most likely miss. Third, it is also important to be attentive to the genuinely unforeseen results a corpus analysis can potentially reveal, opening up to completely different research paths that may be contrary to the researcher’s initial motivations. As far as this research is concerned, it is worth recalling that both the urgent need to explore IPV from a discourse perspective and the innovative combination of approaches guaranteed thought-provoking results. However, it is also true that the application of text analysis software to the corpus under inspection yielded insightful evidence which had not been initially anticipated.

Last but not least, Baker and McEnery (2015) devote a great deal of attention to the role corpus linguistics may have in one of the most generalised criticisms levelled against critical linguistics in general, and CDS in particular, which relates to its ability to reduce researchers’ bias. The spread of quantification and the need to engage in positivist accounts of scientific research even among the human and social sciences have led applied linguists to support the idea that a corpus analysis will solve issues of subjectivity in their research. Although the avoidance of subjectivity is complex, corpus linguistics is regarded as a very effective tool in order not to rely on a given analyst’s interpretations and judgements (Close-Subtirely & Baker, 2018). In this line, Baker and McEnery argue (2015) that accepting techniques such as keywords selection as intrinsically objective is certainly dangerous, since the sole process of

interpreting them is not detached from researchers' subjective interferences. In their own words, "it is highly likely that two independent researchers working on the same corpus will produce different keyword lists" (Baker & McEnery, 2015: 8-9). Based on these arguments, it is indeed important to highlight that corpus linguistics is here regarded as a pathway to equip linguists and their research with assistance to support their claims with more solid evidence. More specifically, as Baker and McEnery put it (2015: 9),

rather than viewing corpus linguistics as problematically biased, it is more helpful to accept that there is no such thing as unbiased human research (and that such a goal may not necessarily be attractive in any case), but instead aim for wider transparency about methodological decisions and a more nuanced set of stated claims about the benefits of using computational methods.

As tends to be the case when dealing with developing fields, discussion around these topics is still open to debate. What seems unproblematic to affirm is that corpus linguistics as a whole is gradually earning a central place within discourse driven studies, which seem to be willing to be based on less biased methodological grounds. Not surprisingly, corpus linguistics is also trying to expand to fields within linguistics that have been hitherto less explored. The rise of online interaction is promoting the application corpus techniques to the analysis of this discourse type (Harvey, 2012; Hunt & Harvey, 2015), which has particularly focused on health communication in digital environments. Given the widespread character of multimodality in online communication, one of the most promising areas of research along these lines may be the treatment of multimodal texts by means of corpus techniques, although initial explorations are being carried out (Adolphs & Carter, 2013; Adolphs et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the ways in which more audio-visual modes (especially elements such as *emojis* or *memes*, which are gradually being used frequent and ubiquitously in most communicative digital scenarios) will be dealt with in systematic ways still remains unclear to date.

6.3 Text analysis software tools: LIWC

If the increasing tendency among language scholars to build their research on more stable methodological grounds is taken into account, it should be unsurprising to discover the many software tools that have been developed in recent years. As

presented by Partington et al. (2013) in a resource-oriented appendix, there exists a plethora of tools and opportunities to scrutinise texts following a corpus linguistics approach. Depending on the motivation and the specific research interests, analysts can make use of the many technical possibilities that available software may offer. Perhaps due to its pioneering nature, *Wordsmith* (Scott, 2008) is one of the best-known software packages. Similarly, most corpus linguists will also be familiar with the many utilities provided by *AntConc* (Anthony, 2011) or *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). Mostly known for their usefulness for either media discourse mining or sentiment analysis, similar tools have also been developed by Dutch and Spanish multidisciplinary research teams, such as the *NewsReader* (Vossen et al., 2016) or *Lingmotif* (Moreno-Ortiz, 2016) respectively.

Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC henceforth)³⁴ has been used for this study for the reasons that are discussed in the following paragraphs.³⁵ First, it is worth considering that LIWC developers conceive language as “the most common and reliable way for people to translate their internal thoughts and emotions into a form that others can understand” to the extent of seeing words and language as “the medium by which cognitive, personality, clinical, and social psychologists attempt to understand human beings” (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010: 25). These underpinning assumptions are of paramount importance if the nature of the corpus investigated in this research is borne in mind.

It seems convenient to draw on the logic behind LIWC and how it processes language input. LIWC relies on word count strategies to investigate issues concerned with content analysis and style. It is based on the assumption that lexical choices made by people transmit psychological information over and above their literal meaning and independent of their semantic context (Pennebaker et al., 2007),³⁶ which can at the same time be used to make inferences about dimensions of individuals’ personalities (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). LIWC has two central features: the processing component and the internal dictionaries (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Basically, LIWC analyses speech samples by identifying and

³⁴ Information on this software tool can be found here: <http://liwc.wpengine.com>

³⁵ Nonetheless, *AntConc* (Anthony, 2011) has also been employed at several stages of this research project. Appendix 4, for instance, provides a keyness analysis (see Appendix for details).

³⁶ “Semantic context” is seen here as “meaning-constraining context, i.e., discourse context, experimental context, situational context within which a target word is uttered [or used]” (Rahman and Melinger, 2009: 713).

classifying them according to the three internal dictionaries that the LIWC2015 version has, which consists of almost 6,400 words, words stems and selected emotions (LIWC, 2017).³⁷ Each dictionary refers to the collection of words that define a particular category, examples of which are illustrated in Table 20 below.³⁸ Hence, the LIWC software provides the percentage-use scores of 80 standard linguistic categories of different types as they are represented in the scrutinised texts submitted by users.

Table 20 | Examples of LIWC internal dictionaries (extracted from Pennebaker et al., 2015)

Linguistic Dimensions			Psychological processes		
Total function words	funct	<i>it, no, very</i>	Affective proc.	affect	<i>happy, cried</i>
Total pronouns	pronoun	<i>I, them, itself</i>	Positive em.	posemo	<i>love, nice, sweet</i>
Personal pronouns	ppron	<i>I, them, her</i>	Negative em.	negemo	<i>hurt, ugly, nasty</i>
1 st pers. singular	i	<i>I, me, mine</i>	Anxiety	anx	<i>worried, fearful</i>
1 st pers. plural	we	<i>we, us, our</i>	Anger	anger	<i>hate, kill, annoyed</i>
2 nd pers.	you	<i>you, your</i>	Sadness	sad	<i>crying, grief, sad</i>
3 rd pers. singular	shehe	<i>she, he</i>	Social proc.	social	<i>mate, talk</i>
3 rd pers. plural	they	<i>they, their</i>	Family	family	<i>daughter, dad, aunt</i>
Impersonal pron.	ipron	<i>it, it's</i>	Friends	friend	<i>buddy, neighbour</i>
Articles	article	<i>a, an, the</i>	Drives		
Prepositions	prep	<i>to, with</i>	Affiliation	affiliation	<i>ally, friend, social</i>
Auxiliary verbs	auxverb	<i>will, have</i>	Achievement	achieve	<i>win, success, better</i>
Negate	negate	<i>no(t), never</i>	Power	power	<i>superior, bully</i>

These linguistic categories include language variables (such as analytical thinking, authenticity, or emotional tone), 21 standard categories identifying function words (% of pronouns, articles, auxiliary verbs, etc.) and 41 semantic categories dealing with psychological constructs (such as affect, cognition, biological processes). Broadly speaking, this output measure is correlated to both personality and real-world outcome measures, which arguably capture people's social and psychological statuses as represented in their discursive production. Nonetheless, as Tausczik and Pennebaker themselves claim (2010), language dimensions such as function words are more straightforward than others. This is not the case when dealing with

³⁷ This chapter is based on LIWC 2015 version. More details on the development and psychometric properties of it can be found in Pennebaker et al., 2015.

³⁸ A full list of all the categories provided by a standard LIWC analysis is included in Appendix 3.

dimensions related to emotions, which are definitely more subjective. In order to solve this slippery challenge, “an initial selection of word candidates was gleaned from dictionaries, thesauruses, questionnaires, and lists made by research assistants [and] groups of three judges then independently rated whether each word candidate was appropriate to the overall word category” (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010: 27). Reportedly, the final percentage of judges’ agreement ranged from 93% to 100% after this rating phase (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010: 28).

Due to both the uncomplicated methodological manoeuvring and the potential it has to provide a fine-grained exploration of texts according to their emotional characterisation, it is possible to identify a rich profusion of studies that combine language-driven research and sentiment analysis via the application of LIWC. As a matter of fact, interesting insights have been obtained after examining discourses pertaining to personal accounts on intimate and social relationships or health issues. In fact, there is evidence supporting the correlation between physical and/or emotional pain and a higher use of first-person singular pronouns (Rude et al., 2004). In a similar vein, research has also pointed out that verb tense differences (present or past) can also indicate increased psychological distance and a higher degree of resolution when speakers describe disclosed events in comparison to when they do the same with previously undisclosed events (Pasupathi, 2007). Moving to health-related explorations, patients suffering from depression have been proved to use more first-person singular nouns and negative emotion words than others (Rude et al., 2004). Similarly, in the only study that to my knowledge explores IPV using LIWC (Holmes et al., 2007), women trying to cope with IPV were found to use different words to describe violence. As reported by these authors, a higher use of emotion words showed more immersion in the traumatic (violent) event. Although this study is based on the offline written output of several women during four writing sessions, the findings are definitely worth consideration.

6.4 Methodological issues

As pointed out in the previous section, and despite still scarce but interesting attempts (Holmes et al., 2007), the investigation of online accounts of IPV via the application of text software tools has not been widely endeavoured yet. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to obtain a preliminary approximation to the

discursive character of these three groups based on the analytical categories provided by LIWC, observations that will also be considered from a more qualitative-driven exploration of the analysed data in the forthcoming chapters. Rather than focussing on how LIWC categories would reflect individuals' real-world measures, this chapter specifically investigates if the scores in the distribution of LIWC categories vary if online communities under scrutiny are contrasted. All things considered, this chapter is guided by the following research questions:

(RQ1.1) How can the online discourse of women undergoing IPV-related experiences be better understood through the application of text-analysis software tools such as LIWC?

(RQ1.2) How are the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny discursively characterised in the light of LIWC-provided categories?

(RQ1.3) Based on their discursive characterisation, to what extent do these online IPV communities differ from other non-violence motivated forum communities?

To this end, a 40,000-word set from each community (SB1, SB2, SB3) was separately submitted to LIWC, obtaining the percentage of words belonging to each of the already-given categories provided by LIWC (see Table 20 above). If Chapter 5 is recalled, there was a slight deviance in the total number of words integrating each online community, since data collection was heavily dependent on this forum users' data usage. Nonetheless, in the attempt to offer a comparison based on the same number of words, the LIWC analysis was applied to an exact set of 40,000 words, basically because this was the minimum figure the three online communities could amount to. As a result, a total corpus of 120,000 words was randomly selected for the research objectives of this chapter, which has been treated as the experimental corpus (referred to as *VIOL_CORPUS* in what follows).

As this research progressed, it was deemed necessary to test the extent to which the discursive characterisation of the *VIOL_CORPUS* was different from the discourse used in digital environments whose main motivation was not linked to IPV situations but, rather, to experiences that many people in our more immediate contexts are likely to undergo. It was only on the basis of this comparison that the distinctive character of the IPV-related communities could be tested more

meaningfully. Contrasting the experimental corpus with already-available, large reference corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC) was one of the first possibilities to be considered. However, this was soon disregarded once the obvious differences between the experimental corpus and these reference/control corpora were taken into account.

First of all, it is worth noticing that already-available reference corpora such as the BNC usually derive from more traditional (offline) communicative contexts such as the written media or literary works. Given the nature of online discourse and its hybridity between the written and the spoken varieties of the language (which was extensively discussed in Chapter 3), it was thought that a more accurate analysis would result from comparing discourse types whose production contexts were digitally-based and therefore more alike. Another reason to disregard this comparison dealt with the specific character of the main discourse type under scrutiny (IPV). The nature of online discourse makes it harder to categorically affirm that all posts included in the Survivors' Forum were genuinely written by women. However, this research is built upon the assumption that users contributing to this online forum (hosted in the website of a charity openly committed to help women suffering from this type of violence) are female survivors of IPV. Conversely, most reference corpora are formed by large amounts of language in which variables such as gender are not accounted for, not to mention women undergoing such particular experiences as those associated with IPV. A final motivation not to use already-available reference corpora was linked to more practical issues. The software tool employed to analyse the experimental corpus (VIOL_CORPUS) was LIWC. In order to obtain the percentage-use scores provided by LIWC, text files need to be directly submitted to LIWC's desktop application, which necessarily obliges researchers to have data stored in plain text (.txt) or in any similar format (namely .docx or .xlsx).

Judging from the above-mentioned shortcomings, it was assumed that comparing the experimental corpus to already-available reference corpora would unavoidably lead to rather skewed results. It was mainly for these reasons that the most adequate solution would require the *ad hoc* compilation of online texts that could serve as the control corpus, which in fact entails widely-adopted *praxis* in corpus-assisted discourse studies (Partington et al., 2013). Thus, as Table 21 below conveys, the NONVIOL_CORPUS consists of a balanced sample of 120,000 words. Bearing in

mind that this control corpus needed to be compiled from scratch, collecting the same number of words was preferred to offer analyses based on appropriate comparable terms. In total, 760 forum posts were collected.

Table 21 | Details of control corpus (NONVIOL_CORPUS)

REFERENCE CORPUS (NONVIOL_CORPUS)		
DISCOURSE TYPE	POSTS	WORDS
NONVIOL1_Travelling (NV1)	244	40,000
NONVIOL2_Wedding (NV2)	299	40,000
NONVIOL3_Mothering (NV3)	217	40,000
TOTAL_NONVIOL	760	120,000

As previously pointed out, an essential requirement when creating this reference corpus was to collect posts produced in similar circumstances to those integrating the experimental corpus. To this end, posts were collected from online forums that fitted the multiple criteria established by the research protocol proposed in section 5.6.2 in the attempt to comply with good research practice in ethical terms. In short, posts were not password protected, registration was not required, discourse data was anonymised to the furthest possible degree and a sensitive approach to data storage was equally adopted.

Additionally, as Table 22 below further elaborates, only posts initiating a thread (to follow the same procedure than in the VIOL_CORPUS) were collected from online forums around three different communicative contexts: a forum related to travelling, posts included in a forum aimed at sharing experiences linked to wedding preparation, and forum posts included in an online site linked to a wide range of issues pertaining to motherhood. This was mostly done in order to control one of the most central variables for this research purposes, which presumed that the writers of these posts were women. As stated elsewhere, this is not always possible to guarantee in online contexts, but that is again a taken-for-granted assumption for those conducting Internet research. Despite this, due precaution was taken when trying to provide this reference corpus with reliable, comparable data. Given that this reference corpus is merely used in this chapter for its potential suitability to establish a contrast with the experimental corpus, further details of this process are not included in this chapter.

Table 22 | Brief netological description of online communities in NONVIOL_CORPUS

Forum communities	Netological description
NONVIOL1 Travelling	Posts integrating this non-violence online community were nested in one forum group included in TripAdvisor [www.tripadvisor.com/ShowForum-g1-i12357-Solo_Travel.html]. These 244 posts belong to the 'Solo travelling' online forum, and only those posted by female users were collected (to assist this task, the internal forum search engine was employed by submitting keywords such as 'woman', 'girl', or 'lady'). Posts range from 2009 to 2018, and topics ranged from questions about "safe" tourist destinations for women to travel solo, budget friendly ideas or different accommodation options.
NONVIOL2 Wedding	Posts included in this nonviolent subcorpus were originally posted in a British website aimed at women getting married [www.hitched.co.uk/chat/forums/]. The forum posts used for collection purposes were archived in threads explicitly aimed at women (whereas a different thread was specifically addressed at bridegrooms). These messages temporal span also covered several years to 2018 and ranged from DIY decoration, venue and clothing issues or even looking for wedding witnesses.
NONVIOL3 Mothering	These 217 posts were collected again from a publicly accessible forum specifically aimed at women [www.netmums.com]. All posts were anonymised to the highest possible degree, since many users did share very personal details. Mothers gathered in this online space to ask questions related, <i>inter alia</i> , microwave steriliser, baby car seats, children's genital exploration/curiosity or teeth falling out.

Once both the VIOL_CORPUS and the NONVIOL_CORPUS were ready to be compared, all posts were submitted to LIWC. Despite the numerous available categories researchers can select from, only some of the most relevant semantic categories for the purposes of this study were chosen. For this reason, attention was paid to categories included within 'language variables' (namely *analytical thinking*, *authenticity* and *tone*), those corresponding to emotionality (*positive emotions*, *negative emotions*), and categories concerning pronominal distribution (*I*, *he*, *they*). It should be borne in mind that, apart from seeking to obtain a general discursive picture of the dataset at hand, the main objective of this corpus-assisted exploration was to ascertain the different discursive features of the three main online communities under scrutiny. Nonetheless, LIWC scores (and subsequent statistical treatment) reveal interesting patterns if some other categories are contrasted (see Appendix 5). This will be surely used for future studies.

All in all, this section has specified some of the central, method-wise concerns for the development of this chapter. Next section turns to present and discuss results in

the light of the three research questions detailed above, which will essentially investigate the many insights that a text analysis software tool such as LIWC can offer into a better understanding of IPV.

6.5 Results and discussion

This section presents the results obtained after applying LIWC as the main text software tool to analyse the corpus under scrutiny. More specifically, it focuses on comparing the six online communities at the kernel of this chapter: SB1, SB2 and SB3 in the VIOL_CORPUS (also central for the next chapters) and NV1, NV2 and NV3 in the NONVIOL_CORPUS (used only for the purposes of this chapter).

To this end, the scores of those LIWC categories that are deemed to be more pertinent for this study are used to organise this section in several subsections, which present and discuss the implications of those percentages for key areas in IPV. Although descriptive statistics is provided throughout the chapter, inferential statistics measures are employed when possible. It is worth pointing out that this investigation does not account for individuals' discursive production. Rather, it understands language production in each of the analysed communities as embedded within the socio-cognitive approach to discourse, which views the discursive output and context in which is produced as unavoidably intertwined. Nonetheless, statistical measures were carried out when possible, and statistical significance measures (p value and log-likelihood) are in many cases integrated in the presentation and discussion of results.

Nonetheless, note that the number of words in each subcorpus is intentionally the same (40,000 per each subcorpus, resulting in 120,000 for both the experimental and the control/reference corpora correspondingly), which facilitates the adequate contrast between them. Therefore, data is presented in this section by means of raw numbers (N) and percentages (%). As suggested in the previous section, LIWC results in the VIOL_CORPUS are compared with the NONVIOL_CORPUS, which was built to serve as the reference of more generic online instances of the discourse types at hand.³⁹

³⁹ Although it was decided to focus on LIWC for these purposes, a keyness analysis was also carried out by means of AntConc to quickly find out which words are unusually (in)frequent in a given

6.5.1 Language variables: analytical thinking, WPS, authenticity and emotional tone (LIWC)

Among the many categories LIWC uses to classify words, there are seven of them (excluding 'word count') that fall within the group "summary language variables" (Pennebaker et al., 2015). In short, they offer a broad discursive characterisation of any discourse type under investigation and a wide range of valuable linguistic details can indeed be obtained by means of employing this software tool. On a semantic level, LIWC supplies scores related to analytical thinking ('Analytic'), authenticity ('Authentic') and emotional tone ('Tone'). It can further explore more syntactic correlations on the basis of the number of words included per sentence ('WPS').

Although many of these categories have been frequently combined by related research, this section will mostly focus on three of them, as suggested in the previous section. First, in the attempt to investigate complexity of thinking styles, combined attention will be paid to analytical thinking and 'WPS' (words per sentence). High scores in 'Analytic' are thought to indicate formal, logical and hierarchical thinking patterns (LIWC, 2017; Pennebaker et al., 2014), whereas low percentages may imply using language in more narrative ways, focusing on the here-and-now and leave more room for personal experiences (Pennebaker et al., 2014). The second category ('WPS') also seems to psychologically correlate with a higher capability to engage in verbal fluency and exude cognitive complexity (Heberlein et al., 2003; Hancock et al., 2007). Third, high figures in 'authenticity' tend to be indicative of people expressing in honest and personal ways, while lower numbers may evidence a more guarded, distanced form of discourse (Newman et al., 2003; Pennebaker et al., 2015; LIWC, 2017; Peslak, 2018). Fourth, emotional 'tone' seems to be more straightforward in interpretative issues, since the higher the percentage, the more positive the tone (Cohn et al., 2004; LIWC, 2017).

Having considered these categories and what they stand for, it seems timely to present LIWC scores obtained for each language variable (%) for the analysed corpus. As illustrated in Table 23 below, two different tendencies can be observed if both the forum communities and the summary language variables are compared.

(experimental) corpus [the VIOL_CORPUS in this case] in contrast with a reference corpus [the NONVIOL_CORPUS] (Gabrielatos & Marchi, 2012). Results for this are included in Appendix 4.

Note that the maximum possible number in the raw figures is 40,000 (since the six subcorpora contrasted in this chapter were intentionally equalled in words)

Table 23 | LIWC language variables (raw numbers and %) in VIOL_CORPUS

LIWC language variables in VIOL_CORPUS	Forum communities (VIOL_CORPUS)						Stat sig (SB1 vs SB3) (p) ⁴⁰
	SB1		SB2		SB3		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Analytical	7044	17.6	7380	18.4	8196	20.4	NS ⁴¹
WPS	8836	22.1	8484	21.2	8304	20.7	NS
Authenticity	25088	62.7	28200	70.5	30592	76.4	SB1<SB3 $p<0.001$
Tone	2492	6.2	4236	10.5	5628	14.1	SB1<SB3 $p<0.001$

If the brief considerations above are taken into account, it can be argued that discourse in the ‘Life after abuse’ subcorpus (SB3) is characterised by a more analytical style than in ‘Is it abuse?’ (SB1). The lower percentage observed in the latter may therefore suggest a stronger focus on the here-and-now and on personal experiences, together with a tendency to offer more narrative accounts of these users’ experiences with IPV. It is precisely this reliance on a more narrative style what may have triggered a higher score for ‘WPS’ also in SB1. As a matter of fact, an interesting observation can be made if the ratio between posts collected for SB1 and SB3 and their corresponding number of words is taken into account. Basically, posts in SB1 are notably lengthier, which explains how 105 posts amounted to 46,733 words. This tendency is reversed in SB3, where almost double the amount of posts (201) equals to 42,866 words. Although this can be interpreted as a sign of verbal fluency, the higher score for WPS in this case may have to do with the longer sentences needed to verbalise the violent situations women are starting to witness.

A tendency among users to express themselves in personal and humble ways is suggested by the higher percentage measuring ‘authenticity’ found in the third

⁴⁰ As suggested elsewhere, engaging with inferential statistics was not always central for this research. It is worth recalling that this research investigates the online communities as such, without accounting for individual discursive uses. However, when trying to provide a statistical reality check, it was necessary to take into account all the LIWC scores for each post in each community. This was only applied to communities within the VIOL_CORPUS due to their central role in this research. I would like to thank Dr. José Ramón Rodríguez and Jesús Martínez for guiding me through the statistical tests and measures of significance at different stages of this research.

⁴¹ NS = non-significant.

community, which additionally represents the most noticeable contrast if these four LIWC language variables are observed. Similarly, a noticeable contrast is observed when the emotional tone of these three communities is considered. Results obtained for ‘tone’ suggest that women writing in ‘Life after abuse’ show a more positive emotional tone than those contributing to ‘Is it abuse?’. As Table 3 above suggests, results obtained in these two categories are also statistically significant.

Having presented the discursive characterisation of the main three online communities this research is interested in, attention is paid now to the contrast between scores obtained in the VIOL_CORPUS (experimental) and the NONVIOL_CORPUS (control). Table 24 below contrasts the LIWC scores for both the VIOL_CORPUS and the NONVIOL_CORPUS.

Table 24 | LIWC language variables (raw numbers and %): VIOL_CORPUS vs. NONVIOL_CORPUS

LIWC language variables	VIOL_CORPUS vs. NONVIOL_CORPUS			
	VIOL_CORPUS		NONVIOL_CORPUS	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Analytical	22,608	18.8	49,656	41.3
WPS	25,608	21.3	22,476	18.7
Authenticity	84,180	70.1	85,740	71.4
Tone	11,880	9.9	21,435	52.5

On these grounds, it seems sensible to establish two different trends. If results obtained for both large corpora are borne in mind, two variables seem to behave less differently in these two discourse types. To start with, both corpora present very similar scores if ‘authenticity’ is considered. This is surely influenced by the high figure that the online travelling community (NV1) offers (89.55%), suggesting that users in this community communicate in less guarded and/or distanced ways than the rest. A very slight divergence rate (2.61%) is also spotted in ‘WPS’. This would then point out to a higher cognitive complexity in IPV-related discourse, which was also within the expected results. Nevertheless, curious interpretations may be reached if the six subcorpora are juxtaposed.

LIWC scores obtained in the ‘analytical’ and the ‘tone’ variables suggest broader divergences between IPV-related discourse and its counterpart. On the one hand, thinking/writing styles in both corpora can be perceived. Thus, online users’ discourse in the NONVIOL_CORPUS can be said to be more logical and integrated

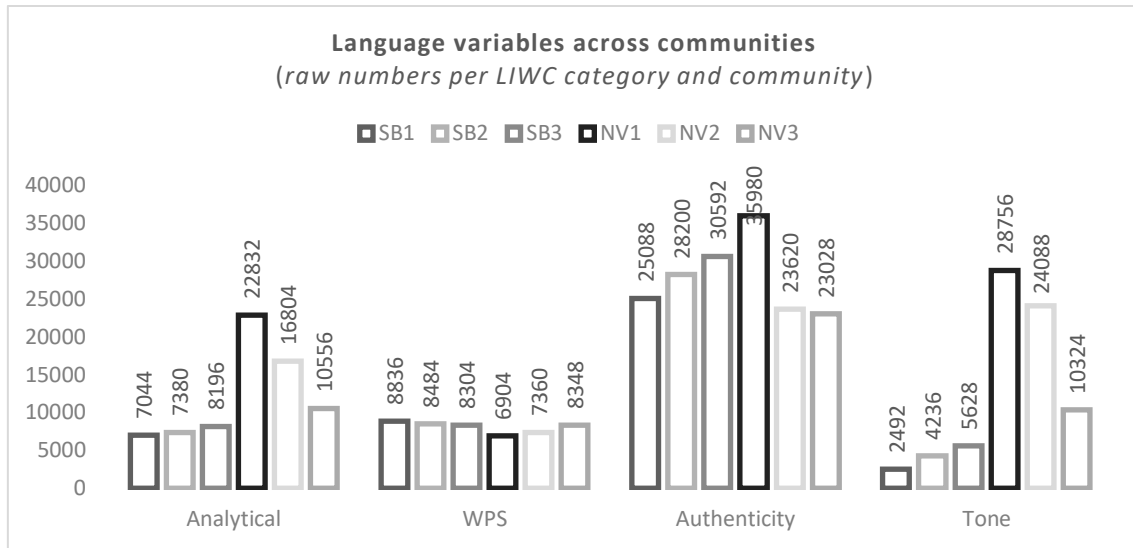
by more hierarchical thinking patterns, whereas IPV survivors' discourse is allegedly narrative-oriented, personal, and focused on the here and now. On the other hand, the most drastic divergence between two corpora is that concerning 'tone' (42.65%). It is surprising to find figures showing a divergence of that magnitude between both corpora, which highlights the pessimistic tone governing the IPV online communities under scrutiny. Nonetheless, more insights along these lines can be gained if percentages obtained in each of the six subcorpora are paralleled, which is what this section turns to present now.

The possibility of juxtaposing the six online communities can reinforce some of the claims already made and provide more fine-grained interpretations. To this end, Table 25 below arranges following a top-bottom fashion to facilitate the process of discussion and interpretation. Similarly, Figure 22 offers a comparison based on raw numbers. As anticipated in previous paragraphs, a less remarkable difference is observed as far as 'WPS' and 'authenticity' are concerned. First, 'WPS' scores gradually decrease from SB1 to NV1 (22.09% > 17.26%). This pattern reinforces the complexity in cognitive-emotional terms that discourse reflected by women trying to find out if they are being abused. Interestingly, however, this same complexity seems to be more central in discourses around motherhood (NV3) than in women's accounts of 'Life after abuse' (SB3), which may also stress the many difficulties faced by women in the process of motherhood. This can explain the reason why the lowest percentage for 'authenticity' is associated with NV3, which suggests a more guarded discursive style. As will be further elaborated in this chapter, scores associated with motherhood experiences are not always so distant from the IPV-related ones.

Table 25 | Explored language variables across six online communities under scrutiny (in %)

ANALYTIC		WPS		AUTHENTIC		TONE	
NV1	57.1	SB1	22.1	NV1	89.9	NV1	71.8
NV2	42	SB2	21.2	SB3	76.4	NV2	60.2
NV3	26.3	NV3	20.9	SB2	70.5	NV3	25.8
SB3	20.4	SB3	20.8	SB1	62.7	SB3	14
SB2	18.4	NV2	18.4	NV2	59.1	SB2	10.5
SB1	17.6	NV1	17.3	NV3	57.5	SB1	6.2

Figure 22 | LIWC language variables across communities (N)



Previous claims associated with the variables ‘analytical’ and ‘tone’ are strengthened by means of this detailed presentation of results. Thus, LIWC scores in these two cases are arranged exactly in the same way. Judging from percentages in ‘analytical’, it is possible to claim that more narrative writing styles are encountered as SB1 is approached (which is accompanied by an inverted progression in cognitive complexity is at issue). A similar (though more drastic) pattern is spotted in ‘tone’, which at the same time entails the most severe decline if the highest score (71.89% in NV1) is compared with the lowest one (6.23% in SB1). As a matter of fact, this remarkable difference was one of the main reasons why a more detailed account of discursive emotionality between these two corpora was worth analysing, which is what the next section endeavours to examine.

6.5.2 Analysing emotionality: positive and negative emotions (LIWC)

As the previous section indicated, there is a sharp contrast between percentages measuring the emotional tone of each corpus. Hence, a closer analysis of both corpora’s (discursive) emotionality is worth pursuing. Studies combining linguistic analyses and psychological processes in major social phenomena have proved that LIWC is capable of providing accurate identification of emotion in language use (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2004; Kahn et al., 2007). This research is driven by the assumption that the different degrees and mechanisms in which people express their emotions are fundamental to comprehend how they are experiencing the world (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2004). Not surprisingly, LIWC has been applied to the

exploration of emotionality in trauma and health discourses in different contexts, such as cancer (Bantum & Owen, 2009) or relationship narratives (Boals & Klein, 2005). Moreover, there have been interesting attempts to examine narratives by IPV survivors (Holmes et al., 2007). Although this analysis was based on 32 volunteers in offline contexts, a LIWC scan found that making use of more positive and negative emotion words to talk about their experiences with violence prompted increased feelings of physical pain over the writing sessions, concluding that the higher use of emotion words, the bolder the perceived immersion in the traumatic event.

LIWC specific measurements for emotionality in the corpus under inspection are depicted in Table 26 below. Broadly speaking, LIWC is able to identify emotions in two broad spectra: positive and negative emotions. Furthermore, it can detect three subtypes of negative emotions (*anxiety*, *anger* and *sadness*). As Table 6 shows, the amount of positive emotions increases within 'Life after abuse' if compared to 'Is it abuse?'. Conversely, the percentage measuring negative emotions decreases in SB3 if compared to SB1. Curious results can be observed if the type of negative emotions is compared. Accordingly, words measuring 'anxiety' escalate from SB1 to SB2, although a higher peak is observed in SB2. With regard to 'anger', however, percentages decline if 'Life after abuse' and 'Is it abuse?' are compared. Interestingly, percentages measuring the output for sadness show a more stable distribution across the three communities.

Table 26 | Analysing emotionality with LIWC (iraw numbers and %) in VIOL_CORPUS

Emotionality (LIWC) in VIOL_CORPUS	Forum communities (VIOL_CORPUS)						Stat sig (SB1 vs SB3) (<i>p</i>)
	SB1		SB2		SB3		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Positive emotions	812	2	908	2.2	1,096	2.7	SB1<SB3 <i>p</i> <0.047
Negative emotions	1,524	3.8	1,388	3.4	1,436	3.5	NS
Anxiety	268	0.7	328	0.8	308	0.8	NS
Anger	528	1.3	444	1.1	432	1.1	SB1>SB3 <i>p</i> <0.041
Sadness	316	0.8	288	0.7	312	0.7	NS

These results yield thought-provoking interpretations. Lexical choices categorised as positive are more salient in 'Life after abuse', whereas a more negative nuance is perceived in 'Is it abuse?'. This can be linked to the overall pattern obtained in 'Tone'

in the previous section, which suggests that more optimistic discourse is more likely to permeate the overall discursive characterisation of SB3. As showed in Table 26, the difference is also statistically significant ($p < 0.047$). Furthermore, this gains more prominence if posts within this community are analysed in qualitative terms. As next chapters will further elaborate, posts in this community are generally characterised by a very supportive tone who seeks to give encouragement to other users at this stage.

The evolution of negative emotions is worth mentioning. Despite the more even distribution of lexical items across the three communities belonging to the category 'sad', a divergent tendency is perceived if the focus is on 'anxiety' and 'anger'. In fact, based on the results illustrated in Table 26 above, lexical choices suggesting a higher degree of anxiety reach their peak in 'Getting out'. This may imply that women undergoing IPV may feel more anxious when, having acknowledged they are being abused, they are in the process of leaving the abusive relationship. However, traces of 'anger' in the corpus under scrutiny seem to be more present at an initial stage (SB1), decreasing gradually from SB3. This higher presence of lexical items within the category 'anger' in SB1 is also statistically confirmed ($p < 0.041$).

Having investigated the way emotionality is expressed in the three IPV online communities, it is worth considering how the VIOL_CORPUS and the NONVIOL_CORPUS differ, which is shown in Table 27 below.

Table 27 | Emotionality in LIWC: VIOL_CORPUS vs. NONVIOL_CORPUS (raw numbers and %)

Emotionality (LIWC)	VIOL_CORPUS vs. NONVIOL_CORPUS			
	VIOL_CORPUS (N=120,000)		NONVIOL_CORPUS (N=120,000)	
	N	%	N	%
Positive emotions	2,820	2.4	3,804	3.2
Negative emotions	4,344	3.6	2,100	1.8
Anxiety	900	0.8	636	0.6
Anger	1,404	1.2	312	0.3
Sadness	912	0.8	564	0.5

Broadly speaking, the control corpus displays a higher score if emphasis is placed on positive emotions, a tendency that is reverted if negative emotions are taken into account. Focusing now on the three specific categories overarched by the 'negative emotions', it is interesting to check the way 'anxiety', 'anger' and 'sadness' are distributed in the VIOL and the NONVIOL corpora. Although variance is observed if

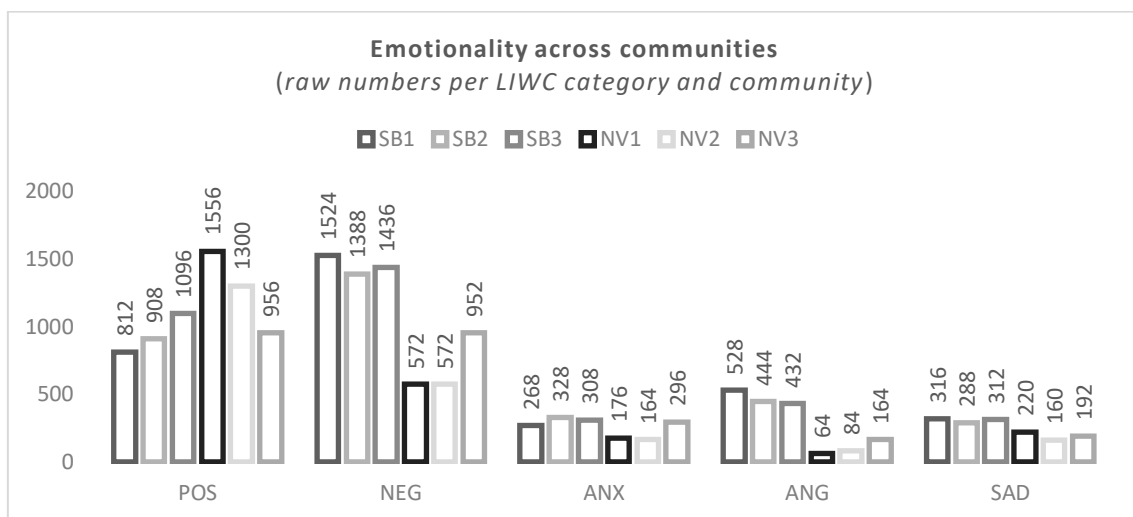
‘anxiety’ and ‘sadness’ are contrasted, the sharpest difference is found in the discursive expression of ‘anger’.

Moving now to the cross-community comparison, Table 28 below includes all the percentages obtained for each LIWC categories concerning emotionality in the six subcorpora representing the online communities under investigation. Likewise, Figure 23 offers a graphic representation of results based on raw numbers. It should be noted again that each community contains 40,000. In contrast to the previous section, low raw figures are a consequence of the greater degree of specificity when dealing with lexical items included within these categories.

Table 28 | Discursive emotionality across six online communities under scrutiny (in %)

POS_EM		NEG_EM		ANX		ANGER		SAD	
NV1	3.9	SB1	3.8	SB2	0.8	SB1	1,2	SB1	0.8
NV2	3.2	SB3	3.6	SB3	0.8	SB2	1	SB3	0.8
SB3	2.8	SB2	3.5	NV3	0.7	SB3	1	SB2	0.7
NV3	2.4	NV3	2.4	SB1	0.7	NV3	0.4	NV1	0.6
SB2	2.3	NV1	1.4	NV1	0.5	NV1	0.2	NV3	0.5
SB1	2	NV2	1.4	NV2	0.4	NV2	0.2	NV2	0.4

Figure 23 | Discursive emotionality across six online communities under scrutiny (N)



Bearing all these indicators in mind, several interpretations can be reached at this point. Overall, forum communities engaged in non-violent communicative scenarios appear at the top of the table and emphasise the very little room that online communities around IPV leave for positive emotions. Nonetheless, it seems that users in SB3 (‘Life after abuse’) make use of more positive discourse than online

users sharing their experiences with motherhood (NV3). What seems clear however is the very few instances of lexical items echoing positive emotions in users contributing to SB1 ('Is it abuse?'). This is also validated if the scores for negative emotions are paid attention to, since SB1 takes in this case the top position. Notice however that the second highest score for negative emotions is that shown in SB3, which becomes a rather controversial result considering that SB3 proved to be the most positive online community within the VIOL_CORPUS. This could be explored further by a more qualitative exploration of the ways in which LIWC carries out this type of sentiment analysis, which is not an available feature and one of the most noticeable limitations of the tool at the time of writing. Nonetheless, this caveat can be mitigated if the percentage-distribution of the three negative emotions across the six communities is examined.

Furthermore, the three subcorpora integrating the VIOL_CORPUS take the top positions as far as negative emotions are concerned. Judging from the obtained results, these users' online discourse shows higher instances of lexical anxiety in experiences connected with motherhood than at a very initial stage within an abusive relationship. In order to better understand the relevance of this, it should be noted that percentages for 'anxiety' in either the travelling or the wedding preparation communities oscillate between 0.44% and 0.41% respectively, whereas the highest point for anxiety in fact doubles in SB2 (0.82%). A very similar pattern is observed in percentages ascribed to 'sadness'. The three online communities linked to IPV show very similar figures. Although this may suggest that lexical sadness is uniformly scattered throughout the VIOL_CORPUS, a comparison with the control corpus does not seem to suggest so. As a matter of fact, the lowest indicator for sadness (0.40% in NV2) almost doubles in its highest counterpart (0.79% in SB1).

Despite this, it is not until the category 'anger' is examined when the most telling results are observed. As shown above, women contributing to an online travel forum show a rather insignificant degree of lexical anger (0.16%). Overall then, this represents the sharpest contrast between the online community in which lexical anger is used the least (0.16% in NV1) compared to where it is used the most (1.32% in SB1). Consequently, and based on previous considerations, this suggests that discourse generated around IPV is characterised by a higher inclusion of lexical anger than by certainly interrelated negative emotions such as anxiety or sadness.

This claim gains prominence if online instances of discourse in forums not connected with IPV itself are taken into account.

Overall, this section has provided interesting insights into the way emotionality is discursively expressed in the corpora under investigation. Interestingly, findings of this sort have been achieved by previous research, identifying insightful correlations between the distribution of these categories and aspects related to cancer narratives (Bantum & Owen, 2009) or childhood trauma (Luterek et al., 2005). Some other studies have shown a correlation between negative emotion words and some other discursive features that a LIWC analysis can offer. In fact, as demonstrated by Rude et al. (2004), research participants suffering from depression are more likely to use negative words and more first-person singular pronouns in emotional writings than participants who have never been depressed. Next section precisely turns to examine several aspects of pronominal distribution in these forum communities.

6.5.3 Pronominal distribution (LIWC)

A critical approach to the study of pronouns has been traditionally central for CDS research, since they can convey key information concerning issues of power and dominance (van Dijk, 1993). As a result, given that they are frequently used as remote sensors of group dynamics (Kacewicz et al., 2012), pronouns are at the core of studies drawing conclusions on the discursive construction of collective identities (Koller, 2008), since they can be used to identify focus, priorities and intentions (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). In fact, LIWC provides percentages for a wide range of pronominal information, and previous studies have thus explored social issues along these lines. For instance, there seems to be a correlation between people who use higher scores of first person singular pronouns and rather poor cognitive-emotional narratives (Baddeley & Singer, 2008; van Middendorp & Geenen, 2008).

Table 29 below depicts the percentages offered by LIWC once the three subcorpora under scrutiny were processed. It is worthwhile to mention, though, that figures indicating the score of 'he' had to be calculated by AntConc (Anthony, 2014), since the version of LIWC used for analysis makes no difference between *he* and *she*. This can arguably be seen as one of the major shortcomings of the tool. Apart from this, LIWC can provide interesting insights into the way pronouns are used across the

three subcorpora. Based on the data, it is possible to observe that the general use of personal pronouns is less salient in ‘Life after abuse’, especially if both the first and third stages are juxtaposed. A similar pattern is observed in the case of *he* and *we*. However, the use of the first-person pronoun *I*, the pronoun *you* and instances of *they* increase in SB3 if SB1 is considered. LIWC can also shed light on the use of impersonal pronouns such as *it* or *its* (IPRON), which again in this case shows a decrease in SB3 if SB1 is taken as a reference.

Table 29 | Pronominal distribution (raw numbers and %) in VIOL_CORPUS

Pronominal distribution (LIWC) in VIOL_CORPUS	Forum communities (VIOL_CORPUS)						Stat sig (SB1 vs SB3) (<i>p</i>)
	SB1		SB2		SB3		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
PPRON	6,988	17.5	6,708	16.8	6,492	16.2	SB1>SB3 <i>p</i> <0.001
IPRON	2,172	5.4	2,196	5.5	2,100	5.3	SB1>SB3 <i>p</i> <0.001
I	3,812	9.5	3,964	9.9	3,968	9.9	NS
WE	344	0.9	312	0.8	288	0.7	NS
HE	1,536	3.8	1,128	2.8	888	2.2	SB1>SB3 <i>p</i> <0.001
THEY	180	0.5	172	0.4	280	0.7	NS

The way in which pronouns are used across these forum communities may have several interpretations. As far as the use of the first-person pronoun is concerned, similar figures are observed, and the difference between SB1 and SB3 is not statistically significant. Previous studies have identified a higher tendency to use first-singular pronouns among people experiencing psychological and emotional distressed are considered (Rude et al., 2004). However, there seems to be very little variation if this pronoun is regarded.

Nonetheless, the pronoun *he* becomes less central in ‘Life after abuse’, a difference which is statistically significant. This may be due to the fact that the perpetrator is given less discursive prominence in the final phase, when abuse seems to be a past event (note the use of the preposition *after* in the very name of the community) and the social actor responsible for that is gradually replaced. A rather different interpretation is also feasible if attention is paid to the evolution of the pronoun *they*. Given the prominence that the third-person plural pronoun gains in SB3 if contrasted to SB1, this may suggest a discursive drift from representing the perpetrator in

individual terms (*he*) to collective ones (*they*), which may have been partly influenced by the mere use of the forum and to the process of generating a stronger bond (favouring references of *us* as women against *them*, the perpetrators). However, as usually happens when working with decontextualised instances of data, a more qualitative exploration of the text is required to pin down the social actors behind these referential devices (since *he* could refer to a male child and *they* can also possibly stand for *my friends*). This is precisely undertaken in the chapters following.

It is convenient now to observe how both the experimental and the control corpora contrast in this regard. Table 30 below focuses on the way pronouns are distributed in both corpora.

Table 30 | Pronominal distribution in LIWC: VIOL_CORPUS vs. NONVIOL_CORPUS (raw numbers and %)

Pronominal distribution (LIWC)	VIOL_CORPUS vs. NONVIOL_CORPUS			
	VIOL_CORPUS (N=120,000)		NONVIOL_CORPUS (N=120,000)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
PPRON	20,184	16.8	13,416	11.2
IPRON	6,468	5.3	5,916	4.9
I	11,736	9.8	8,088	6.7
WE	948	0.8	1,272	1.1
HE	3,552	2.9	2,016	1.6
THEY	624	0.5	732	0.6

Generally speaking, different tendencies are observed. First, it is remarkable to notice how women contributing to IPV communities seem to rely more on personal pronouns, a divergence that in fact implies a difference of 5.6%. Taking into account some of the properties that personal pronouns have, this may be indicative of a higher tendency to produce ambiguous discourse which relies more on pronouns. Another plausible interpretation may be linked to issues of genre specificity. The fact that users contributing to the VIOL_CORPUS gather around a relatively specific experience (that of being experiencers of IPV) may also trigger an overreliance on shared knowledge by the imagined audience of these posts. In other words, there is no need to specify that 'he' is referring to the perpetrator, since users reading the post will know who the referent is. This can also be related to the higher score that impersonal pronouns display in the VIOL_CORPUS. One plausible interpretation behind this may be linked to the complexity many users find when sharing such delicate topics. Despite the physical detachment fostered by the mediated nature of this type of communication, many users still report difficulties when engaging in these

topics. These cognitive-emotional difficulties may play an important role in the higher use of impersonal pronouns.

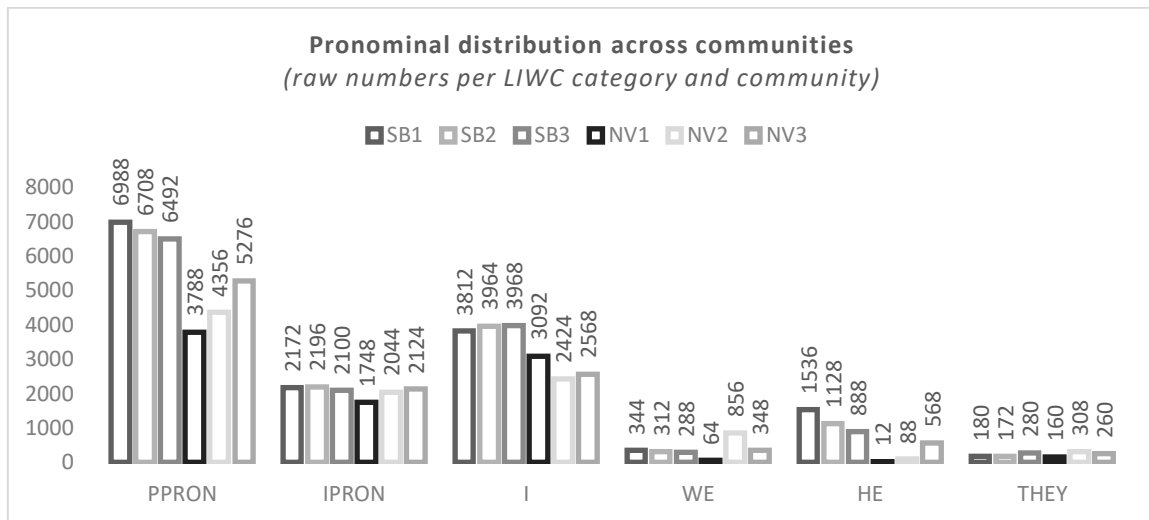
As far as the pronoun 'I' is concerned, the divergence between both corpora is the highest when pronouns are accounted for. This difference contributes to existing literature along these lines (Rude et al., 2004; Baddeley & Singer, 2008; van Middendorp & Geenen, 2008), which identifies a correlation between a higher use of the first-person pronoun and depressive testimonies. This claim gains reliability if issues of data collection are recalled. Notice that all posts analysed are written in the first-person, comparing IPV survivors at different stages, women travellers and brides and/or mothers-to-be. Moving now to the pronoun 'he' is more frequently found among users contributing to the VIOL_CORPUS, with a divergence rate of 1.3% between the two large corpora. This was perhaps one of the most corroborative findings supporting the claim that presupposed higher discursive salience of 'he' in IPV communities for obvious reasons.

Now, it is convenient to compare results obtained in the six subcorpora in order to achieve more accurate claims. Table 31 and Figure 24 show these results in percentages and raw numbers respectively.

As pointed out before, an interesting pattern is observed if the distribution of personal pronouns is taken into account. Whereas SB1 presents a rather high score (17.5%), a noticeable decrease is distinguished if the solo-travelling forum (NV1) is considered. This may be related to issues of genre specificity and an overreliance on shared knowledge by online members of these communities, as pointed out before. This can also be supported by the way scores for impersonal pronouns are distributed, with the travelling community showing the lowest point in this category. One feasible interpretation may be the need these users have to refer to the experiences they are living via impersonal means, which would again emphasise the complexities in cognitive-emotional terms this community may be characterised.

Table 31 | Pronominal distribution across six online communities under scrutiny (in %)

PPRON		IPRON		I		WE		HE		THEY	
SB1	17.5	SB2	5.5	SB3	9.9	NV2	2.1	SB1	3.8	NV2	0.8
SB2	16.8	SB1	5.4	SB2	9.9	NV3	0.9	SB2	2.8	SB3	0.7
SB3	16.2	NV3	5.3	SB1	9.5	SB1	0.8	SB3	2.2	NV3	0.6
NV3	13.2	SB3	5.3	NV1	7.7	SB2	0.8	NV3	1.4	SB1	0.5
NV2	10.9	NV2	5.1	NV3	6.4	SB3	0.7	NV2	0.2	SB2	0.4
NV1	9.5	NV1	4.4	NV2	6.1	NV1	0.2	NV1	0.1	NV1	0.4

Figure 24 | Pronominal distribution across six online communities under scrutiny (N)

LIWC scores referring to pronouns 'I' and 'he' are worth a comment. The fact that all IPV-related communities present top-scores if the pronoun 'I' is considered supports analogous findings in studies that stress the depressive tendency among participants with a higher inclination towards the use of this pronoun. According to these results, users in both SB2 and SB3 seem to be experiencing similar levels of distress and depression (9.9% and 9.9% in both cases). At the other side of the spectrum, brides-to-be would be the ones suffering less from this depressive state, since the score for 'I' is 6.06% in this case. Turning now the discursive salience of 'he' across the six subcorpora, a uniform pattern is observed again. Apart from the fact that 'he' is clearly more predominant in IPV-related communities, another interesting interpretation may stem from how the same pronoun is used in the NONVIOL communities. Thus, 'he' decreases from 3.8% (N=1536) in SB1 to a rather insignificant 0.03% in NV1 (N=12), something that be expected if the solo-travelling nature of NV1 community is elicited and the discursive salience that male perpetrators receive in the VIOL_CORPUS.

6.6 Concluding remarks

Broadly speaking, this chapter has offered a general discursive picture of the type of discourse this study investigates. Taking a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach, the three sections above have been employed to offer discursive insights that characterise these female survivors of IPV. More specifically, by making use of the text analysis software tool LIWC, this chapter has pursued two specific objectives. On the one hand, it has examined how the three online communities this research explores (SB1, SB2 and SB3) present a different discursive nature. Although emphasis has been put on three areas, the LIWC scores obtained in some other categories⁴² provide sufficient evidence to claim each community can be treated differently. On the other hand, the application of LIWC to both the experimental (VIOL_CORPUS) and the control (NONVIOL_CORPUS) corpora has shed light on the distinctive discursive nature between these two types of discourse. In what follows, original research questions are retrieved and answers are supplied on the basis of findings from Section 6.4 above.

(RQ1.1) How can the online discourse of women undergoing IPV-related experiences be better understood through the application of text-analysis software tools such as LIWC?

The way this chapter has unfolded is in itself the answer for RQ1.1. As widely dealt with throughout the sections, LIWC as a tool has been proved to be of great use to serve as a great starting point and gain interesting insights into the discursive characterisation of the discourse type under scrutiny. Nevertheless, the building of a parallel corpus, and the subsequent LIWC-driven analysis of it, was deemed appropriate in order to incorporate the contrastive perspective. A LIWC analysis of IPV-related communities on their own would have yielded useful pointers about this type of online discourse, but a reference point from which comparative conclusions can be reached was needed. This is in fact one of the possible shortcomings that can be linked to the use of LIWC. Future versions of this software tool could perhaps combine users' submitted data with any established reference corpus and generate an intra-corpora analysis based on the many language variables and semantic categories LIWC can provide. Still, as suggested in this chapter, comparative

⁴² See Appendix 5 for a full account of the results obtained in different categories.

research might require a very specific type of reference corpus to establish more accurate contrasts.

Furthermore, as pointed out on several occasions throughout the previous section, LIWC-driven analyses may be best suited to assist discourse-driven research at more initial stages. Despite its usefulness, it is certainly complex to entirely rely on decontextualised instances of data, especially since some central categories for CDS research are quite heavily context dependent (pronouns, for instance). Although qualitative explorations are therefore essential, LIWC scores have been useful to provide indicative scores that may assist researchers in more detailed analyses of texts.

(RQ1.2) How are the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny discursively characterised in the light of LIWC-provided categories?

Following the same pattern that Section 6.4 adopted, answers to this RQ are led by the LIWC categories that assisted the analysis.

Thus, as far as language variables are concerned, an increased score in analytical style is observed if SB1 ('Is it abuse?') and SB3 ('Life after abuse') are contrasted, suggesting a shift from more narrative, personal discourse to more hierarchical and logical discursive patterns. Women writing in SB3 seem to engage in more authentic discourse than users in SB1. Lower scores in 'authenticity' are usually indicative or more guarded, distanced forms of discourse. However, there is a decrease as far as cognitive complexity is concerned, based on the decrease observed from SB1 to SB3 in the 'WPS' variable. Users seeking to find out if they are experiencing IPV communicate using, syntactically more complex, lengthier sentences. One of the most remarkable discursive differences is observed as regards emotional 'tone'. Women in SB3 seem to engage in more positive forms of discourse than those in SB1.

When it comes to emotionality, 'Life after abuse' (SB3) experiments an increase as far as the discursive inclusion of positive emotions is concerned. Evidence of this discourse-emotional shift is provided by a reverted tendency in the score for negative emotions. If different negative emotions are contrasted, (lexical) sadness seems to be more uniformly present across the three communities. Conversely, users in SB2

seem to experience more 'anxiety' than users in the remaining two communities, suggesting higher peaks of nervousness and agitation at this stage. Interestingly, (lexical) 'anger' seems to mitigate if the three IPV-related communities are juxtaposed, although users in SB1 seem to feel more annoyed than the rest.

Broadly speaking, pronominal distribution decreases from SB1 to SB3, both in terms of personal and impersonal pronouns. Though evenly distributed, the use of the first-person pronoun is slightly higher in SB3. Conversely, a decrease is spotted in the first-person plural pronoun is taken into account. The use of 'he' declines in SB3, which may be interpreted as a loss in discursive salience provided to the perpetrator. On the contrary, the use of the pronoun 'they' escalates in SB3. Although this needs to be confirmed by qualitative explorations of the data, this may indicate a discursive shift in the way the perpetrator is activated in discourse, moving from individualisation to collectivisation.

Once these IPV online communities have been sketched on the basis of their discursive characterisation, RQ1.3 sought to understand the extent to which discourse in these communities differed from that encountered in non-violence motivated online forums.

(RQ1.3) Based on their discursive characterisation, to what extent do these online IPV communities differ from other non-violence motivated forum communities?

Paying attention to LIWC language variables first, both the VIOL_CORPUS and the NONVIOL_CORPUS present similar scores if 'authenticity' is at issue. A detailed analysis of all corpora suggests that discourses around motherhood score remarkably higher than discourse used by users in IPV communities. Based on 'WPS' scores, IPV-related discourse shows a higher degree of cognitive-emotional complexity, especially that employed by users in SB1. Interestingly however, discourses around motherhood are closer to IPV-related discourse than that of some other, non-violent contexts. According to results for 'analytical', IPV online communities are especially characterised by an analytical style that is more narrative-oriented and personal, focusing more on the here-and-now. Non-violence motivated online communities are generally more logical and hierarchical in their discursive style. The sharpest contrast between both corpora is obtained in 'tone'.

This manifest a very remarkable difference in the way emotional tone is used, highlighting the severely pessimistic type of discourse found in SB1 if compared to non-violent online communities.

In terms of emotionality, forum communities engaged in non-violent communicative contexts are discursively characterised more by a more positive emotionality than IPV-related communities. The opposite pattern is found if 'negative' emotions are at stake. If all subcorpora are compared, claims about IPV-related negative emotions and their discursive characterisation are validated. It is striking however to find out that levels of (lexical) 'anxiety' are steadier in discourse of motherhood than women trying to find out if they are experience abuse. Nonetheless, the high levels for 'anger' or 'sadness' in SB1 take the top position, which validates previous findings the overall negative tone of this online community.

When the VIOL_CORPUS and the NONVIOL_CORPUS are confronted in the light of pronominal distribution, LIWC results suggest that the former relies more heavily on pronouns (both personal and impersonal) than the latter. Although several interpretations are possible, these results may be related to issues of genre-specificity. In other words, the fact that IPV is a more peculiar social issue may trigger an overreliance on shared knowledge by the imagined audience, which may encourage users to trust in the lexical vagueness that is sometimes generated by pronouns. Another possible interpretation is that users may prefer not to name or use a full noun to make the category explicit (*husband, perp*, etc.), since simply naming the perpetrator may be painful or stressful for them. By comparing the two larger corpora, it becomes clearer that the use of 'I' and 'he' can be taken a differentiating discursive trait. In line with similar research, users in IPV-related communities show higher scores for the pronoun 'I', which may suggest more depressive personality traits than those in non-violent communities. This can also be seen as a tendency to focus on themselves and their situations as female survivors of IPV. As far as 'he' is concerned, original expectations were also confirmed when the distribution of this pronoun across the six subcorpora is observed, stressing the very little discursive room left for this pronoun in non-violent online communities.

Useful though these pointers may be to build bridges between the micro and the macro levels of discourse, results deriving solely from quantitative explorations need

to be treated with due precaution. As stated by main developers of LIWC itself, “the study of word use as a reflection of psychological state is in its early stages” (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010: 30). This is one the reasons why future research in this field could aim at incorporating similar text-analysis tools such as *Lingmotif* (Moreno-Ortiz, 2016) to investigate these tools and their different affordances may lead to complementary results. In any case, although the incorporation of corpus-driven approaches to discourse analysis has shown to be efficient to ground language analyses in more empirically-based findings, the limitations of corpus linguistics need to be considered and addressed. As already mentioned, making strong claims on the basis of pronoun usage may trigger misleading interpretations of any discursive event. Together with context, software tools are still not well-equipped with mechanisms to deal with figurative language or ironic and sarcastic references. Consequently, studies aiming at providing a holist view of a discursive phenomenon should always leave room for qualitative examinations, which can usually account for many of the already-mentioned drawbacks.

6.7 Summary

This first empirical chapter has attempted to provide readers with the bigger picture of the discourse used by female survivors of IPV. Once the theoretical bases outlining the usefulness of assisting CDS research by means of corpus linguistics tools (CADS), attention was paid to the most relevant methodological considerations that guided research presented in this chapter. After a detailed analysis of the software text analysis tool used to analyse data (LIWC), results displayed the discursive characterisation of the three IPV online communities this study is mostly interested in. More specifically, three areas were selected on the basis of their suitability to understand the data under scrutiny: language variables (such as ‘analytical thinking’ and ‘authenticity’), emotionality, and pronominal distribution. A contrast with non-violence motivated online forums was carried out to add further validity to these findings and to investigate how discourse emerging from non-violent forums differs from discourse used by users in the Survivors’ Forum. The following chapters embark on the analysis of more specific concerns from a more qualitative perspective, namely the discursive representation of forum members as IPV survivors and of their perpetrators.

CHAPTER 7 | ANALYSING ONLINE COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES: EXPLORING SOCIAL ACTOR REPRESENTATION

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a corpus-assisted analysis of the dataset presented the bigger linguistic picture of the corpus. This chapter sets out to provide more specific, qualitative-driven explorations that focus on the micro-textual level of these women's digital discourses. More specifically, as anticipated before, this chapter concentrates on the socio-cognitive representations of female survivors and male perpetrators as discursively-instantiated social actors and the role this has in the construction of online collective identities. In order to attain this main objective, this chapter unfolds as follows. First, Section 7.2 devotes attention to key theoretical underpinnings connected with the Social Actor Approach as one of the most useful methods within CDS to investigate the representation of social actors in discourse. On these grounds, Section 7.3 aims at outlining the major methodological issues concerning this empirical study, paying special attention to the refined taxonomy that was systematically employed for purposes of analysis. Then, Section 7.4 engages in the presentation and discussion of results, drawing on the mechanisms employed by users of the online forum to represent themselves and the perpetrators. As suggested by one of the central research questions leading this study, differences in the use of these discursive mechanisms are contrasted with the three stages within IPV relationships that the three online communities can be said to mirror. Section 7.5 highlights some of the limitations encountered and identifies different directions that future research may follow in this regard.

7.2 The analysis of online collective identities: van Leeuwen's Social Actor Approach as a useful starting point

Although a detailed account of what is meant by *social actor(s)* would certainly go beyond the scope of this chapter, some general comments may be of use to better understand the implications of the term. One crucial tenet of CDS research is based upon what is understood as "representational strategies" (van Dijk, 1988; Fowler, 1991). In short, they refer to a set of semiotic choices that enable speakers to locate people in the social world and emphasise, background or conceal certain aspects of

their identity by means of language (Machin & Mayr, 2013). If the *foci* of these choices on individuals or groups, these are conceived as “social actors” or “participants” for CDS research.

One of the most salient figures within CDS interested in the many ways social actors can be represented in discourse is Theo van Leeuwen, whose seminal work in this area (van Leeuwen, 1996) still influences contemporary research. In his own words, a social actor essentially refers to “how the *participants* of social practices can be represented in [...] discourse (2008: 23). Based on the assumption that social practices are “socially regulated ways of doing things” (van Leeuwen, 2008: 6),⁴³ the actual performance of all social practices requires a set of participants allocated in roles such as the instigator, the agent, the affected or the beneficiary, to name a few (van Leeuwen, 2008). Nonetheless, there is not an automatic, unilateral link between social actors and grammatical actors (van Leeuwen, 2008, Koller, 2009), since “sociological agency is not always realised by linguistic agency [but] can also be realised in many other ways [such as] possessive pronouns” (van Leeuwen, 2008: 23).

In fact, this is one of the main reasons why van Leeuwen refers to his proposed taxonomy as a “sociosemantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented” (2008: 23), overtly warning of the risks of relying too closely on specific linguistic categories when attempting to investigate agency. In his own words, the main difference is that emphasis is put on “sociological categories (‘nomination’, ‘agency’, etc.) rather than on linguistic categories (‘nominalisation’, ‘passive agent deletion’, etc.)” (van Leeuwen, 2008: 23). Prioritising the sociological upon the linguistic is based on the assumption that meanings belong to culture rather than to language and, as a result, they cannot be constrained to any specific semiotic system (van Leeuwen, 2008).⁴⁴ Despite the thought-provoking theoretical repercussions this certainly has, it is striking to find out that, at the level of operationalisation, van

⁴³ As van Leeuwen himself notes, “the word ‘regulate’ may give the wrong impression here, since ‘regulation’, in the sense in which we normally understand it, is only one of the ways in which social coordination can be achieved. Different social practices are ‘regulated’ to different degrees and in different ways –for instance, through strict prescription, or through traditions, or through influence of experts and charismatic role models, or through the constraints of technological resources used, and so on” (van Leeuwen, 2008: 6-7).

⁴⁴ As a matter of fact, van Leeuwen is particularly well known for investigating modes of communication that go beyond the purely linguistic level, such as images, music or even colours (see van Leeuwen, 1999; van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2011).

Leeuwen's taxonomy can be instantiated through a range of linguistic realisations in discourse. This will be addressed later on in this section.

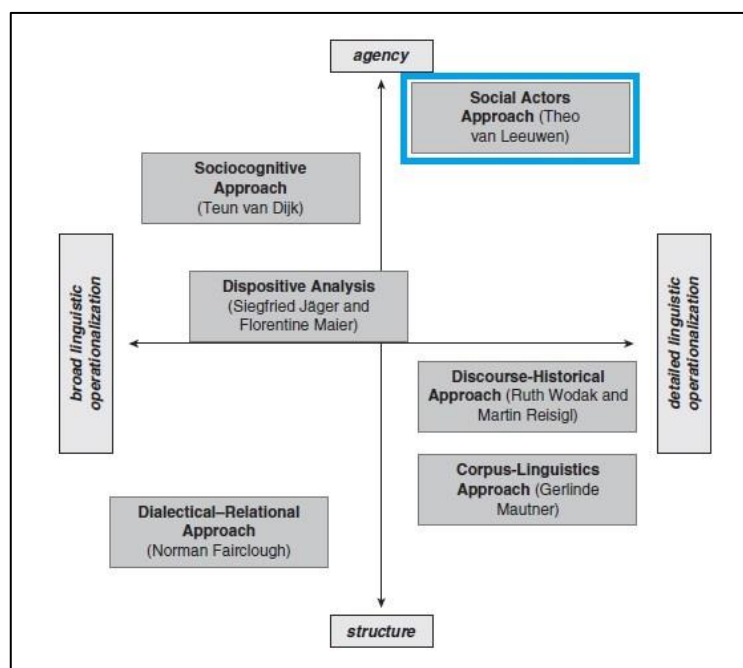
Regardless of the many theoretical implications of the previous aspects, van Leeuwen's socio-semantic inventory is deeply influenced by systemic functional linguistics and its view of language as a resource that allows text producers to make choices among alternatives (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Understanding language in this way underpins the idea that any discursive choice made by any speaker or writer carries particular implications that cannot be expressed otherwise (Darics, 2017), which at the same time strongly justifies the interest CDS research has widely shown towards social actors and their representation in discourse.

Although van Leeuwen's understanding of discourse is in tune with the conceptions of discourse vastly discussed in Chapter 4, his view pays closer attention to the process of recontextualisation. As he widely develops in his well-known monograph (2008), van Leeuwen argues that discourses are resources for representing aspects of reality. He also understands that different discourses can make sense of the different aspects of reality, in different ways and serving different purposes (van Leeuwen, 2008). What is more, and again in line with the understanding of discourse as social practice (see Chapter 4), he emphasises the role of social practices as the foundational pillars of discourses, showing particular interest in the process by which social practices are transformed into discourses of whichever its kind, which in short stands for recontextualisation (van Leeuwen, 2008). As stated before, social actors are core members of these social practices, and therefore are prominent components of the recontextualisation process. In short, as argued by van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), it is through discourse that social actors constitute knowledge, roles and identities.

This special attention to those in charge of instigating action has turned van Leeuwen's Social Actors Approach (SAA) into one of the most widely-used methods for CDS/CDA. As argued by Wodak and Meyer (2009: 26), and despite sharing most of the motivations and purposes with other CDA methods, SAA concentrates on explaining the role of action in the establishment of social structures, paying particular attention to the analysis of core elements of social practices in its

discursive recontextualisation, among which social actors stand out. If contrasted with some other methods usually employed among CDS researchers, as Figure 25 below illustrates, SAA is therefore more concerned with agency from a detailed linguistic operationalisation view. Based upon Baker and Ellece's definition of it (2004: 4), "linguistic agency refers to how character or objects are represented in relation to each other", it should not be surprising to comprehend why van Leeuwen's approach was deemed as the ideal analytical framework from which this particular research should be framed.

Figure 25 | SAA in contrast to other methods of CDA (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 22, emphasis added)



Despite the fact that van Leeuwen's SAA (2008) embodies a method for CDA that is both theoretically compact and methodologically consistent, studies within CDS that are also interested in the discursive representation of social groups do not necessarily stand on the same epistemological grounds. Rather, although most contributions with similar research concerns tend to acknowledge the indebtedness to van Leeuwen's taxonomy (1996, 2008), the focus on social actors is merely seen as another set of parameters that can be modified and extended in analyses of identity in discourse, especially those in which social actor representation is central for the research purposes (Koller, 2009). It is true, though, that social actors as a discourse analytical category can be easily nominated as one of the most obvious list of parameters when looking at the discursive realisations of the self and others.

Additionally, social actor representation works at both individual and collective levels, when analysing either out-group or in-group construction (Koller, 2009; Koller, 2012). Quite understandably, these discursive constructions of the 'in' and 'out' groups are central in discursive representations of collective identity, and, at the same time, a traditional concern within CDS research (van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk, 1998; KhosraviNik, 2010).

The ubiquitousness of discursive representations of social actors in any text, also facilitated by the versatile character of the mechanisms proposed by van Leeuwen in his taxonomy (1996; 2008), has turned social actor representation into a central tenet for several major strands of CDS. For instance, interesting explorations between social actors and the associated predications have been carried out from the Discourse Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). More closely related to the theoretical underpinnings this research is built upon, social actors representation has also been approached from the socio-cognitive approach to discourse, in which the socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) of social actors groups are of pivotal importance (Koller, 2008; 2009; 2012).

As broadly elaborated in Chapter 4, the socio-cognitive approach to discourse (Koller, 2012; 2014; van Dijk, 2014) understands that the constitution of SCRs is partially intertextual and considerably influenced by the circulation of relevant texts within and across discourse communities. This encourages the development of a cyclical model in which discourse and cognition become crucially intertwined components that shape each other iteratively. This also explains why "text producers communicate particular SCRs of social actor groups, including beliefs and/or knowledge about them, the attitudes towards and expectations of them that ensue from beliefs and/or knowledge, and the emotions that accrue to them" (Koller, 2012: 23). Consequently, making use of social actor representation is deemed of crucial importance in socio-cognitive terms mostly because it connects content and linguistic analysis at the text level by relying on questions such as, *inter alia*, what groups and individuals are referred to and how? Are social actors included or excluded, genericised or specified, activated or subjected? In fact, questions of this sort serve as a guide for those research questions leading this dissertation in general, and in this chapter in particular.

Another strength of SAA is its versatile character, despite having been commonly applied to the study of less visible groups that are discriminated against in society. In fact, it has been used to explore discourses around immigration and national identities (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; van Leeuwen, 2008; Lamb 2013). Similarly, notions of power in institutional contexts are also explored in terms of how the government, teachers and pupils are represented in policy texts (Mulder, 2003). Due to its flexibility, this method has also been used to gain interesting insights into lesbian discourses (Koller, 2008), children's fiction (McGlashan & Sunderland, 2011; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2012), the discourse of leadership (van Leeuwen, 2009) and even some discursive and semiotic implications of toys (Caldas-Coulthard & van Leeuwen, 1996). Interestingly, some aspects of this analytical framework are being applied to texts that have received relatively less attention from CDS researchers. For instance, Richardson and Langford (2015) have recently examined the collective identity shifts in the child care advocacy association of Canada's public messaging. More recent attempts also rely on a combination of social actors and more innovative techniques embedded within corpus linguistics, drawing on how the collocational meanings of key social actors can have very interesting political repercussions (Salama, 2012). Nonetheless, as far as the review of literature for this research is concerned, the use of van Leeuwen's taxonomy to discourse connected to abuse has not been sufficiently explored. Likewise, there seems to be a dearth of studies making use of SAA to analyse online discourse. The fact that this approach has been mostly applied to written texts in different genres makes this study worth considering. These are the main two niches this research seeks to contribute to, as the next section will further elaborate.

7.3 Methodological issues: from SAA to SARDDA

This section sets out to outline the main methodological considerations that guided this second empirical chapter. First of all, this section addresses the main research questions guiding the exploration of social actor representation in the corpus under scrutiny. Broadly speaking, this section will describe the general methodological procedure adopted for these purposes. More specifically, it seeks to refine van Leeuwen's SAA model in order to assist the systematic analysis of the corpus this research considers.

As can be easily inferred from the previous sections, this chapter sets out to examine the multiple discursive ways in which both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV are represented as social actors in the online forum this research looks at. Therefore, there are three main research questions leading this empirical exploration:

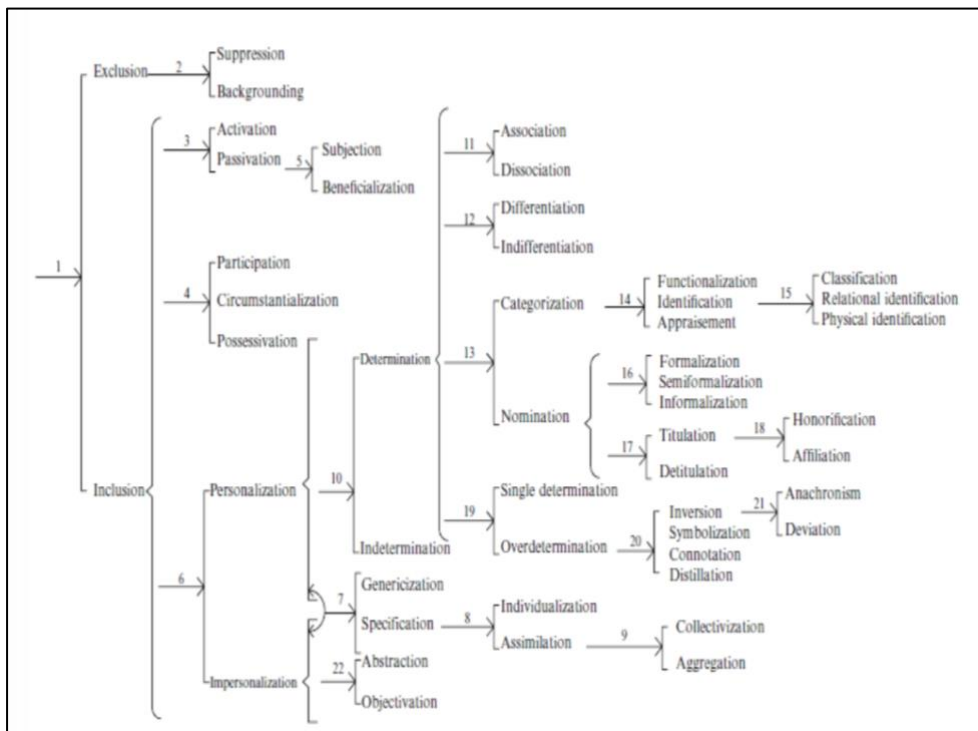
(RQ2.1) How are female survivors of IPV discursively represented as social actors in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ2.2) How are male perpetrators discursively represented as social actors in these women’s digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ2.3) To what extent do these discursive representations as social actors vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

In the attempt to answer these RQs, the first important endeavour was to verify if van Leeuwen’s SAA could serve as a suitable analytical framework. As anticipated in the previous section, and as Figure 26 below accurately describes, van Leeuwen’s proposed taxonomy to analyse the sociosemantic representation of social actors in discourse is a very exhaustive one.

Figure 26 | van Leeuwen’s Social Actors Network: representing social actors in discourse (2008: 52)



This network offers 50 categories conceived to equip researchers with “a critical lens, sensitive to the dimensions and effect of ideology” (Huckin et al., 2012) in the representation of social actors around the three main metafunctions of language. In fact, van Leeuwen manages to operationalise these socio-semantic categories by providing both a theoretical description and a wide range of linguistic mechanisms by means of which these are instantiated in discourse. More specifically (van Leeuwen, 1996: 67), all the mechanisms are grouped according to three major types of transformation: deletion (systems 1 and 2 in Figure 26 above, or ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’), rearrangement (systems 3-5) and substitution (systems 6-22). Furthermore, and based on newspaper discourse on immigration, he also widely illustrates these many possibilities (2008: 23-54). Overall, then, this methodological transparency arguably turns van Leeuwen’s network into a neat ready-to-use sociosemantic catalogue for discourse-driven research along these lines.

Nonetheless, this taxonomy presents several shortcomings that are worth considering. One of the most salient ones is related to the way this inventory is graphically designed. As Figure 26 clearly suggests, researchers interested in applying this framework are encouraged to begin their analyses starting from the left side of the diagram, something which is reinforced by an arrow there with a superimposed number 1. After this, users seem to be directed in a linear progression though what appears to be a decision tree, constituted by a set of “either-or” choices arranged on the basis of several types of numbered arrows and brackets whose implications are not always very straightforward. Quite relatedly, this graphic layout does not always make clear if mechanisms in each set of categories exclude each other or not. Interestingly, and perhaps aware of these pitfalls, van Leeuwen himself (2008: 132) tried to anticipate possible criticism by specifying that

in actual discursive practices, the choices need not always be rigidly either or. Boundaries can be blurred deliberately, for the purpose of achieving specific representational effects. [S]ocial actors can be, for instance, both classified and functionalised. In such cases, the categories remain nevertheless distinct and useful for making explicit how the social actors are represented.

In other words, van Leeuwen seems to be cognisant of the many problems that following the either-or linear progression may trigger, but still does not contemplate a different representation of the taxonomy. However, this seemingly rigid

arrangement has troubled researchers interested in applying this framework (Martin, 2012), which suggests that an alternative depiction may be worth considering.

Another problematic point here deals with the rather abundant presentation of analytical categories to activate social actors, which can indeed become a source for confusion among CDS practitioners (KhosraviNik, 2010). In fact, and if previously discussed issues of graphic representation are recalled, CDS researchers may feel, for instance, the need to make use of all the categories when investigating social actor representation. As a matter of fact, the attempt to use all the proposed categories is a rather complex endeavour, which explains why researchers following this approach tend to foreground those socio-semantic categories that fit best the discursive phenomenon under investigation. Unsurprisingly, there have been numerous variations of van Leeuwen's proposal to explore the representation of social groups in discourse (van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Flowerdew et al., 2002; van Dijk, 2006; to name just a few), which at the same time explains why more recent studies regard social actor representation as another possible set of parameters assisting researchers to pursue related goals instead of an unbreakable unit. Thus, eclectic adaptations and refinements of this general framework are applied conveniently to different objectives, employing some of these categories as an analytical toolkit to explore different discursive phenomena (Darics, 2017). It makes sense that a socio-cognitive approach to the study of collective identity (Koller, 2009; Koller, 2012) relies more on categories such as genericisation and specification or individualisation and assimilation than to less unrelated categories for this purpose, such as association or dissociation.

Although this *ad hoc* assortment of analytical categories has been sufficiently addressed, less attention has been paid to the role that issues of genre-specificity may play (and indeed do) in the process of adapting van Leeuwen's taxonomy to systematically analyse data. As noted elsewhere, SAA is operationalised and widely exemplified on the basis of written media discourse and applied subsequently to the analysis of written texts. Although most of the mechanisms lend themselves to the scrutiny of non-written discourse data without serious complications, several modifications were found to be necessary in the analysis of oral discourse (Sánchez-Moya, 2013). In a similar vein, the fact that this taxonomy has not been widely used to analyse digital texts and contexts has proved to be of crucial importance in the

process of refining the analytical framework for this research. Some of the most salient considerations are addressed in what follows.

As Chapter 3 discussed in depth, there is a plethora of aspects at the level of production/reception influencing the way discourse is instantiated in digital environments. Apart from the many consequences this has at the meso level, the mere affordances and contextual specificities of the online context this research inspects also affects the micro level, to the extent of having an impact on the framework used for the purposes of analysis. As readers will surely remember, the discourse type under investigation derives from an anonymised, publicly-accessed forum that is moderated by professionals. For the sake of safeguarding women making use of the forum, specific references to any revealing detail is therefore deleted. It is true that users are aware of this and generally refrain from providing details, but, in some cases, moderation is still required. With this idea in mind, it should be recalled that van Leeuwen's taxonomy (see Figure 26 above) offers seven categories under the overarching category of 'nomination', which is basically thought to occur when "social actors are represented in terms of their unique identity, by being nominated" (van Leeuwen, 2008: 40). Hence, neither 'nomination' nor the seven categories deriving from it (from 'formalisation' to '(de)titulation') are thought to be irrelevant for the analysis of this particular type of discourse, since the medium factors (Herring, 2007) that characterise this type of digital communication at the meso-level will not make possible the discursive realisation of social actors in certain ways.

Likewise, issues of genre-specificity can arguably affect the inclusion of some more categories that van Leeuwen's original framework proposes. An interesting reflection in this regard is related to the mechanisms by which social actors can be discursively excluded. Thus, van Leeuwen identifies two main types of exclusion: 'suppression', when there is no reference to the social actor(s) in question anywhere in the text (van Leeuwen, 2008: 28) or 'backgrounding', when "excluded SAs may not be mentioned in relation to a given action, but they are mentioned elsewhere in the text, and we can infer with reasonable (though never total) certainty who they are" (van Leeuwen, 2008: 29). Although several ways to linguistically realise exclude social actors are provided, all of them are based on textual mechanisms at the micro-level that generally grant discursive suppressions (agent deletion or nominalisations, for

instance) or backgrounding (ellipses in non-finite clauses or juxtaposed clauses). Less attention is paid, though, to instances where connections are established extra-textually and above the cohesive confinements of one particular discursive unit (like an online post certainly is). In other words, the high degree of discursive specificity that characterises language in this forum may challenge the possibility of finding, for example, ‘suppression’ as a mechanism to activate social actors. The fact that women in this forum gather to share their experiences with IPV (triggered in most cases by perpetrators) enables other members in the community/readers to infer with certainty that the perpetrator is being evoked in discourse, regardless of the fact he is activated by means of a pronoun or there are no textual references whatsoever to the perpetrator at the micro-level. Cohesive ties are therefore created from the micro to the meso level and thinking of total ‘suppression’ in this context is certainly a very thorny issue.⁴⁵

Aspects like the ones discussed above had to be taken into account when designing the refined analytical framework to be applied systematically to the analysis of the data. Another further step before sketching the tentative framework was to carry out a pilot study of the 20 first posts in the first three temporal cohorts in each of the subcorpora under scrutiny (SB1, SB2 and SB3). Once this was completed, the most recurrent mechanisms to activate social actors in this discourse type were identified. Most of these are embedded within van Leeuwen’s SAA (2008), although several changes were introduced to adapt these mechanisms to the most frequent ones observed in the pilot study.

In sum, the adaption of van Leeuwen’s Social Actors Approach (SAA) to the analysis of data this research considers is mostly based on five tenets, which are summarised in Table 32 below. Considering the proposed modifications, it was deemed convenient to adapt the very name of it and adapt it to Social Actor Representation

⁴⁵ Consider, for example, the following post: “can someone please explain the checking up aspect and does anyone have or had problem? Is it showing **he** loves u??” [SB1_1.105]. Although there is no other reference to the perpetrator, issues of genre-specificity and cohesion to the meso-level of discourse will be enough for readers (internal and external) to understand who is being referred to in this case.

in Digital Discourses of Abuse (SARDDA),⁴⁶ which will be used throughout in forthcoming sections.

Table 32 | Moving from van Leeuwen’s SAA to SARDDA according to five basic tenets

(1)	SARDDA seeks to break the seemingly monolithic taxonomy proposed by van Leeuwen by means of using some of the categories as FEATURES, which was deemed easier to proceed with the textual analysis. As an example, it was complex to deal with cases in which van Leeuwen’s proposed categories were part of different analytical groups (cases in which the perpetrator was activated using FUNCIONALISATIONS and COLLECTIVISATION, for example). Therefore, it was preferred opt for a “BOTH/AND” approach, where a set of features does not necessarily restrict another set (although it is clear that a SA cannot be individualised and collectivised at the same time)
(2)	SARDDA takes into account issues concerning medium factors at the meso-level and aspects deriving from genre-specificity, as discussed above.
(3)	SARDDA derives from a preliminary study of the corpus at hand. Basically, the most common realisations for perpetrators were taken after analysing the first 20 collected posts of each online community under analysis (SB1, SB2, SB3)
(4)	Although features are outlined using a list in SARDDA, the application of proposed features is thought to be applied <i>ad hoc</i> and depending on each textual representation. It is not obligatory to apply all features to SA instantiations, although it is preferred for the sake of systematicity.
(5)	SARDDA tries to provide solutions for the graphic representation of features by proposing a less hierarchical design, as illustrated below. This is thought to favour the possibilities of applying a “BOTH/AND” approach rather than a “EITHER/OR” one.

Table 33 below briefly describes the mechanisms, which are now treated as ‘features’. It also makes reference to the coding tag used for systematic analysis. Additionally, each feature is exemplified by means of quotations included in the corpus. Once this is done, some of the most noticeable adaptations of SARDDA are briefly discussed, as well as some of its shortcomings and limitations.

Table 33 | Groups, features, codes & definitions and examples used in SARDDA

GROUPS OF FEATURES / [CODING TAG]		DEFINITION / EXAMPLE
1	(A) NEUTRAL [NEU]	SAs are activated in neutral ways, without traces of marked evaluation “After looking through this very informative site I notice things that sound like my husband ”
	(B) NON-NEUTRAL [NON-NEU]	SAs are activated in non-neutral ways, with traces of marked evaluation “At the same time also knowing that no decent man would constantly pester for sex [sad_emoji]” “For those of you not familiar with my story, I’m still with my emotionally abusive partner ”

⁴⁶ Although van Leeuwen (2008) uses the term ‘social actor’ to refer to “participants of social practices” (2008: 23), SARDDA also considers cases of attributes ascribed to a social actor realised as the carrier in an attributive relational clause. This is marked by the label [ATTR].

2	(A) +GENERIC REFERENCE [GE_REF]	SAs are represented as generic group, identified by means of their relationship with one generic group/society “However this time I feel the red flag I feel is just the fear that every man will react the same” “what may have made me a target for an abusive man ”
	(B) +SPECIFIC REFERENCE [SP_REF]	SAs are represented as specific, identifiable individuals “I have recently separated from my husband after (removed by moderator) years” “Last night my partner had been acting strange” “ this man I am with is generally lovely”
	(C) + ATTRIBUTIVE [ATTR]	This feature was added to differentiate specific/generic references to the perpetrator from attributes ascribed to them. These are considered attributive features added to the representation of SAs <i>per se</i> . “he is a seventeen stone ex ” “he was genuinely very abusive both physically, emotionally and sexually ” “he was just a dangerous man ”
3	(A) METAPHORICAL [MET]	SAs are activated by means of METAPHORISED (or generally figurative) ways “I wouldn’t pick such a monster out of the crowd” “ My OH has Asperger syndrome and this means he has great difficulty coping with stressful situations and he often struggles to realise the effects his behaviour has on other people” [Other Half]
	(B) NON-METAPHORICAL [-MET]	SAs are not activated by means of METAPHORISED (or generally figurative) ways [Any reference to PERPETRATOR done literally and hence non-metaphorically, see examples elsewhere]
4	(A) CLASSIFIED IDENTIFICATION [CLA_ID]	SAs are referred to in terms of the major categories by means of which a given society or institution differentiates between classes of people (age, gender, provenance, race, sexual orientation, etc.) “I’ve been with this man for one year, I have no family and very very few friends”
	(B) FUNCTIONALISATION [FUNC]	SAs are referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do, such as an occupation, role, etc. “are the perps technically,,, mad?” “The man I had and who I thought loved me has actually proved to be a domestic abuser ” “I have had to be the primary wage earner in the family”
	(C) RELATIONAL IDENTIFICATION [REL_ID]	SAs are represented in terms of their personal, kinship, or work relations to each other. “I was very unsettled when my ex contacted me the other day”
	(D) NO CATEGORISATION [NON_CAT]	SAs are not represented by any of the features included in group (4), i.e., when SAs were not clearly CLAD_ID, FUNC or REL_ID. “Sometimes I question still if it was really abuse or if he was just an immature prat ”
5	(A) INDIVIDUALISATION [IND]	SAs are represented as individuals, mostly relying on linguistic singularity “I am currently living with my husband . He ended the marriage. He says he wants to be friends”
	(B) COLLECTIVISATION [COLL]	SAs are represented as groups or collectives, mostly relying on linguistic plurality. “ Those men will be stuck in the kind of situation they are in for their entire lives” “If we did what the abusers did would we be able to carry on life as normal?”
6	(A) POSSESSIVATION	SAs are referred to through possessivations that are instantiated by means of the speaker (from the woman survivor in most cases given the nature of this data)

	(through SELF) [+POS_S]	"I just know that the first time <u>my abusive husband</u> dragged me around and hurt me [...]"
	(B) POSSESSIVATION (through OTHERS) [+POS_O]	SAs are referred to through possessivations that are instantiated by means of others (in most cases, in this case, by means of children) " <u>my son's dad</u> had never come calling here after 6 because he always classed it as 'too late'"
	(C) NO POSSESSIVATED [-POS]	SAs are not activated by means of possessivation " <u>The man</u> I had and who I thought loved me has actually proved to be a domestic abuser"

It is now convenient to address the most noticeable changes in SARDDA, which will be done following a top-bottom order. First of all, the first group seeks to investigate if marked cases of evaluation are applied to social actor representation. Though not developed in this research, this set of features may be taken as a springboard for future studies looking the many possible types of evaluative mechanisms (Martin & White, 2007) used to activate social actors in this type of discourse. Echoes of this are found in van Leeuwen's original taxonomy (by means of 'appraisalment'), although it is included within 'categorisation'. This different treatment is mainly done to highlight the idea that evaluative mechanisms can actually occur when social actors are collectivised, for instance.

As far as the second group is concerned, SARDDA tries to distinguish referential and attributive representations of social actors. Hence, it pays separate attention to generic reference [GE_REF], specific reference [SP_REF], and to the attributes ascribed to social actors, marked by means of [ATTR]. In a similar vein, the third set of features attempts to differentiate between metaphorical (or generally figurative) representations of social actors from literal ones. As specified later on, this decision triggered an interesting unfolding of this research, since the salience and richness of figurative references to both male perpetrators and female survivors prompted the need to explore this in further detail, as addressed in Chapter 8 below.

Features included in group 4 and group 5 are central for the development of this chapter. On the one hand, features in group 4 are of crucial importance if some of the medium factors of this online context are considered. As suggested before, 'nomination' is not a possibility given the anonymised character of the IPV forum. Hence, a tendency towards 'categorisation' is very likely to predominate, especially if users' awareness of the impossibility to nominate the perpetrator is also taken into consideration. There are four possible features included in 'categorisation'. Apart from 'functionalisation', used in the same way as van Leeuwen, there are slight

modifications. First, 'appraisement' is certainly foregrounded and adjusted to 'neutral' and 'non-neutral', as mentioned before. Then, two types of 'identification' are put forward: 'classified identification' and 'relational identification', which resemble van Leeuwen's 'classification' and 'relational identification' (van Leeuwen, 2008). The few instances in the corpus relying on physical identification are mostly regarded as metonymical references to the social actor, which will be explored in the next chapter.

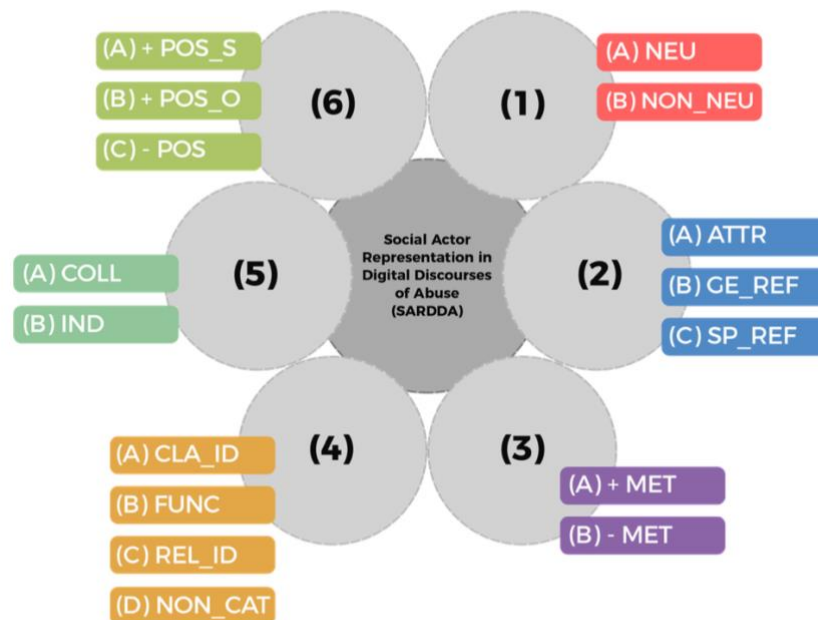
On the other hand, features in group 5 deal with the representation of social actors in either individualised or collectivised ways, which is central when the construction of collective identity is at issue (Koller, 2009; 2012). Although this differentiation widely resembles van Leeuwen's taxonomy, it is worth mentioning that he agglutinises mechanisms such as 'aggregation' in the rather broader 'collectivisation'. Issues of genre-specificity also play a role here, since activating social actors relying on quantified groups of participants or statistics, as 'aggregation' does (van Leeuwen, 2008: 38), is not at all likely in first-person accounted experiences with IPV in online contexts.

Finally, features in group 6 deal with possessivated means to activate social actors in discourse. Although van Leeuwen (2008) already claimed that both 'functionalisation' and 'relational identification' can be realised by means of possessives (as indicated by 'my abuser' and 'my daughter' respectively), 'possessivation' is also foregrounded in SARDDA in the attempt to facilitate its combination with other mechanisms. Thus, discursive realisations such as 'my man', although it would initially respond to 'classification', could also be considered possessivated.

As suggested elsewhere, the set of parameters included in SARDDA is not to be seen as a static inventory of features. Although these features are thought to be generally suitable for tracing social actor representation in digital discourses of abuse, due adjustments are surely expected when issues of genre-specificity and/or the influence of medium factors are encountered. Not ignoring that the data this study investigates is made up of recounted experiences with IPV narrated in the first person, a wider range of mechanisms to activate other SAs (namely the perpetrator, whose discursive salience is remarkably understandable) is logically expected. The fact that SARDDA is perhaps better equipped for the analysis of social actors other

than one's self may be seen as one of its limitations. Nonetheless, the disentangling of the hierarchical representation can be seen as a possible way to solve this problem, since some features to represent social actors may be more useful than others depending on the many aspects mentioned so far. Based upon this non-hierarchical understanding of this set of features, Figure 27 below illustrates one possible way to represent SARDDA. As suggested by its circular layout, features may be used following a non-linear fashion.

Figure 27 | Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse (SARDDA) (own proposal)



The proposed set of features integrating SARDDA was systemically used to analyse data under scrutiny once the different examples in Table 33 were validated by three different researchers in the field of CDS. Despite this, there were several challenges and controversies when analysing data, most of which will be addressed in the next section. Following a similar fashion to what Figure 27 above attempts to illustrate, a similar coding system was created in *Atlas.ti*, the software for qualitative analysis employed with this objective in mind.⁴⁷ Although data was analysed twice and by

⁴⁷ The understanding of 'code' this dissertation relies on is that proposed by Saldaña, assuming that "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based [...] data" (2013: 3)

relying on the same codes, another limitation of this study is linked to this process itself, since accuracy could have been increased by peer-coding.

Overall, this section has put forward the most central methodological decisions informing this empirical exploration of the dataset at hand. More importantly, this section has heeded the many steps taken while refining van Leeuwen's SAA to the extent to contributing with SARDDA, a related set of features that have assisted the analysis of social actor representation in the discourse type at issue. Results deriving from the application of this framework are offered in the forthcoming sections.

7.4 Results and discussion

Having identified the main methodological considerations that guided this part of the study, this section puts forward the results deriving from the application of SARDDA to the corpus under scrutiny and prompts discussions around them. As included in Section 7.3 before, two of the main research questions in this chapter deal with the discursive representation of both female survivors (RQ2.1) and male perpetrators of IPV as social actors (RQ2.2) in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV. Mostly for this reason, this section is divided into two main subsections, in which the afore-mentioned are respectively addressed.

Within these two main divisions, the first three subsections pay attention to textual representations in each of the online communities under investigation on the basis of the features included in SARDDA. Despite its more descriptive nature, this is done in order to grasp a better understanding of each online community at the micro-level of discourse, which is also motivated by the assumption that each of the three communities under exploration (which constitute the meso-level) revolves around three different sociological scenarios at the macro-level.

It is precisely the interconnection of these three levels of discourse that is foregrounded in the final part, which responds at the same time to (RQ2.3). In this case, a more contrastive approach is adopted in order to find out the extent to which social actor representation of female survivors and male perpetrators varies across the three online communities. To this end, a cross-community comparison is favoured, focusing on how the discursive representation of the two central social

actors fluctuates between SB1-SB2 and SB2-SB3. Likewise, a more holistic view is attained by comparing divergences between the initial (SB1) and the final stages (SB3).

Although this chapter prioritises qualitative analysis, emphasis is put on those SARDDA mechanisms showing higher degrees of statistical significance. Significance testing is calculated through several statistical measures of significance. In general, results for chi-square (χ^2) and the corresponding p value will be presented. In this test, three levels of statistical significance are observed, representing prominence by means of colour-code. These three levels are: (1) p value is no greater than 0.05 (yellow); (2) cases where p is no greater than 0.01 (light green); (3) p value is less than or equal to 0.001 (dark green), which suggests that results are even less likely to have occurred by chance. Additionally, results for log-likelihood [LL] are also included. In short, scores for LL must be greater than 3.84 (when degree of freedom is 1, as it is the case) for a difference to be statistically significant (Oakes, 1998). Results obtained for these tests are used throughout the whole section to spot and discuss the most significant shifts in discursive terms. These tests are applied in order to test the degree of significance of the similarities/divergences in the frequencies of each variable across communities (SB1 to SB2, SB2 to SB3 and SB1 to SB3).

7.4.1 Representing the self: female survivors as Social Actors

This section presents results obtained when examining the discursive representation of female survivors of IPV as social actors (SAs) in the data set. As anticipated elsewhere, the first three subsets in this subsection explore social actor representation in the light of SARDDA. Considering that posts are written from a first-person perspective, substantial attention is paid to discursive mechanisms of self-presentation.⁴⁸ Although SARDDA proposes six features, only five of them will be taken into account in this section, since figurative ways to represent social actors will be addressed separately in Chapter 8. In what follows, the representation of the self is examined, providing a brief descriptive account based on the distribution of discursive features in each of the three online communities.

⁴⁸ Note that self-reference activation by means of pronouns is not addressed here, although Chapter 6 can be confronted if the use of pronouns across these online communities is of interest.

7.4.1.1 Representations of female survivors in SB1 (Is it abuse?)

Table 34 below uses the different set of discursive features and indicates their quantitative representation as occurring in SB1. Apart from offering the total amount of observed frequencies for each feature (N), it also provides the percentage of how each feature is distributed. This is arranged in a top-to-bottom fashion for the sake of clarity. Since the three online communities are not equal in size, normalised frequencies (ptw) are also included, although this will only be considered when the three communities are contrasted. The same pattern is followed in forthcoming sections.

Table 34 | Female survivors as social actors in SB1 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Set of features for analysis in SARDDA	SB1 (46,733 words)		
	SB1 (N)	SB1 (ptw)	%
1_NON_NEU	85	18.2	59
1_NEU	59	12.6	41
2_ATTR	98	21	68.1
2_SP_REF	26	5.6	18.1
2_GE_REF	20	4.3	13.9
4_NON_CAT	65	13.9	45.1
4_CLA_ID	38	8.1	26.4
4_FUNC	23	4.9	16
4_REL_ID	18	3.9	12.5
5_IND	129	27.6	89.6
5_COLL	15	3.2	10.4
6_-POS	140	30	97.2
6_+POS_O	4	0.8	2.8
6_+POS_S	0	0.00	0
REFERENCES TO SELF	144	30.8	100

As Table 34 suggests, the representation of female survivors as social actors in SB1 prefers a non-neutral nuance (59%). Although discursive instantiations referring to either oneself or the imagined (collective) addressees can be done by means of less marked mechanisms in evaluative terms (S1, S2),⁴⁹ the majority of realisations in this community opts for non-neutrality. Even if providing a detailed account of the different mechanisms from the point of view of evaluation is beyond the scope of this research, non-neutrality inclines towards negativity. Thus, there tends to be an

⁴⁹ Note that examples dealing with the representation of female survivors are indicated via (**S**NUMBER). Also, it is noteworthy to mention that all examples included in this chapter have not been altered in any form, respecting the way the post was originally written by its user. Nonetheless, bold and italics have been added with empathic purposes.

emphasis on the many either physical or psychological traits the user dislikes about herself (S3), although instances in which users degrade themselves (usually prompted by failing to satisfy the perpetrator in any way) are also encountered (S4).

(S1) imagine **ladies** if i listened to the above paragraph? [SB1_1.96]

(S2) it is not normal for **a women** [sic] of my age to not want it more [SB1_2.10]

(S3) I'm too **fat**, I'm too **needy**, I'm getting **older**, I have stretch marks from our baby. [SB1_2.4]

(S4) I feel suffocated, and s**t about myself, that **I'm a horrible b***h** for putting him down [SB1_2.36]

Another interesting tendency when engaging in the non-neutral representation of herself as a social actor in SB1 is that of making use of the reported speech. By means of this discursive mechanism, non-neutral references to the self are transported to the online posts indirectly, incorporating the voice of the perpetrator and the many negative evaluative remarks addressed to the survivor in particular. This can be done in different ways. Hence, the range of non-neutral (namely negative) features can be sorted as a reported list of the many insults received from the perpetrator (S5), whereas in some cases this is done by means of a rough transcription of what happened at a conversational level, where interaction between oneself and the perpetrator can be easily envisioned (S6).

(S5) **Call me** all the names under the sun, **tell me I'm ugly ,useless , mentally unbalanced, not a good mother no good at relationships not a good daughter and so on and so on**. [...] **Calling me the c word** always really upset me but now it's not as bad it's just more words to try and hurt me. He's a very heavy drinker and can get very nasty. [SB1_2.38]

(S6) He had a go, stormed upstairs and told me where I could shove the f***ing dinner. I said its Xmas day, have dinner with the kids and **he said I was nothing but a c***, a horrible c***!** [SB1_2.21]

This tendency to make use of reported speech is also observed if a different set of features is taken into account. As Table 34 above indicated, textual realisations of the self in this community are mostly included by means of attributive clauses (68.1%). Specific and generic reference is less salient here (18.1% and 13.9% respectively), although remarkable divergences are found in the remaining two communities (as the next sections below will elaborate). Thus, attributes are activated by means of a copular verb and they are sometimes embedded within a reported clause (S7). Generally speaking though, attributes tend to mirror the

confused state in which many of users in this forum find themselves as they resort to online contexts in order to look for advice (S8) or, again, they concern different physical and/or emotional traits (S9).

(S7) He told me I was **deformed** (only a couple of times, but it stayed with me) [SB1_1.100]

(S8) I'm just looking for some advice because I'm **so confused and scared**. [SB1_2.13]

(S9) I am really **emotionally demanding**, I want affection a lot of the time and need conversation in a relationship [SB1_2.14]

Bearing in mind that the analysed online posts in this forum are first-person narratives, it is unsurprising to find that attributive clauses are also usual vehicles to activate different features dealing with categorisation. Out of the three main features included in SARDDA for discursive cases of this sort, female survivors in SB1 are represented by means of classified identification (26.4%), functionalisation (16%) and relational identification (12.5%). To put it differently, users in SB1 employ major categories used to differentiate classes of people (age, gender, etc.) when representing themselves rather than by means of the functions they do or, more importantly, their personal or kinship relations to each other. More specifically, as illustrated in (S10), it is common that users in this community make use of the rather unmarked term “person” when representing themselves (in 28.9% within the [CLA_ID] feature), whereas the use of the more gendered term “woman” is observed less frequently (18.4%), as shown in example (S11). At this stage, discursive activation by means of the rather different but still gendered term “ladies” is less central (15.8% of the cases). Regardless of this distribution, it is interesting to observe cases in which terms of both types are used within the same clause. For instance, example (S12) shows how the term “person” may be used more holistically, whereas “an independent woman with a mind of her own” may refer to earlier versions of oneself that are not affected by an abusive relationship, after which the self metaphorically turns into a “clingy wreck”.

(S10) I am **a very determined hard working person**, but my inner self esteem is so low [SB1_1.129]

(S11) He says that if he had married **a less feisty woman** things would have been different [SB1_1.91]

(S12) How can an otherwise *sensible person* go from being an *independent woman* with a mind of her own to an anxious, *clingy wreck* who can't live her life without "his" approval [SB1_2.2]

Interestingly, there were some cases in which it was difficult to distinguish the rather fuzzy boundaries between classified identification and functionalisation. As example (S13) suggests, it is not always easy to decide if a discursive representation favours more suitably what one is or what one does, a challenge that was also identified by van Leeuwen (2008). These cases were handled under the assumption that one is not born a victim (or an abuser) but rather becomes so. Although this should be ideally coded by means of a hybrid feature, instances of this sort were labelled as functionalisations. Still, more clear-cut instances of functionalisation are present in SB1. As shown in (S14) and (S15), some users activate themselves in discourse via their professional role. Nonetheless, surely driven by the anonymous character of the online site, there is very little clarity when it comes to the type of jobs they do. Curiously enough, not only is functionalisation employed to refer to users' occupation in offline realms, but also to activate the online role they play in this digital context (S16).

(S13) I think it would help me to identify one way or the other if I was actually a **victim** or not [SB1_1.94]

(S14) Financially I am **the major earner**, in fact I pay for pretty much everything including paying off his debts [SB1_2.12]

(S15) I found myself in the opposite situation of becoming **the main breadwinner** because he wasn't well enough to work [SB1_2.5]

(S16) I think I might become a **regular "poster"** as I have quite a few themes which I would like to share with you [SB1_1.132]

Last but not least, female survivors as SAs are also represented via relational identification. Influenced by the discourse type under scrutiny, a rather predictable way to refer to themselves is either through their role as mothers or by means of the emotional bonds towards the perpetrator. In fact, out of the 18 instances responding to the feature [REL_ID], 50% refer to the former (S17) whereas 33.3% refer to the latter (S18, S19).

(S17) He tells me I'm a **bad mum**, puts me down all the time [SB1_2.26]

(S18) Has he got a point- if I was a **happy wife** of probably do lots of nice things knowing he was tired...I've just locked myself in the bathroom [SB1_2.20]

(S19) I feel so low, I also feel like I was just a **trophy GF** [SB1_1.130]

Similar to the blur when classified identifications and functionalisations need to be distinguished, SB1 includes cases where relational identification may also suggest more functionalised nuances (S20, S21). Note that, although the same term is used in both examples, contextual information may suggest that example (S20) is closer to functionalisation (the fact that money stops is worrying since this user's occupation is a stay-at-home Mum) whereas example (S21) is more linked to her condition as a mother. Even though a more hybrid label could have been ideally used for cases of this sort, [FUNC] was still preferred for the sake of systematicity.

(S20) I was worried about him suddenly stopping money – **I'm a stay at home Mum** [SB1_2.1]

(S21) He wasn't happy but didn't stop me, just made me feel guilty about leaving our child. I quit after a short while and resumed being **a Sahm** [SB1_2.1]

Before moving to the next set of features, readers may have noticed that the most frequent code found in this group is [NON_CAT], which amounts a 45.1% of all cases in this set. This is indeed quite paradoxical, especially considering this cluster is thought to identify cases in which social actors are discursively represented by means of categorisation. As suggested in Section 7.3 above, this feature was conceived as a rather overarching one to amalgamate cases in which the main three mechanisms within categorisation could not be straightforwardly perceived. Examples of this are shown in (S22) and (S23), although the most frequent cases tagged as [NON_CAT] are precisely insults or nouns whose evaluative connotation was too marked to be included as classified identification. Nonetheless, this controversy will be treated afterwards due to the fact this category is even more noticeable in SB2.

(S22) I keep wondering what if I'm wrong? What if I'm just **a wimp** and need to toughen up a bit? [SB1_1.119]

(S23) telling me im **a bipolar b***h** cause im on my period, telling me he hopes I dont need to rely on him for things anymore [SB1_1.129]

Finally, features included in group (5) and group (6) offer less variety in discursive terms. On the one hand, as Table 34 above indicates, representation of the self as a social actor in SB1 is vastly achieved by means of individualisation. As a matter of fact, all examples included in this section with the exception of the first one) can be

seen as textual instances in which the self can be easily identified as a particular individual. Interestingly, as forthcoming sections will demonstrate, this feature represents one of the most significant discursive shifts if a cross-community analysis is undertaken. For this reason, an in-depth analysis of this feature will be addressed later in this chapter.

As far as features in group (6) are concerned, SB1 shows very little variation again. Quite logically, this is not striking if the first-person narratives are recalled. Representing oneself by means of possessivation is not an easy endeavour, although it is precisely this community the one with the greater amount of possessivations that unavoidably require the textual activation of another social actor. Example (S24) is perhaps its best representative, in which an interesting representation of the self is achieved by means of both metaphorical and metonymical reference that is directly linked to the perpetrator through the third person possessive 'his'.

(S24) Problem is I am not an unconfident person who is going to be **his mug**
[SB1_1.128]

As previously indicated, this section has provided a qualitative description of the most representative mechanisms used by female survivors of IPV as social actors in the first online community under investigation (SB1). The next subsection focuses on SB2 and proceeds in a similar fashion.

7.4.1.2 Representations of female survivors in SB2 (Getting out)

As suggested elsewhere, users in SB2 are generally aware of the fact that IPV is already taking place in their lives. Therefore, most users contributing to this community situate themselves amidst the abusive process in the relationship, and a common communicative pattern is that of looking for practical advice on how to deal with the situation they are in. Interestingly, this is already hinted at the title of the community, emphasising that users writing there are within a somewhat figurative space they need to get out of. Table 35 below accounts for the frequency of mechanisms by means of which users represent themselves discursively in SB2. Considering that a separate section will be devoted to engage in a cross-community analysis, prominence is now given to the most salient discursive features in the light

of SARDDA found in this second community. Nonetheless, references to other communities will be pointed out when deemed relevant.

Table 35 | Female survivors as social actors in SB2 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Set of features for analysis in SARDDA	SB2 (40,324 words)		
	SB2 (N)	SB2 (ptw)	%
1_NON_NEU	82	20.3	63.6
1_NEU	47	11.7	36.4
2_ATTR	68	16.9	52.7
2_GE_REF	36	8.9	27.9
2_SP_REF	25	6.2	19.4
4_NON_CAT	91	22.6	70.5
4_CLA_ID	28	6.9	21.7
4_FUNC	5	1.2	3.9
4_REL_ID	5	1.2	3.9
5_IND	97	24.1	75.2
5_COLL	32	7.9	24.8
6_-POS	127	31.5	98.5
6_+POS_O	1	0.3	0.8
6_+POS_S	1	0.3	0.8
REFERENCES TO SELF	129	32	100

SB2 represents the greater difference if the distribution of neutral and non-neutral references is contrasted. As Table 35 above elucidates, 63.6% of these auto-representations is non-neutral with a clear tendency towards negative evaluation. In fact, 91.5% of all non-neutral references are negative. Not so differently from the type of non-neutral references found in SB1, users in SB2 also present themselves by stressing the adverse situation they are in. An interesting observation though is related to the fact that users in SB2 seem to focus less on their less desirable physical traits (*ugly*, *fat*, as seen in the previous section) and shift towards the weak psychological traits that being immersed in the abusive relationship is triggering,⁵⁰ as examples (S25), (S26) and (S27) try to demonstrate. It is remarkable to observe how even more physical notions such as *dirt* are used to metaphorically describe one's psychological/emotional state, as also suggested by 'devastated' or 'some kind of monster'. Notice though that positive non-neutrality is also observed, yet emphasis is less usually placed on one's physical condition (S28).

(S25) I start the day convinced of **how dirty I am** and then I struggle with my mood for the rest of the day [SB2_1.24]

⁵⁰ Although this LIWC category was not part of the development of chapter 6, the semantic category "BODY" provides a higher score in SB1 than in SB2, a difference which happens to be statistically significant as suggested in Appendix 5. This may be used as piece of evidence supporting this shift from focusing on (negative) physical traits to more psychological ones.

(S26) **I am absolutely devastated**, I don't understand why everything and everyone I value in my life is disappearing [SB2_1.4]

(S27) I can't even walk the streets of the area we live because everyone thinks **I'm some kind of monster** [SB2_2.37]

(S28) I've read such tragic stories that others of you are going through and really scary things your putting up with and **you're all so strong** [SB2_2.20]

Examples above can be employed to refer to how features in group (2) are used in SB2. As Table 35 above shows, 52.7% of self-reference in SB2 is transmitted by means of attributes. Despite its predominance, this tendency decreases in this community if compared to SB1, whereas the shift towards generic reference starts to increase. As a matter of fact, if both percentages and normalised frequencies are compared, generic reference in SB1 happens 13.9% (4.3 ptw) in contrast to 27.9% of cases in SB2 (8.9 ptw). Although this already represents a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=6.56$; $p<0.05$), this discursive phenomenon will be dealt with in depth in the following section because it is in SB3 where its use escalates considerably.

More attention is necessary when considering how SARDDA features included in group (4) are employed in SB2. Curiously enough, if Table 35 above is recalled, it is not complex to detect that there is a decline in the main three mechanisms used for categorisation purposes. Nonetheless, classified identification [CLA_ID] is the mechanism that still prevails out of the three, which suggests the preference users have to represent themselves via major categories to differentiate classes of people (van Leeuwen, 2008). In contrast to the inclination to use the less gendered label 'person' found in SB1, it is interesting to find out that the most frequent term within classified identification is 'ladies' (42.8% of the total). If this is added to the occurrence of 'women' (14.2%), it is possible to argue that users in SB2 opt for more gendered terms (57.1%), whilst self-representation by means of terms such 'person' or 'people' is less salient here (S29).

In contrast, as examples (S30), (S31) and (S32) illustrate, the increase of more gendered classification terms can be associated with the process of collectivisation that starts forging in SB2 (notice the plural forms), in which the role that users play in this particular community is of particular importance. For instance, as seen in example (S30) and (S31), defining relative clauses can be of use when users in SB2 try to specify the sort of advice they would to receive (from women who have left the abusive relationship under particular circumstances), which in turn emphasises the

different nature of this community. The crucial role of the online site is made explicit, to the point of stressing the role online users can play in the process of leaving an abusive relationship (S32).

(S29) I feel like I've become **this invisible person** like I'm just existing and facilitating other people's lives. [SB2_2.20]

(S30) Any advice from **ladies** who left with no money would be appreciated [SB2_1.53]

(S31) Any **ladies** who have left, what did you do? [SB2_1.86]

(S32) I think it would be worth remembering that **all of the women on this site** are part way through a journey towards freedom and a happier life [SB2_2.48]

In a similar fashion to some of the examples in SB1, it is possible to identify cases in which the boundaries between [CLA_ID] and [FUNC] were complex to draw. Example (S33), for instance, represents a very interesting case. First of all, there seems to be a terminological tension between the terms 'survivor' and 'victim', which echoes a similar controversy in IPV research (see Chapter 2). In fact, it seems that the representation of herself as a survivor is only possible after a process of reconstruction from the bottom to the top (which is also interesting in metaphorical terms) in which the 'victim' self seems to be left behind. The use of the verb "class" would pose problems here, since, on this basis, it may seem closer to classification than to functionalisation. Nonetheless, as already discussed in the previous section, this was coded as functionalisation. Another controversial case is encountered in (S34). Although the term 'prostitute' would seem to fit better as a functionalised reference, a close analysis of this excerpt suggests that this representation is activated externally and via the perpetrator's family.

(S33) (removed by moderator) months on and **I class myself as a survivor not a victim** it has been hard building myself up from rock bottom and my 2 kids but now I can say my life is perfect [SB2_1.66]

(S34) He tells me that my family are trash and that his family would see me as no more than **a prostitute**, with him for their money [SB2_1.2]

Broadly speaking, cases of functionalisation were far less common in SB2 and in SB1 (which represents a significant decrease, $\chi^2=8.01$; $p<0.01$). A similar decline is observed when dealing with textual representations by means of relational identifications. Despite this dearth, the way in which relational identifications are used in SB2 is very telling of the type of discourse that prevails in this community.

Arguably, as showcased in examples (S35) and (S36), these mechanisms seem to be used in order to emphasise the failure these women may perceive not to fit in the stereotypes these terms evoke in social terms. The most alarming issue here though is that, as also suggested by these examples, failing to meet external expectations around these terms seems to be for some users a justification for self-blaming, as example (S36) specifies or, even, to take away the abuser's responsibility (S37).

(S35) **I am often told I am an unfit mother** and our oldest doesn't want to live with me [SB2_2.60]

(S36) I tell myself *the abuse is just something I invented* because I can't face the fact I've been **a bad wife** and ruined both his and my daughter's life [SB2_2.11]

(S37) My resolve has gone. All this time to think, analyzing everything we did and said. *How miserable I must have made him.* How wrong I got it. I can't cope [SB2_2.52]

Nonetheless, this overall decline in categorisation mechanisms in SB2 is at odds with the increase that the feature [NON_CAT] undergoes, which in fact represents a significant difference if both SB1 and SB2 are compared ($\chi^2=8.59$; $p<0.01$). As Table 35 above points out, 70.5% of all textual self-references in this community fit better in this feature. As anticipated in the previous section, the fact that such a great number of self-representations are grouped here suggests that the role of this feature in SARDDA needs to be further problematised. Examples (S38-S41) below represent cases in which none of the three main features for categorisation could be easily applied, which explains the creation of the [NON_CAT] label. It is clear though that these examples can be easily approached from a figurative perspective (note the frequency of simile, for instance), which also justifies the need to cater for examples of this sort from this angle. Similarly, as mentioned in SB1, another identifiable trend is that of resorting to self-deprecation discursive strategies such as insults for self-referential purposes.

(S38) In (month removed by moderator) last year, **the dumbass I am**, I took him back [SB2_1.62]

(S39) He begged me to go back to him before Christmas and **like a fool I did** [SB2_2.7]

(S40) And **I felt like an idiot** when i engaged in a dialogue [SB2_1.5]

(S41) I feel like **a sitting duck** now and wonder if there is anything else I can be doing - any help and information greatly appreciated, thanks!! [SB2_1.70]

As a matter of fact, it is uncomplicated to ignore the tendency towards self-deprecation that prevails in most examples used to describe this online community, a linguistic trait that can be very indicative of these users' global self-esteem. Seminal research along these lines understands global self-esteem as a "positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self" (Rosenberg, 1965: 30) in which both positive and negative self-evaluation are part of a single measure. More specifically, research has proved that one has self-respect and feels worthwhile (while acknowledging personal faults and shortcomings) when self-esteem is high; whereas seeing oneself as a seriously deficient person who is inadequate and unworthy (and one's perceived weaknesses in general predominate) prevails when self-esteem is low (Rosenberg, 1979).

Based on the self-representation mechanisms used in SB2, it may be argued that these women's levels of self-esteems are certainly lower. This can also justify a writing style that opts for self-deprecation in order to emphasise the self-critical and negative part of their self-esteem, which also belittles their worth and efficacy and disregards their self-assurance, moral worth or virtues (Owens, 1993). The fact that this prevails in this rather halfway-through stage, when most women are aware of the abusive relationship they are in but seek at the same time to get out of it, is also very remarkable. As Owens points out, "self-deprecation occurs in *people who are at variance with themselves* and others and who report experiencing psychological and emotional distress" (1994: 393, italics added).

7.4.1.3 Representations of female survivors in SB3 (Life after abuse)

Following a similar procedure to the one adopted so far, this subsection explores the most noticeable mechanisms used by survivors to represent themselves as social actors in SB3, the online community within the forum that encourages users to share experiences regarding life after abuse. Table 36 below accounts for these mechanisms from a quantitative point of view, including raw numbers (N), normalised frequencies (ptw) and distribution percentages in each community for the SARDDA mechanisms at issue.

Interesting insights can be grasped if attention is first paid to group (1). As Table 36 below suggests, the distribution of neutral and non-neutral self-references is more evenly-matched in SB3 than in the other two communities.

Table 36 | Female survivors as social actors in SB3 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Set of features for analysis in SARDDA	SB3 (42,866 words)		
	SB3 (N)	SB3 (ptw)	%
1_NON_NEU	95	22.2	51.4
1_NEU	90	21	48.7
2_ATTR	93	21.7	50.3
2_GE_REF	66	15.4	35.7
2_SP_REF	26	6.1	14.1
4_NON_CAT	96	22.4	51.9
4_CLA_ID	55	12.8	29.7
4_FUNC	19	4.4	10.3
4_REL_ID	15	3.5	8.1
5_IND	126	29.4	68.1
5_COLL	59	13.8	31.9
6_-POS	183	42.7	98.9
6_+POS_O	2	0.5	1.1
6_+POS_S	0	0.00	0
TOTAL REFS TO SELF (SB3)	185	43.2	100

More specifically, self-references that are not marked (either positively or negatively) in evaluative terms reach their highest point in this online community. The relevance of this discursive trait is particularly important if the heavy load of discursive negativity to refer to oneself found in SB2 is recalled. As the next section will further clarify, there is a significant variance in the distribution of neutral terms if both SB2-SB3 and SB1-SB3 are compared. It is curious to observe that some of these neutral references are instantiated in discursive ways that appear for the first time in SB3 (S42), whose rather colloquial nuance may point out at the greater degree of proximity and relaxed atmosphere that prevails in this community. Apart from this, users in SB3 make more room for positive evaluation. Not only do users position themselves as more agentive discursive entities (S43), but also offer a wide range of positive adjectives (*resilient, stronger, better*) and metaphorical references that are in stark contrast to most of those found in SB1 and SB2.

(S42) i guess my question is would you keep quite [sic] and say nothing not get involved and hope for the best or would you speak to her sorry for the long one **guys** [SB3_2.79]

(S43) It's only been a few months since **I dumped him**, but I am **a rather resilient person** and have unexpectedly found so many positives from the experience [SB3_1.7]

(S44) **I know that I am worth the best.** I want to believe that I learned to protect myself and that **I am now stronger and better.** [SB3_1.92]

Examples (S43) and (S44) above can also be used to point out that self-representation is also linked to attributive references, which accounts for 50.27% of the times in SB3. As stated elsewhere, this is not very telling considering the first-person perspective that these users take. Nonetheless, as anticipated in the previous subsections, the scalar increase of generic references reaches its summit in self-representation mechanisms in SB3. In fact, these amount to 35.7% of the cases in this community and it proves to be a significant difference in comparison with SB1 ($\chi^2=27.66$; $p<0.001$).

It should be noted though that the operationalisation of generic reference in the light of the analysed data may cause some controversies. According to van Leeuwen (2008), generic reference is used when social actors are represented as classes and can be realised either by plurality (with articles) or by means of singularity (with or without the definite article). It is indeed plurality that is the most common realisation of generic reference in the dataset at hand. As illustrated by examples (S45) and (S46), references that tend towards genericisation usually rely on the term ‘women’, and any reference to specific individuals is thus complex to ascertain. Interestingly, generic reference can also be conveyed by means of singularity in which the article is not needed, adding a sense of rhetoricity that may be used to address the imagined/expected audience in more emphatic ways (S47).

(S45) I'd move house but he won't agree to sell. No wonder **women** move town completely [SB3_2.64]

(S46) All the stupid men out there who think they are always right and they can tell **women** what to do, go to hell and never return! [SB3_2.61]

(S47) This man battered the mother of his child in front [sic] of them god knows how many times. what father does that? **what mother allows this?** [SB3_2.95]

There are some other cases in which the boundaries of genericisation in broad terms can be somewhat fuzzy. As examples (S48), (S49) and (S50) below suggest, users in SB3 refer to other women in collective ways. Thus, it is uncomplicated for readers (insiders or outsiders) to infer that these “other women” being referred to are also women undergoing IPV. However, it is possible to identify different pragmatic functions. In example (S48), for instance, the user seems to be creating a contrast

between herself as someone who seems to have overcome the aftermath of IPV and other women who may be still suffering from it. Conversely, the use of 'other women' in (S49) is employed in order to contrast the type of abuse this particular user seems to have experienced with that undergone by other women. Although several interpretations are feasible, this type of mechanism may be used to refer to other members within this online forum or female survivors of IPV more generically. This type of collective reference working in particular at the meso-level is more easily observed in (S50), where the pronoun 'others' seems to be addressing, by means of a direct question, to women reading the post.

(S48) I want to hopefully go onto giving something back got my hopes on helping **other women** [SB3_1.98]

(S49) I know the abuse was not as bad as it has been for many **other women** [SB3_1.85]

(S50) I know its not my fault how he hurt me but want some closure. how do **others** cope with dealing with what happened? [SB3_2.18]

Linguistic plurality is also perceptible if different mechanisms dealing with categorisation (group 4) are taken into account. Broadly speaking, as Table 36 above indicates, there is a general increase in the main three mechanisms used for self-representation purposes, whereas the rather overarching [NON_CAT] is less central this time. The most significant difference between SB2 and SB3 is found in classified identifications ($\chi^2=6.64$; $p<0.01$) and functionalisations ($\chi^2=6.27$; $p<0.05$), and interesting trends can be observed if these mechanisms are explored in depth.

When contrasted with functionalisations [FUNC] and relational identifications [REL_ID], classified identification [CLA_ID] is the most frequent mechanism to activate discursive self-representations in SB3, reaching its peak in this online community. One of most interesting aspects within this mechanism is related to the different term (in classification terms) these online users to represent themselves. As (S51) below exemplifies, 'person' is still one of the most frequent ones. However, it is striking to observe how this term can be used in way that reinforces one's dual identity after experiencing IPV. This can evidence the transforming effect that women undergoing this type of violence can experience. Quite relatedly, as seen in (S52) users writing in SB3 refer to a past self that feels non-human as a consequence of maltreatment. Nonetheless, discursive instantiations of plurality are very predominant in SB3, namely relying on the term 'ladies' as (S53) and (S54) suggest.

- (S51) I don't like **this person** I have become – who is she.....??? [SB3_2.65]
 (S52) He was so unkind in how he executed his exit, that I felt worthless, terrified, and actually for nearly [detailed removed] years, it's not that I didn't feel as good as other people, it's that **I actually didn't feel human**, because I had been treated so badly [SB3_2.57]
 (S53) Love never fails. Keep strong **ladies** [SB3_1.39]
 (S54) So **all you ladies out there like me**, on your own after spending half your life as a couple [SB3_2.78]

Given this tendency towards plurality, it was thought convenient to contrast divergences among different [CLAD_ID] terms in SB1 and in SB3 to investigate if significant changes occurred along these lines. Table 37 below offers very telling pointers in this regard since it presents a contrastive account of these terms when used for self-reference purposes.

Table 37 | Terms within classified identifications used for self-representation purposes in SB1 and SB3 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %, statistical significance using χ^2 , p value and log-likelihood)

CLAD_ID term	SB1 (46,733 words)			SB3 (42,866 words)			Stat. sig.		
	(N)	(ptw)	(% CLAD_ID)	(N)	(ptw)	(% CLAD_ID)	SB1-SB3		
							χ^2	p	LL
person	11	2.4	28.9	11	2.6	20	0	NS	0.04
woman	7	1.5	18.4	6	1.4	13.3	0	NS	0.01
women	4	0.9	10.5	13	3.0	23.6	4.49	0.05	5.83
ladies	6	1.3	15.8	21	4.9	38.2	8.53	0.01	10.17

Although the use of 'person' is perhaps more salient in SB3 (based on its normalised frequency), it prevails in SB1 (28.9% of all CLAD_ID mechanisms). Nonetheless, as proved by figures in Table 37 above, self-references of this sort shift from singularity to plurality. This change is particularly significant owing to the salience of 'ladies' ($p < 0.01$), which becomes the most frequent term in SB3. This can be interpreted in several ways. First, 'ladies' can work here as a vocative, involved in addressing other members. Thus, the increased use of this term can be related to the higher trend to look outward and address the reading audience directly. Second, this may arguably evidence the tendency towards pluralisation and collectivisation that textual self-references experiment from an initial stage to a final stage (SB1-SB3), which may have been influenced by a more marked feeling of collective identity found in SB3. Third, this significant evolution of the term 'ladies' can also be telling of the more positive general tone (and therefore emotional state) among women in this final stage. Note that dictionary definitions for 'lady' tend to underline its polite and courteous connotations, or even to refer to "a woman who you admire for her

character or achievements” (MacMillan Dictionary, 2018), which very accurately reflects many of the posts within this community.

In a similar vein, functionalisations increase significantly again in SB3 if contrasted to SB2 ($\chi^2=6.27$; $p<0.05$). Unlike posts in the other two communities, textual evidence here stresses this dynamicity in identity terms that many SB3 users seem to be experiencing. In some cases, as in in (S55), the same user may represent herself in professional terms but also as a member of a relationship. At the same time, although some users display a very firm sense of being a survivor (S56), SB3 also offers interesting cases in which the user’s role as a victim/survivor fluctuate. As examples (S57) and (S58) evidence, users seem to be discursively aware of this oscillation, which is marked by means of the conscious use of punctuation marks or verbal alternation.

(S55) Working full te and juggling the kids trying to be **the bread winner** and **the mother**...trying to.do it all alone. [SB3_1.18]

(S56) I'm a **survivor** and I thank refuges all over uk that I spent time in [SB3_1.98]

(S57) How do **other ‘survivors’** cope after an abusive relationship?! (NOTE: Apostrophes around survivors as i still feel a victim) [SB3_2.40]

(S58) 10months since my family and friends found out my dark secret that i **was/am a victim of domestic violence** [SB3_2.95]

As suggested by many of the examples above, the shift towards collective self-reference in SB3 is the final feature to be discussed here due to its relevance in discursive terms. As a matter of fact, this represents the most significant difference if SB1 and SB3 are juxtaposed ($\chi^2=28.91$; $p<0.001$), as next subsection will briefly illustrate. Many examples included in this subsection have clearly shown the tendency towards discursive plurality found in this community. However, it should be emphasised that this is usually achieved thanks to the feeling of gratitude that users contributing to this community express towards women reading their posts. Therefore, a frequent mechanism to activate collectivisation (S59) consists in evoking the forum (used also for differentiation purposes) and the women comprising it. Additionally, collectivisation is heavily dependent on first-person plural pronouns (S60), which is in many cases reinforced by related linguistic features (such as *all*) that enhance the idea of belonging to a group (S61). Likewise, the pronoun *we* is also used as opposed to third-person plural pronouns that manage to achieve a

greater sense of in-group identity, as female survivors versus *them*, the perpetrators (S62).

(S59) To **all of the women on this forum** who have taken the time to listen to my posts [SB3_2.87]

(S60) wish that **we** never had to have any more struggle <3 [SB3_1.17]

(S61) Life after abuse has its ups and downs but given time **we** will all get to where we really want to be [SB3_2.59]

(S62) If **we** can't allow them into our heads then we can't be mistreated again [SB3_1.55]

Despite its less obvious nature to indicate collectivisation, I would certainly argue that the enhancement of in-group collective identity is also achieved by means of direct references targeted to the reader (i.e., survivors reading the post) from another survivor. As examples (S63) and (S64), the use of the pronoun *you*, combined with the exhortative illocutionary force of the imperatives, may activate women's feeling of being part of this group. This exposure to more directive discursive forms may also help women in their healing process. As both examples below convey, the role that metaphor plays in this process is definitely worth considering (see Chapter 8 below).

(S63) God bless. Wherever **you** at [sic] in the storm [SB3_2.2]

(S64) **Kick those legs ladies and swim up to the surface.** The world waiting for **you** up there is such a colourful, warm and exciting place, **you** really don't want to miss out on it! [SB3_1.7]

Having analysed the mechanisms used by survivors of IPV to represent themselves discursively as social actors in the three online communities under scrutiny, the next subsection gathers the most significant results and provides some concluding remarks before paying attention to discursive representations of IPV perpetrators.

7.4.1.4 Representations of female survivors: a cross-community comparison

This subsection seeks to offer a broad comparison of how the discursive mechanisms explored in depth in previous subsections evolve across the online communities this research looks at. Since plenty of textual evidence has hitherto been offered, this is thought to offer a global perspective based on statistical significance, as Table 38 below illustrates. Additionally, Appendix 6 merges Tables 34, 35 and 36 above and also offers a cross-community comparison.

First of all, as widely exemplified in previous subsections, the most significant difference as far as self-representation is concerned is related to the tendency among these users to engage in collective and less specific references to themselves as survivors of IPV. Although significant differences for these two discursive phenomena are observed even at early stages (if SB1 and SB2 are compared, for instance), the greatest degree of significance (0.001) is found when the initial and the final stages are juxtaposed. As previously pointed out, these mechanisms are consistently instantiated by means of several linguistic strategies that put more emphasis on collectivised references to forum users, which is also achieved by more direct references to users of this online site. Therefore, discursive genericisation and collectivisation may be two central features of a more supportive style. As suggested by Landqvist (2016), and although it is unclear how online support is expressed, interesting correlations have been found between a more supportive and expressive style with a stronger development of online community building.⁵¹

Table 38 | Female survivors as SAs across communities (SARDDA features and statistical significance)⁵²

	SB1-SB2			SB2-SB3			SB1-SB3		
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL
1_NEU	0.09	NS	0.17	10.46	0.01	11.23	8.93	0.01	9.45
1_NON_NEU	0.41	NS	0.52	0.24	NS	0.33	1.56	NS	1.76
2_ATTR	1.70	NS	1.93	2.26	NS	2.52	0.02	NS	0.06
2_GE_REF	6.56	0.05	7.30	6.58	0.05	7.22	27.66	0.001	30.07
2_SP_REF	0.06	NS	0.15	0	NS	0.01	0.02	NS	0.10
4_CLA_ID	0.26	NS	0.40	6.64	0.01	7.37	4.31	0.05	4.77
4_FUNC	8.01	0.01	10.04	6.27	0.05	7.87	0.03	NS	0.11
4_REL_ID	4.64	0.05	6.01	3.52	NS	4.64	0.01	NS	0.08
4_NON_CAT	8.59	0.01	9.04	0	NS	0	8.51	0.01	8.98
5_COLL	8.10	0.01	9.05	5.93	0.05	6.57	28.91	0.001	31.91
5_IND	0.920	NS	1.05	2.02	NS	2.22	0.19	NS	0.25
6_+POS_S	0	NS	1.54	0	NS	1.45	-	NS	-
6_+POS_O	0.53	NS	1.51	0	NS	0.28	0.09	NS	0.52
6_-POS	0.12	NS	0.17	6.71	0.01	7.04	9.74	0.01	10.06

⁵¹ See Chapter 3 for specific information on how support is thought to be achieved in online forums.

⁵² Figures included in the left column offer results for χ^2 and the *p* value. Orange=not significant; Yellow=significant at 0.05; Light Green=significant at 0.01; Dark green=significant at 0.001. Figures in the right column include results for log-likelihood [LL]. In this case, scores must be greater than 3.84 for a difference to be statistically significant (Oakes, 1998).

Second, several interpretations can be reached if the cross-community evolution of mechanisms used for categorisation purposes (group 4) are considered in detail. On the one hand, it seems that both functionalisations [FUNC] and relational identifications [REF_ID] are more salient in SB1 and SB3, with a relevant decrease in SB2. Despite this, normalised frequencies show that self-representations through these mechanisms is particularly prominent in SB1, falling in both SB2 and SB3. The opposite pattern is found if classified identifications [CLA_ID] are borne in mind. Despite its less frequent use in SB2, self-representations of this sort reach their peak in SB3, and a significant difference between SB1 and SB3 is observed. One possible way to interpret this may be that self-references stimulate the activation of lexical choices that are more essentialist and therefore closer to oneself. This could be also useful to understand some of the reasons why both functionalisations and relational identifications are more salient in the first online community. To put it differently, the evolution of these mechanisms across these three online communities suggests a gradual decrease of more peripheral features of identity (such as your role in society or your relationship with others) towards the strengthening of more nuclear identity traits (*ladies, women, etc.*). This can be seen as evidence of how users in SB3 seem to be more concerned with themselves as human beings than with other secondary realms of their personality.

Quite relatedly, and despite the increase of non-neutral mechanisms used for self-reference across the three communities, significant differences are also observed when dealing with neutral discursive mechanisms [NEU]. Thus, it is possible to interpret that these women's self-reference mechanisms are generally non-neutral. However, the rise in neutrality can be seen as a less marked type of discourse in evaluative terms, which may reflect users who are more emotionally detached and with a more stabilised balance between their positive and negative self-esteem. The fact that more neutral mechanisms abound particularly in SB3 may be also due to the effect caused by the feeling of belonging to this online community. As research along similar lines has suggested (Coulson, 2005; Lee & Lin, 2016), self-help online communities like this one can cause a general improvement in users' quality of life (offline), reduction of stress levels, fortified decision making and improved self-determination.

Broadly speaking, having RQ2.1 in mind, this section has sought to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the many mechanisms that female survivors

of IPV use to represent themselves as social actors in the online community under scrutiny. Discursive self-representations in each community (SB1, SB2 and SB3) have been treated separately in order to grasp a better understanding of the discursive nature of each of them. Additionally, a cross-community analysis has been proposed in an attempt to provide a more global perspective of how these discursive mechanisms shift (RQ2.3). The next section turns to explore linguistic mechanisms used to represent IPV perpetrators in this online environment, which is the main concern for RQ2.2. This is accomplished by applying the same procedures that have been followed in this section.

7.4.2 Representing the other: male perpetrators of IPV as Social Actors

As already anticipated from the outset, one of the main research gaps this study intends to fill concerns the discursive representation of salient social actors in the discourse generated by key social actors in IPV. The main objective of this subsection is to investigate different discursive images of male perpetrators as socio-cognitive representations (SCRs). To this end, this chapter focuses on the mechanisms used to linguistically activate men as perpetrators of IPV in the Survivor's Forum using SARDDA as the main analytical framework.

In order to be able to draw findings in a way similar to that in the previous section, three different subsections will first look at these textual representations in each of the three online communities from a qualitative perspective. Once this is done, a cross-community analysis will be presented in the attempt to investigate how these discursive mechanisms evolve. Overall, it should be noted that figurative references to the perpetrator will be dealt with separately in Chapter 8.

7.4.2.1 Representations of male perpetrators of IPV in SB1 (Is it abuse?)

Table 39 below offers the discursive mechanisms by which perpetrators are instantiated in SB. As usual, data are presented following the same procedure than in the previous sections in terms of raw numbers (N), normalised frequencies (ptw) and the distribution of features in each group (%).

The total number of references that fit the proposed SARDDA framework amounts to 213, which suggests the logical increase of discursive mechanisms referring to the perpetrators in contrast to self-references. Although this can be seen as a proof of the discursive prominence that perpetrators receive in broad terms (which gradually increases towards SB3), this may also be linked to the better suitability of SARDDA to account for social actors other than oneself.

Table 39 | Male perpetrators of IPV as social actors in SB1 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Set of features for analysis in SARDDA	SB1 (46,733 words)		
	SB1 (N)	SB1 (ptw)	%
1_NEU	137	29.3	64.3
1_NON_NEU	76	16.3	35.7
2_SP_REF	138	29.5	64.8
2_ATTR	57	12.2	26.8
2_GE_REF	18	3.9	8.5
4_REL_ID	103	22	48.4
4_NON_CAT	46	9.8	21.6
4_CLA_ID	41	8.8	19.3
4_FUNC	23	4.9	10.8
5_IND	200	42.8	93.9
5_COLL	13	2.8	6.1
6_-POS	120	25.7	56.3
6_+POS_S	92	19.7	43.2
6_+POS_O	1	0.2	0.5
TOTAL REFS TO PERPETRATOR (SB1)	213	45.6	100

Regardless of this, one of the first remarkable aspects that stands out from Table 39 above is related the distribution of neutral and non-neutral representations. Hence, a neutral activation of the perpetrator occurs in 64.3% of the cases. This is particularly striking given the fact that SB1 is the online community in which the LIWC-provided category ‘anger’ scores the highest and is used significantly more in comparison with the remaining communities (see Section 6.5.2). Likewise, neutral self-references for female survivors in SB1 are considerably inferior (41%), which suggests that evaluation is more present when users represent themselves than when they do the same for the perpetrators. Therefore, as example (P1) illustrates,⁵³ perpetrators in SB1 are textually neutral in two-thirds of the times. Nevertheless, non-neutrality is also visible. Evaluative remarks are usually embedded as pre-modifiers of the actual term used to refer to the perpetrator (P2, P3), although evaluation through attribution is also frequent (P4, P5).

⁵³ In this case, examples referring to male perpetrators of IPV are indicated via (**PNUMBER**). Similarly to previous examples, it should be borne in mind that all examples included in this chapter have not been altered in any form, respecting the way the post was originally written by its user. Bold and italics have been used to add typographic emphasis.

- (P1) Last night **my partner** had been acting strange, then suddenly he was very [sic] obviously in the mood for sex [SB1_1.92]
- (P2) I just know that the first time **my abusive husband** dragged me around and hurt me, underneath the absolute shock... [SB1_1.99]
- (P3) In short, I have **a narcissistic** [sic] **husband** along with his mother and family who have all been controlling and bullying me and my family [SB1_2.48]
- (P4) Honestly writing all this makes it look so clear that he is **a psychopath with serious mental problems** but he is under my skin so bad [SB1_1.114]
- (P5) He is [sic] **a seventeen stone ex** (details removed by moderator). I don't argue [SB1_1.109]

The last two examples can be used to briefly describe the ways in which perpetrators are represented by means of attributive references, which account for 26.8% of the total. Although this is not very telling if the other two reference-related features are considered, SB1 is the online community where attribution reaches its highest point. As both (P4) and (P5) illustrate, these attributes are mostly used to introduce psychological or physical features of the perpetrator. For example, (P4) epitomises a common pattern in this community, in which users manifest their emotional attachment to the perpetrator despite the many negative attributes he is associated with. This is usually accomplished by means of contrastive or concessive conjunctions. Similarly, the physical description conveyed by the attribute in (P5) gains further significance if the clause 'I don't argue' is taken into account, which may subtly denote the intimidation the user feels towards the perpetrator's physical attributes.

In any case, perpetrators in SB1 are textually represented namely by means of specific reference (64.8%), a tendency that also increases in the other two communities. For this reason, most examples included in this subsection will refer to the perpetrator in specific terms. Although generic references are still very scarce in SB1 (8.5%), it is interesting to observe that users can engage in this shift in the type of reference for particular purposes. In fact, as examples (P6) and (P7) suggest, generic reference (realised by either plurality or singularity) can be used to mark a contrast between non-abusers, who are described as 'decent' or 'normal', with specific references towards users' own abusers.

- (P6) I also know **decent men** wouldn't grope you all the time and would respect you when you say no. there is no NO in **my perp's** world my no's mean yes [SB1_1.97]

(P7) **To any normal man** it would be obvious that I was not enjoying this, that I don't like it and I don't want it and I want it to stop. **But he** keeps on rubbing himself up against me [SB1_2.41]

The previous two examples can be used as a springboard to describe how male perpetrators of IPV are represented as SAs as far as categorisation is concerned (group 4 in SARDDA). Opposite to what users did when representing themselves, as Table 39 above indicates, perpetrators in SB1 are mostly activated by means of relational identifications (48.4%). As its name itself suggests, this mechanism amalgamates textual representations in which all types of relations are included. Therefore, and given its prominence, it was necessary to refine this rather broad mechanism and account for the wide range of possibilities that could be identified, which is illustrated in Table 40 below.

Table 40 | Different mechanisms to activate male perpetrators of IPV via relational identifications in SB1 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

REL_ID term	SB1 (46,733 words)		
	SB1 (N)	SB1 (ptw)	% REL_ID
HUSBAND / HUBBY	44	9.4	42.7
PARTNER	23	4.9	22.3
EX (Ø)	18	3.9	17.5
BOYFRIEND / BF	7	1.5	6.8
DAD / DADDY	4	0.9	3.9
EX (PARTNER)	2	0.4	1.9
EX (HUSBAND)	2	0.4	1.9
FATHER	2	0.4	1.9
EX (BOYFRIEND/BF)	1	0.2	1
TOTAL REL_ID (SB1)	103	22	100

From the observation of this table one can easily grasp that users in SB1 opt for textual mechanisms that emphasise civil or relationship-like statuses (such as *husband*, *boyfriend* or the more generic *partner*) in 71.8% of all cases. In contrast, 22.2% of these instances reflect the breaking-up between the self and the perpetrator, which is lexically marked by the term 'ex' and its many variants. Less attention is paid to the parenting role of perpetrators (5.8%), though.

One possible objection to this analysis is related to the assumption that not all perpetrators may be parents, which might explain the fewer instances associated with parenthood. Although this controversy needs to be taken into account, it is very complex to ascertain which situation may be in each case. Examples (P8) and (P9) are very illustrative in this regard. As contextual information unmistakably reveals,

and despite the fact they are both parents, perpetrators in these cases are represented by means of relational identifications that foreground their belonging to a relationship. Apart from these contentious yet very interesting cases, more straightforward instantiations are easily spotted in this community. In line with what was suggested before, users frequently require external confirmation to understand if their perpetrators' behaviour is ordinary (P10), although for some others violent reactions to other members in the family seem to fall within the realm of eccentricity (P11).

(P8) I am several months on from leaving **my husband** with whom *I had (removed by moderator) kids*. [SB1_1.110]

(P9) I've been with **my partner** a number of years *we have one child together and I'm expecting another*. [SB1_1.117]

(P10) I'm just wondering is it normal for ur **boyfriend** [SB1_1.140]

(P11) Although he is a fantastic (if eccentric) **father** most of the time, he has hit the children [SB1_1.108]

Despite this preference towards relational identifications in SB1 (48.3%), it is worthwhile to briefly indicate the mechanism used in the remaining half of the cases. Thus, the rather broad label [NON_CAT] seems to be useful to explain the textual representation of IPV perpetrators. It is relevant to remember that this feature was initially included in SARDDA to handle references that could not straightforwardly fit the main three mechanisms used for categorisation purposes. Its considerable salience can precisely be related to its miscellaneous nature. Therefore, future applications of this framework may need to find suitable ways to further classify this feature. In fact, examples (P12), (P13) and (P14) are just some of the many possibilities that this feature accounts for. Despite its lower frequency, the use of offensive terms to refer to the perpetrator can also be found in SB1 (P12). Likewise, representations based on sarcasm (P13) and metaphorical expressions (P14) can also occur. As can be observed, this diversity in discursive terms would surely benefit from separate treatment, an aspect that SARDDA fails to satisfy.

(P12) The idea of a full split really scare me as I know he would be **a total t******* [SB1_2.12]

(P13) It's like he is different people at different times. Sometimes **mr fun** but if he doesn't agree with something then only his opinion can be right. [SB1_1.128]

(P14) I've come in and sorted out eldests [sic] homework etc got him to bed whilst **other half** chills out [SB1_2.20]

Before moving to the next group of features, it is important to point out that classified identifications [CLA_ID] and functionalisations [FUNC] are the less relevant features to activate male perpetrators as SAs (19.2% and 10.8% respectively). Despite the fact that functionalised representations will be dealt with in SB3 (due to the considerable increase they experiment in that community), some classified identifications are thought to vividly represent the type of discourse that prevails in this community. As also suggested by previously discussed features, users in SB1 tend to engage in discursive representations in which the perpetrators' positive traits are emphasised at the expense of references to oneself where self-blame is very noticeable, as seen in examples (P15) and (P16). As these examples also suggest, classified identifications in SB1 resort to the term 'man' in 58.5% of all the instances, which contrasts with the less gendered term 'person' that users prefer to use to represent themselves in SB1.

(P15) At this point *I was making excuses for him* due to the past he had told me about, plus after his outbursts he would go back to being **the man** I fell in love with [SB1_2.7]

(P16) The doctor there told me I should be speaking to women's aid. I was horrified – no, no, I said. *It's all my fault, I'm really difficult to love.* He's a **wonderful man**. *I feel so terrible* that he's turned his life upside down like this. [SB1_2.4]

The final feature SARDDA takes into account is related to issues of possessivation. Unlike the logical absence of this type of features when female survivors represent themselves linguistically, some interesting insights can be reached if possessivated patterns are now taken into account. As Table 40 above indicates, perpetrators in SB1 are not possessivated (such as *this man, the ex*, etc.) in 56.3% of the total, in contrast to 43.2% of the instances in which this social actor is represented by means of possessivations that are realised from the survivors' perspective (as seen in *my partner, my husband*, etc). Strikingly enough, there is just one possessivation that is realised by means of other social actors. Given the evolution of this feature in SB2, attention to it will be paid to it in the next subsection.

7.4.2.2 Representations of male perpetrators of IPV in SB2 (*Getting out*)

This subsection focuses on SB2 and explores the mechanisms used by survivors to refer to their perpetrators in this intermediate stage, where most users have already

acknowledged the abusive relationship they are in. Table 41 below offers a quantitative report on the distribution of the different SARDDA features in this community.

Table 41 | Male perpetrators of IPV as social actors in SB2 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Set of features for analysis in SARDDA	SB2 (40,324 words)		
	SB2 (N)	SB2 (ptw)	%
1_NEU	144	35.7	76.6
1_NON_NEU	44	10.9	23.4
2_SP_REF	146	36.2	77.7
2_ATTR	22	5.5	11.7
2_GE_REF	20	5	10.6
4_REL_ID	109	27	58
4_CLA_ID	27	6.7	14.4
4_FUNC	26	6.5	13.8
4_NON_CAT	26	6.5	13.8
5_IND	169	41.9	89.9
5_COLL	19	4.7	10.1
6_-POS	93	23.1	49.5
6_+POS_S	76	18.9	40.4
6_+POS_O	19	4.7	10.1
REFERENCES TO PERPETRATOR	188	46.6	100

To start with, one of the most striking tendencies in SB2 is related to the evaluative nuance of the mechanisms used to refer to the perpetrator. If normalised frequencies for these two features in SB1 are recalled here, it is possible to identify a significant decrease in the use of non-neutrality ($\chi^2=4.12$; $p<0.05$), opposed to the increase of neutral references. This shift is even more revealing if figures for self-references are considered, since the reversed tendency is found here (63.8% of them were non-neutral, especially characterised for its remarkably negative nuance). Therefore, most discursive instantiations of the perpetrator are not marked in either positive or negative terms, although the more immediate context usually provides enough details that could have brought about different negative modifiers. This trend can be observed in (P17), for instance, where the user's partner is said to engage in physically violent actions, but he is still activated neutrally (*my partner*).

Although, by and large, this type of representation prevails in SB2, non-neutral references are also worth a comment. As already suggested in the previous section, this rather intermediate stage is characterised for a dynamicity that stands for the unresolved state in which many of these women are, which permeates their discourse by means of a fluctuating and ambivalent style. Hence, perpetrators in SB2 are negatively evaluated. This can be done in less direct, intertextual ways (P18) or

via very strong negative remarks such as insults that are directly targeted at the perpetrator (P19, P20). Despite this, some of these references exhibit traces of regret and self-blame (P18, P19), which co-exist in the same community with more determined discursive remarks (P20).

(P17) I was on this site a year ago. After **my partner** hit me in hospital for the last time. Well I wasn't strong enough and take him back [SB2_2.25]

(P18) I could have had a different life by now, one away from the Jekyll & Hyde existence with him [SB2_1.15]

(P19) Why I am even feeling guilty at all when he's such a **ratbag**? Arghhhhh! [SB2_1.69]

(P20) I won't let him destroy my life and my family. He is **scum**! [SB2_1.32]

The last two examples can be straightforwardly identified as cases in which users provide different types of attributes linked to their perpetrators. Nevertheless, as Table 41 above indicates, representation by means of attribution also occurs much less in SB2, especially if SB1 is borne in mind (from 12.2 to 5.5 according to the normalised frequency, and significant at $p < 0.01$). Quite on the contrary, it seems that this type of references is transformed into more specific mechanisms, which account for 77.7% of all reference-related mechanisms in SB2.

As examples (P21) and (P22) illustrate, many users in SB2 tend to refer to their perpetrators in very specific ways, which may be emphasised, for example, by the use of singular demonstrative determiners (*this*). Although this will be explored in what follows, it is interesting to observe how these two examples, regardless of some traces of the ceaseless self-blame, seem to discursively reduce the perpetrator into one of the most essentialist conditions (that of being a man) when they show more clear instances of determination in the process of leaving the abusive relationship. Despite the slight increase in SB2 (P23), this process of genericisation becomes more salient in SB3 again, which justifies why this mechanism will be dealt with in the forthcoming subsection.

(P21) Actually so excited but I am so nervous and feeling guilty already. I need some help on how do I tell **this man** I am not coming back. [SB2_1.30]

(P22) one thing I do no is I need to keep **this man** out of our lives for good now, he is no good to us and only bring us down [sad_emoji] [SB2_2.24]

(P23) Can **men** like this ever change? He's lost nearly everything in the process of all this [SB2_1.96]

Judging from examples (P21) and (P22) above and the representation of the perpetration by means of ‘this man’, one may be misled to believe that classified identifications are a common realisation in SB2. Although this mechanism is the second in terms of frequency, it only accounts for 14.4%. In a similar vein, users in SB2 opt for functionalisations only in 13.8% of the cases, although a rising tendency is observed here that will crystallise in SB3. Notwithstanding the shortage of mechanism of this sort, referring to some of them may be of great use to gain interesting insights into the discursive behaviour of this community.

With regards to classified identifications, some of the examples found in SB2 may be used to either problematise SARDDA in its role as an analytical framework or to provide further evidence of some of the discursive traits that characterise this community. Similar to some other cases in which the application of SARDDA may need additional operationalisation, classified identification may also be a source of controversy. Example (P24) below, for instance, activates the perpetrator by means of the term ‘gentleman’, which is even pre-modified positively (*true*). If the contextual cues within the same post are examined, however, it will not be difficult to understand that this term, which is generally associated with positive connotations, is being used ironically here. This dualism that irony can certainly evoke here (what the perpetrator really is versus what he made the survivor believe) is salient in some other textual instances to represent the perpetrator in SB2. As examples (P25) and (P26), classified identifications are often contrasted with more metaphorised references to the perpetrator to emphasise this behavioural dichotomy which seems to take some survivors by surprise.

(P24) There was cheating, compulsive lying and a prison sentence past to come to terms with. The whole relationship from the beginning was one of being groomed and manipulated to believe **a true gentleman** stood before me [SB2_2.57]

(P25) He’s **a lovely wonderful person**, when he’s happy, and **a monster** when he’s not [SB2_2.27]

(P26) He threatened to take custody of our daughter when I said I wasn’t ready to support myself. This is so at odds with **the man** I thought I had. [SB2_2.11]

As far as functionalisations are concerned, it seems relevant to include one example found in this community that also poses some challenges in methodological terms. Example (P27) can be used to understand the dearth of functionalised references to the perpetrator in this online community, since the attempt to be more explicit will

unavoidably lead to moderation. If key theoretical concepts in Chapter 3 are recalled, the fact that the digital environment under scrutiny offers anonymity as one of its central affordances has a direct impact on the way discourse can be analysed. This is less problematic when other terms are employed (P28), even if the fuzzy boundaries between functionalisation and classified identification, as discussed in the previous section, are considered. In fact, as suggested by example (P29), these two mechanisms are in some cases very closely intertwined, which may even be indicative of the rather transitory nature of this second community and its consequent ambiguity in discursive terms.

(P27) he worked away a lot as he was (*removed by moderator*) [SB2_1.22]

(P28) I met **my aggressor** [sic] when I was studying abroad. We immediately fell in love and I was sure I wanted to spend my life with him [SB2_1.33]

(P29) My abuser (ex husband) has made contact [SB2_1.21]

Interesting though these less significant examples may be, it is noteworthy to stress that activating the perpetrator through relational identifications is still the most frequent trend in SB2 (58% of all categorisation mechanisms). As also done in SB1, both its predominance and the rather vague character of this mechanism were taken as sufficient justification to further investigate the type of relational identification used in SB2, which is illustrated in Table 42 below. As can be gathered from the way these mechanisms are distributed in SB2, it seems that users still prefer to highlight the marital bond to represent the perpetrator.

Table 42 | Different mechanisms to activate male perpetrators of IPV via relational identifications in SB2 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

REL_ID term	SB2 (40,324 words)		
	SB2 (N)	SB2 (ptw)	% REL_ID
HUSBAND / HUBBY	41	10.2	37.6
EX (Ø)	29	7.2	26.6
PARTNER	16	4	14.7
DAD / DADDY	13	3.2	11.9
BOYFRIEND / BF	5	1.2	4.6
EX (HUSBAND)	2	0.5	1.8
EX (BOYFRIEND/BF)	1	0.3	0.9
EX (PARTNER)	1	0.3	0.9
FATHER	1	0.3	0.9
TOTAL REL_ID (SB2)	109	27	100

One possible way to interpret this is again related to the idea that users in this forum are married at the time of writing, although the nature of Internet research makes it very complex to engage in claims of the sort. In any case, this should be taken with due precaution since the being married does not always correspond with representing the perpetrator on these grounds, as (P30) below exemplifies. These challenges aside, and although terms that refer to different relational statuses still prevail in this community (56.9%), the tendency to create separation (namely by means of 'ex' and its several possible combinations) increases in SB2 to 30.2% (in contrast to 7.8% in SB1). Curiously enough, a certain degree of caution needs to be adopted here, since closer observations around these textual representations suggest that relational identifications seem to mirror the fluid character that prevails in this community, which is suggested by users' different linguistic mechanisms to make this more obvious (P31, P32).

(P30) I have been **married** for (detail removed by moderator) years and have been with **the same guy** since I was (age removed by moderator) [SB2_1.62]

(P31) I'm really tired, **I've been married to my "husband"** nearly 25 years [SB2_1.55]

(P32) I just want to walk in and say to landlord I'm giving up my tenancy, you ring up and talk to **my soon to be ex** about assignment, not my problem(!) [SB2_2.31]

Likewise, instances that instantiate the perpetrator as a father in several forms also rise in this community (12.8%), which is closely related to possessivation. Interestingly, this tendency to represent the perpetrator by means of other social actors entails a very significant difference if SB1 and SB2 are contrasted ($\chi^2=17.15$, $p<0.001$). Nevertheless, a close inspection of some of these cases may reveal different patterns in the way of doing this. Thus, the perpetrator may be activated as a father (or dad) by foregrounding his role as such but de-emphasising the possessivated link (P33). In some other cases, however, this possessivation is more explicitly marked by adopting the perspective of the possessivated entity (P34), in which the perpetrator is then associated to mutual offspring. A more radical way of achieving this concerns the activation of possessivated entities (my children) and attach the perpetrator to it (P35).

(P33) Why is it that he can just swan into my house acting like nothing ever happened and he's **dad** of the year? [SB2_2.37]

(P34) I have been able to pick myself up and move on mentally, emotionally, psychologically and financially. It hasn't been easy leaving my younger son with **his father** (he groomed him months before I fled to a safehouse) [SB2_1.70]

(P35) **my children's dad** was convicted on 3 counts of assault and criminal damage [SB2_1.66]

Although SB2 also stands out for being the online community in which possessive references to the perpetrators are observed (*my ex, my husband, etc.*) reach their highest point (49.5%), its use here and in the other two communities is consistent and differences between them are not significant.

7.4.2.3 Representations of male perpetrators of IPV in SB3 (Life after abuse)

This subsection is devoted to investigate how perpetrators of IPV are represented in SB3, where most survivors share their experiences after undergoing abuse. This subsection completes the characterisation of male perpetrators in this online forum, although the more explicit cross-community section below will summarise the different forms in which perpetrators are represented in the light of SARDDA in this online setting.

By looking at Table 43 below, one of the most striking findings is related to the total number of mechanisms coded in SB3 ($N=241$), a figure that suggests an increase in the total number of references around the perpetrator. This is also observed based on the formalised frequencies of the initial and the final stage (from 45.58 to 56.22) and it constitutes a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=4.81$, $p<0.05$). If the corpus-assisted approach to the analysis of this dataset included in Chapter 6 is taken into account, one may remember that the opposite trend is observed if the evolution of the pronoun 'he' is regarded. Given that the amount of mechanisms that activate the perpetrator by means of non-pronominal ways increases significantly in SB3 (if compared to SB1), a different interpretation is therefore needed. Based on the assumption that SB1 shows a stronger tendency to use pronouns, one possible understanding may be related to the nature of SB1 as a community in which users are still unsure if what they are experiencing is considered abusive. This uncertainty may bring about a more tentative type of discourse, in which a complex phenomenon such as IPV is referred to in less specific ways. Another possible way to interpret this has a more linguistic motivation. As specified elsewhere, SB1 as a corpus subset is

characterised for being the one with the lowest amount of posts (105) but the highest numbers of words (46,733), which quite unmistakably hints at the lengthy character of posts included therein. The higher presence of pronouns in SB1 may be logically explained then by the greater need to use pronouns as cohesive referential devices in longer posts.

Table 43 | Male perpetrators of IPV as social actors in SB3 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Set of features for analysis in SARDDA	SB3 (42,866 words)		
	SB3 (N)	SB3 (ptw)	%
1_NEU	178	41.5	73.9
1_NON_NEU	63	14.7	26.1
2_SP_REF	172	40.1	71.4
2_GE_REF	38	8.9	15.8
2_ATTR	31	7.2	12.9
4_REL_ID	123	28.7	51
4_NON_CAT	40	9.3	16.6
4_CLA_ID	40	9.3	16.6
4_FUNC	38	8.9	15.8
5_IND	188	43.9	78
5_COLL	53	12.4	22
6_-POS	134	31.3	55.6
6_+POS_S	80	18.7	33.2
6_+POS_O	27	6.3	11.2
REFERENCES TO PERPETRATOR	241	56.2	100

Nevertheless, what seems clear is that users in SB3 represent perpetrators of IPV more frequently than those in the other two communities. Table 43 above specifies how the different mechanisms are distributed using SARDDA as the analytical framework. If attention is first paid to the distribution of both neutral and non-neutral mechanisms to refer to the perpetrator in this subcorpus, it is remarkable to observe how neutral references continue to rise. As a matter of fact, normalised frequencies range from 29.3 (SB1) to 41.5 (SB3), a divergence that is indeed significant ($\chi^2=9.16$, $p<0.01$). This does not mean that non-neutral references are uninteresting, as illustrated by the first three examples. Thus, whereas in some cases evaluation is very explicitly negative and resorts to a combination of assembled insults addressed at the perpetrator (P36), room is also made for more metaphorical (yet negative) ways (P37) or more unusual lexical choices (P38), since the adjective ‘vile’ occurs only once in the whole corpus. Despite this, 73.9% of all representations are neutral and mostly make use of more plain terms. Again, this overall tendency not to attach evaluative remarks to the representation of the perpetrator may be interpreted in different ways. Although very negative descriptions of the actions linked to the perpetrator can be provided, the widespread attitude among many women in this

forum to blame themselves for the many outcomes of abuse may explain the absence to describe perpetrators negatively and by means of basic terms (P39). Another way to explain this can be linked to the higher tendency to engage in more metaphorical representations of the perpetrator (as elaborated in Chapter 8), in which the type of evaluative mechanism is not always so straightforward (P40).

(P36) remember how worthy I really am and see him for what **the poor yet nasty, useless idiot** he really is [SB3_1.7]

(P37) And years after that they still blame you. They talk to you like you are inferior because you were a victim of **a monster in disguise**. They don't trust you [SB3_1.92]

(P38) i had no idea what the woman was taking about! turns out **my vile ex** strikes again! he has beaten up his girlfriend [SB3_2.79]

(P39) But I just don't have the courage to go to things on my own. I spent half of my life with **one man**, and now I'm middle aged and alone, and struggling with doing things, and going to things on my own. [SB3_2.78]

(P40) although there was physical violence it was mostly emotional abuse, **he was a real game player** [SB3_2.44]

As the cross-community section included afterwards will further elaborate, significant differences are observed for the three kinds of reference SARDDA contemplates. First of all, as already discussed in SB2, referring to the perpetrator by means their attributes is the least frequent mechanism in SB3. When compared to SB1, this decrease is statistically significant ($\chi^2=5.12$, $p<0.05$). If one considers that this is mostly realised by copular verbs in attributive predicators, this may suggest a weaker tendency to engage in descriptions of the perpetrator. Conversely, attribution seems to give way to both specific and generic reference. Although both these types increase in a significant way from SB1 to SB3 ($\chi^2=6.97$, $p<0.01$ and $\chi^2=8.21$, $p<0.01$ respectively), the employment of generic references reaches its highest point in this online community. If the previous section is recalled here, the same tendency is observed with regards to self-representations. Therefore, perpetrators in SB3 are more frequently genericised than in the other two communities. As pointed out in the previous section, genericisation is usually instantiated by means of plurality, which is also easily observed in SB3 (P41). Apart from this more usual pattern, it is striking to find out that many of these cases are usually activated by means of a negative premodifier, which in a way may be indicative of a more marked absences of the perpetrator as such in life after abuse (P42, P43, P44). Regardless of this, specific reference is also maintained in SB3 and perpetrators are usually activated by a great degree of specificity (P45).

(P41) It is dangerous for the kids, please do not think **abusers** have the right to negatively affect you and/or your children [SB3_1.28]

(P42) The one thing I miss when you have **no partner**, is the fact there is no one there to give you a cuddle [SB3_2.15]

(P43) I am happy and everything is going well for me. This is my year and **no abusive ex** is going to spoil it for me [SB3_1.21]

(P44) **No man** worthy of love should hurt a female both physically and emotionally [SB3_2.91]

(P45) My children have recently been showing me videos which they recorded of **the narcissistic abuser** [SB3_2.47]

The last example above can be used to discuss the type of categorization used in SB3 to represent perpetrators. Based on the rather slippery understanding of 'abuser' (and similar terms such as *aggressor*) as someone who is described for what he does (i.e., he abuses), there seems to be a preference towards the functionalisation of the perpetrator among users in SB3. As a matter of fact, the increase in functionalised references is the only significant difference when compared to the initial stage ($\chi^2=4.54$, $p<0.05$).

Broadly speaking, as mentioned elsewhere, the communicative medium factors that influence discourse in this online environment also impact on the types of functionalisations occurring in this community. Although some textual cases evidence clearer signs in this regard (P46), it is otherwise difficult to find allusions to the professional role of perpetrators. Despite this, the increased tendency to functionalise the perpetrator is mostly accomplished by terms that link him to criminal actions (P47, P48), among which 'perp' (shortened for 'perpetrator') stands out in SB3 (P49, P50).

(P46) after **he retired from the military** he could no longer hold a job... [SB3_1.67]

(P47) He's an amazing **manipulator** and caught her at a bad moment. [SB3_]

(P48) he will forever have to live with himself - that nasty person who is selfish and moreover now a convicted **criminal** [SB3_2.6]

(P49) months later we tried again, but separately, again, **my perp** is the quite type, always allowing me to do the shouting, never retaliating [SB3_1.99]

(P50) I've bumped into/been seen by various different people who know me and know **my perp** [SB3_2.93]

In fact, if general English dictionaries are checked,⁵⁴ it is uncomplicated to obtain definitions of ‘perpetrator’ that emphasise its harmful and illegal connotations. When the occurrence of this word is investigated in the total corpus, its use in SB3 is found to be statistically more significant than in SB1 ($\chi^2=4.71$, $p<0.05$). The orientation of many of the posts in SB3 from a content point of view should be considered now, since this could reflect a linguistic influence from being involved with the police/justice system or from contact with those in social services.

Furthermore, female survivors have a tendency to gradually activate perpetrators by means of functionalisations. A similarly increasing trend is found in the use of classified identification mechanisms for self-referential purposes. This may have curious repercussions at the level of self/other-conceptualisation. Arguably, the increased salience of classified identifications among survivors might be associated with a reinforced perception of their own identities in the light of what they essentially are (neither *victims* nor *survivors*, but *women*), which contrasts with the opposite tendency to conceptualise perpetrators on the basis of what they do and not what they are (*perpetrators* rather than *men*).

Nonetheless, it should not be underestimated that representing the perpetrator on the grounds of their relational identification still prevails in SB3 (51%). If normalised frequencies across communities are compared, differences are almost unnoticeable (interestingly, this divergence only stands out as significant after checking the log-likelihood function). However, more pertinent findings are reached if the varied character of the terms included in the overarching code [REL_ID] are further refined, which is what Table 44 below shows.

In short, if the most prominent terms within relational identification are grouped in three interrelated groups,⁵⁵ more distinctive patterns appear. Thus, although divergences in isolated terms may not be always significant (*partner* proves to be rather uniform, for instance), the three identified groups differ significantly. On the

⁵⁴ The Cambridge Dictionary online defines ‘perpetrator’ as “someone who has committed a crime or a violent or harmful act” (2018), whereas the Macmillan Dictionary prefers to do it by saying that it is a derivate word from ‘perpetrate’, which is in turn defined as “to do something that is harmful, illegal or dishonest” (2018).

⁵⁵ Group (1) assembles terms that evoke the emotional bond between both social actors, regardless of civil specificities. Group (2) is thought to emphasise the role of the perpetrator as a father. Group (3) concentrates on instances where the term ‘ex’ is used, which ultimately signifies the end of any relational link.

one hand, relational identifications in which the emotional link remains unaltered falls considerably from SB1 to SB3. On the other hand, however, relational identifications that foreground the parenting side of the perpetrator increase, and so do those in which the emotional bond is discursively marked by the presence of 'ex'. Although changes in those terms concerning civil/emotional statuses may be explained by the actual change at a personal level, it seems that female survivors in SB3 opt for representations that discursively bring perpetrators closer to their children than to themselves.

Table 44 | Terms within relational identification used for representing the perpetrator in SB1 and SB3 (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %, statistical significance using χ^2 , p value and log-likelihood)

REL_ID term	SB1 (46733 words)			SB3 (42866 words)			Stat. sig.		
	(N)	(ptw)	(% REL_ID)	(N)	(ptw)	(% REL_ID)	SB1-SB3		
							χ^2	p	LL
HUSBAND	44	9.4	42.7	16	3.7	13	9.95	0.01	11.28
BOYFRIEND / BF	7	1.5	6.8	3	0.7	2.4	0.66	NS	1.32
PARTNER	23	4.9	22.3	12	2.8	9.8	2.06	NS	2.63
SUBTOTAL (1)	74	15.8	71.8	31	7.2	25.2	13.41	0.001	14.62
DAD / DADDY	4	0.9	3.9	14	3.3	11.4	5.32	0.05	6.78
FATHER	2	0.4	1.9	9	2.1	7.3	3.81	NS	5.44
SUBTOTAL (2)	6	1.3	5.8	23	5.4	18.7	10.28	0.01	12.16
EX (Ø)	18	3.9	17.5	68	15.9	55.3	32.39	0.001	35.46
EX (HUSBAND)	2	0.4	1.9	1	0.2	0.8	0	NS	0.26
EX (BOYFRIEND)	1	0.2	1	0	0	0	0	NS	1.30
EX (PARTNER)	2	0.4	1.9	0	0	0	0.41	NS	2.60
SUBTOTAL (3)	23	4.9	22.33	69	16.1	56.1	26.14	0.001	28.21
TOTAL REL_ID	103	22	100	123	28.7	100	3.67	NS	3.92

Interestingly, this tendency can also be observed if issues of possessivation are borne in mind. Hence, SB3 is also distinctive as the community in which representing the perpetrator via possessivations that require other social actors (namely children) stands out. In fact, a significant divergence is observed if SB1 and SB3 are juxtaposed ($\chi^2=24.58$, $p<0.001$). In a similar vein to the different patterns in this regard observed in the previous section, some cases seem to adopt the children's perspective to bring the perpetrator into discourse, as if the conversation with them was translocated to women's own writing (P51). By contrast, some others are realised via more direct links, since in these cases perpetrators become the user's children's possessivated entities (P52).

(P51) they said he told them that i wouldn't let them see **their daddy** again
[SB3_2.69]

(P52) feeling sorry for himself and not even realise what he's done to me. How am I supposed to survive this, **my children's dad** [SB3_2.1]

Before bringing this subsection to an end, it is necessary to offer some insights on the significant growth in the collectivised representations of the perpetrator witnessed in SB3 ($\chi^2=26.60$, $p<0.001$). More specifically, the distribution of collectivisation moves from 6.1% in SB1 to 22% in SB3. Quite surprisingly, a similar degree of significance is also spotted when self-representations are at issue. By and large, collectivisation is instantiated by means of plurality, which is visible in a wide range of lexical possibilities (P53), (P54). As discussed in cases of collectivised self-references, collectivisation commonly reinforces identity issues by which perpetrators are presented as the out-group, and the exclusion of this group from one's life seems to have positive effects.

(P53) **Those men** will be stuck in the kind of situation they are in for their entire lives [SB3_1.7]

(P54) I no longer think of **the exes** anymore. I am happy in myself happy being alone and happy with my life [SB3_2.43]

A subtler pragmatic role that collectivisation may play in this online environment is very much influenced by the technical specificities of the posts themselves. As stated elsewhere, this research only looks at original posts, disregarding the interaction that emerges from them. However, text included in the title of the thread was also compiled and considered for the purposes of analysis. As examples (P55), (P56) and (P57) illustrate, there is an interesting shift from collectivised discursive representations in titles (mostly pronouns) to more individual ones right after the post begins to be written. Considering that the text included in titles is the only visible part of the post for the rest of the forum users (who need to click on the thread title to continue reading), this preference towards collectivising the perpetrator in titles may be used strategically to add visibility to a given post, which may trigger more reads of it and, quite possibly, more replies from forum users. This tendency would need further testing on a larger dataset, but its implications may be worth considering.

(P55) *[TITTLE]* is it normal to miss **them**?????? *[POST]* nearly 3 years after leaving **my ex** I still pine for **him**, feel like I need to speak to **him**, is this normal????? why do i feel like this?? [SB3_1.29]

(P56) *[TITTLE]* when you see **them** again for the first time *[POST]* just seen **my abuser** gain [SB3_1.45]

(P57) [TITTLE] why is it so frightening [sic] when **they** go quiet? [POST] Im more on edge now waiting than what i was when **he** was harassing [sic] me! X [SB3_1.52]

Now that discursive representations of male perpetrators of IPV have been examined from a more detailed perspective, next section brings these findings together before drawing some general conclusions.

7.4.2.4 Representations of male perpetrators: a cross-community comparison

Considering that the three previous sections have sought to answer RQ2.2, this section will bridge results obtained therein and offer a holistic view of how perpetrators of IPV are discursively represented across the three online communities under scrutiny, which is what RQ2.3 seeks to elucidate. Following a similar pattern to that adopted for exploring self-representations and having engaged in a more qualitative examination of the data, this section merely concentrates on the most significant differences found in users' mechanisms to activate the perpetrator. As Table 45 below suggests, this is namely accomplished by contrasting results deriving from the statistical measures that have been applied so far, relying on colour-coding to make differences more noticeable. Furthermore, Appendix 7 merges Table 39, Table 41 and Table 43 above to provide a more compact vision of raw numbers, normalised frequencies and percentages as far as the representation of perpetrators as social actors is concerned.

Focusing on mechanisms used to activate male perpetrators, the most significant cross-community shift is the one the collectivisation entails. If collective representations of survivors are recalled here (see Section 7.4.1.2), a very similar change is observed if self-representations are at issue ($\chi^2=28.91$, $p<0.001$). This confirms original expectations regarding the process of collectivisation that the main two social actors undergo from initial to final representations. In a similar vein, perpetrators are more commonly represented as genericised entities in SB3, although the evolution of this mechanism across communities is mitigated if representations of survivors are contrasted.

Table 45 | Male perpetrators as SAs across communities (SARDDA features and statistical significance)⁵⁶

	SB1-SB2			SB2-SB3			SB1-SB3		
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL
1_NEU	2.55	NS	2.73	1.67	NS	1.82	9.16	0.01	9.48
1_NON_NEU	4.12	0.05	4.57	2.03	NS	2.33	0.25	NS	0.35
2_ATTR	10.11	0.01	11.32	0.76	NS	1.04	5.12	0.05	5.72
2_GE_REF	0.38	NS	0.61	4.00	0.05	4.63	8.21	0.01	9.13
2_SP_REF	02.76	NS	2.95	0.73	NS	0.84	6.97	0.01	7.25
4_CLA_ID	0.94	NS	1.21	1.48	NS	1.81	0.02	NS	0.08
4_FUNC	0.64	NS	0.89	1.28	NS	1.59	4.54	0.05	5.14
4_REL_ID	2.01	NS	2.21	0.15	NS	0.21	3.67	0.05	3.92
4_NON_CAT	2.62	NS	3.07	1.83	NS	2.20	0.01	NS	0.06
5_COLL	1.70	NS	2.19	13.19	0.001	14.70	26.60	0.001	29.58
5_IND	0.02	NS	0.04	0.14	NS	0.18	0.03	NS	0.06
6_+POS_S	1.01	NS	1.16	1.73	NS	1.93	0.07	NS	0.12
6_+POS_O	17.15	0.001	22.55	0.68	NS	0.95	24.58	0.001	32.49
6_-POS	4.19	0.05	4.54	12.22	0.001	2.88	2.27	NS	2.45

Regardless of this, it is interesting to observe that the processes of both collectivisation and genericisation seem to be forged in the move from SB2 to SB3, although they definitely crystallise in SB3. As already discussed in Section 7.4.1.4 above, this tendency towards collectivisation and genericisation for self-representations may be seen as a trait of a more supportive discourse style among users as they engage in more cooperative communicative exchanges. Nonetheless, the collectivisation of perpetrators may be more related to the creation of a more compact conceptualisations of themselves as survivors in which male perpetrators are collectively regarded as the out-group.

In contrast to the very little fluctuation as far as possessivated realisations are concerned when looking at self-representations, more significant divergences are perceived when representations of the perpetrators are at issue. The discursive activation of the perpetrator by means of the self (*my partner*) keeps a rather uniform progression across the communities. Nonetheless, more marked changes are

⁵⁶ Figures included in the left column offer results for χ^2 and the *p* value. Orange= not significant; Yellow=significant at 0.05; Light Green= significant at 0.01; Dark green= significant at 0.001. Figures in the right column include results for log-likelihood [LL]. In this case, scores must be greater than 3.84 for a difference to be statistically significant (Oakes, 1998).

perceived in the absence of possessivated features (*ex, partner*) and in the mechanism that needs to activate other social actors for representational purposes (*my children's dad*). Thus, users seem to prefer the former in SB3, which in fact displays the highest score for this mechanism. This may be linked to the more empowered traces of discourse found in SB3, in which women do not even find the need to refer to themselves linguistically to address the perpetrator (which explains the decrease in possessivated mechanisms in this community). This can also be related to the prominence discursively representing the perpetrator by resorting to children as the ones at the *possessing* end. Thus, the link that possessivation creates between survivors and their perpetrators seems to blur in SB3 which is counterbalanced by this shift to putting their mutual offspring in the discursive spotlight.

This can also be associated with the evolution that categorisation mechanisms present across the three communities. Thus, the tendency to functionalise the perpetrator from SB1 to SB3 proves to be significant. As briefly discussed in the previous subsections, this is at odds with what is observed in self-representations, where the most significant divergence ($p < 0.05$) between SB1 and SB3 is connected to classified identifications. Therefore, perpetrators are more commonly conceptualised on the basis of what they do (they perpetrate crimes, they abuse) at the final stage, which also pinpoints a tendency to de-emphasise the mechanisms that evoke their features as human beings (*man, person*). The opposite tendency is observed when dealing with forum users' self-representations, since these survivors' discourse seems to background their role either in professional terms (*the main breadwinner*) or as members of an abusive relationship (*the victim*) and foreground those terms that fall within the realm of what they are (*ladies, women*).

All in all, this section has mostly strived to offer different insights to answer RQ2.2, which tries to provide answers to how male perpetrators of IPV are discursively represented as social actors in survivors' digitally-recounted experiences with this type of violence. To this end, the first three subsections above have presented textual evidence grounded on both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data in order to reveal interesting patterns as far as these representations are concerned. In the attempt to answer RQ2.3, the final subsection has offered a cross-community comparison to grasp a more global understanding of how the different mechanisms

used for discursive representation of the perpetrators evolve across the three online communities under examination. In the next section, details of these findings are included to conclude this chapter. Similarly, many of the limitations identified throughout this process will be treated more broadly, and suggestions for further research will also be mentioned.

7.5 Concluding remarks

In the attempt to investigate how online collective identities are transmitted in the online forum examined in this research, this chapter has made use of social actor representation to find out the most salient mechanisms female survivors use when referring to themselves and IPV perpetrators in their own digitally-recounted experiences. To this end, this chapter has also dwelt upon the so-called 'Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse' (SARDDA) a feature-based analytical model that builds on van Leeuwen's Social Actors Approach. More specifically, findings have revolved around the six set of features included in SARDDA and have been arranged in order to provide answers to the three main research questions leading this chapter. The first one, which concerns users' self-representations, reads as follows:

(RQ2.1) How are female survivors of IPV discursively represented as social actors in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

The systematic application of SARDDA onto the three main subcorpora this research analyses has successfully managed to identify interesting discursive patterns. As widely explained in the previous sections, this has facilitated the observation of pointers that are very indicative of many of these users' understanding of the complex realities they are living, ranging from their worries or concerns to their wider emotional states.

Thus, self-representations in SB1 are characterised by non-neutral nuances. In many cases, discursive instances of this non-neutrality are inclined towards negativity that is mostly employed to emphasise the many physical or psychological traits the user dislikes about herself. As widely exemplified in the corresponding subsection, many of these evaluations are carried into these users' discourse by means of reported speech, to the extent of almost reproducing the many offences their perpetrators

target at them. The salience of these negatively loaded lexical choices can also be observed if the distribution of categorisation features is considered. The fact that 45.1% of all coded self-representations cannot fit in any of the three main mechanisms to account for categorisation is in itself indicative of the frequency by which users represent themselves via alternative terms, which in most cases point at their low self-esteem.

In a very similar vein, users contributing to SB2 engage in very non-neutral representations of themselves (63.6% of all cases), of which 91.5% are heavily marked by their negative nuance. A close analysis of the types of these evaluations can be used to observe a shift from negative assessment of users' physical conditions towards more psychological traits. This tendency is also found among many of the classified or relational identifications these survivors use when representing themselves. In connection with this, it is common to find self-references that evoke failure as women or as mothers, which may lead to justifications for self-blaming that can even take away the perpetrator's responsibility in the abusive relationship. These findings at the micro-level seem to correlate with conclusions reached at more macro/sociological levels. As claimed by Owens (1993), a tendency towards self-deprecation tends to be indicative of the negative part of one's self-esteem, which in most cases crystallises in discourse that belittles one's worth and disregards one's moral worth or virtues.

Unsurprisingly, most of these negative evaluations are conveyed in discourse by means of attributive references used to describe or to ascribe qualities to these female survivors, which helps us understand the prevalence of attribution in both SB1 and SB2. Although similar figures in this regard are observed in SB3, users contributing to this community engage more significantly in representations that rely on genericisation and collectivisation. Linguistic plurality therefore gains prominence in this community, which in short underpins this process of collectivised identity representation that reaches its summit in this final stage. What is more, a close textual analysis of this community reveals that the enhancement of in-group collective identity is frequently achieved via more direct references addressed at the readers of any post, which seems to play a key role in this overall more positive emotional tone that characterises the discourse of this community (which was also suggested by the emotionality analysis provided by LIWC in the previous chapter).

Moving now to (RQ2.2), a very similar procedure was adopted to explore discursive representations of male perpetrators of IPV. This question was worded as

(RQ2.2) How are male perpetrators of IPV discursively represented as social actors in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

One of the first striking findings in this regard is related to the way neutral and non-neutral mechanisms are distributed in SB1. Although a corpus-assisted analysis of this community indicates more salient traces of linguistic anger, it seems that users in this forum centre their non-neutral representations on themselves and not on the perpetrators. If previous findings are recalled here, this can be easily linked to issues of survivors' low self-esteem, which can be associated with self-blame (expiating the perpetrator's responsibility to conceive the abusive relationship as part of their fault). Thus, mechanisms used for representing the perpetrator are neutral in 64.3% of the cases. Representations of the perpetrators rely less on attribution now and move towards specific reference. Likewise, perpetrators in this community are mostly represented by means of relational identifications, which constitutes a uniform tendency across the three communities.

Representations of the perpetrator in SB2 suggest a more uneven distribution in terms of neutrality, which again suggests these users' tendency to avoid negative evaluations of the perpetrator. Specific references also prevail in SB2, which become more salient due to the fewer cases of attribution in this community. As far as categorisation is concerned, relational identifications continue to grow, although the trend to functionalise the perpetrator starts to be noticeable here. Similarly, collectivisation is not very central yet, although SB2 starts to witness the process of activating the perpetrator by means of possessivation that include other social actors, namely his children. The rather half-way character of this stage is also reflected in the discourse, since it is common to find representations where a combination of mechanisms is found.

Additionally, SB3 particularly stands out for displaying significant cases in which the perpetrators are activated by means of collectivisation and genericisation, mirroring the same trend when self-representations are at issue. Furthermore, an interesting particularity of SB3 is the higher presence of functionalised representations, whose

occurrences were generally low in the other two communities. As detailed in the corresponding section, relational identifications show very little significance if the mechanism is treated as a whole. However, the further refinement of this mechanism in three subgroups enables to find out that perpetrators in SB3 are represented more by their roles as fathers or by means of lexical choices that explicitly signal an emotional rupture rather than by terms that foreground civil or emotional bonds between the survivor and the perpetrator.

Finally, (RQ2.3) concerns a cross-community analysis and specifically investigates how SARDDA mechanisms evolve in the three communities

(RQ2.3) To what extent do these discursive representations as social actors vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

Based on how these mechanisms evolve in the three communities, interesting insights were obtained which were discussed in detail in the corresponding sections. Broadly speaking, the cross-community comparisons were used to identify that the representation of both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV tended towards collectivisation and genericisation in SB3, especially if compared to SB1.

Apart from this, more marked divergences were observed. Thus, a cross-community comparison served to reveal that these survivors' discourse backgrounds their role either in professional terms (*the main breadwinner*) or as members of an abusive relationship (*the victim*) and foregrounds terms that fall within the realm of what they are (*ladies, women*). IPV perpetrators, on the contrary, are more commonly represented in the discourse on the basis of *what they do* at the final stage, which also pinpoints a tendency to de-emphasise the mechanisms that evoke their features as human beings (*man, person*).

Broadly speaking, and very much in line with the socio-cognitive understanding of discourse, this chapter has tried to evidence how collective identities are negotiated in this online environment, influenced by factors pertaining to the meso-level of discourse and favoured by the contextual disposition of the online site under scrutiny such as the different online communities that have been widely explored so far. By relying on issues of social actor representation, this chapter has attempted to

emphasise that socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) have a crucial role in the forging of collective identities, as suggested by Koller (2014), since it is basically by means of discourse that these representations are “projected, transformed and constituted” (Koller, 2014: 152).

Before bringing this chapter to an end, it seems convenient to point out some of the most salient limitations faced in the research process. Roughly speaking, these are connected with the application of SARDDA from a methodological point of view. Although this framework has managed to pursue the main research objectives, it is true that some of the features this taxonomy proposes would benefit from further elaboration. Future applications of this framework would need to provide a more fine-grained specification, especially in some features where related but different instantiations will play a central role when accounting for ideologies as transmitted in the text (i.e., relational identifications or features related to (non-) neutrality). Hence, as widely discussed throughout the different sections, it is sometimes complicated to draw lines between classified identifications (what a social actor is) and functionalisations (what a social actor does), as van Leeuwen himself already pointed out (2008). This may become a very complex endeavour since, as theories linked to the performative character of identities advocate, some aspects of a given identity may be boosted in some contexts and diminished in others. Likewise, the application of SARDDA by relying on double coding will surely be beneficial to test notions concerning reliability. Once these caveats are addressed, it would be interesting to check whether SARDDA is suitable for the analysis of similar contexts. In fact, as suggested elsewhere, the application of social actor representation features in online contexts has not been widely undertaken yet.

7.6 Summary

This chapter has explored different mechanisms to investigate social actor representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV in the online forum under investigation. Following theoretical considerations pertaining to social actors as such, this chapter undertook the process of refining van Leeuwen’s original taxonomy (2008) to scrutinise digital discourses of abuse (SARDDA). Having specified the different methodological decisions, the chapter has focused on providing quantitative and qualitative explorations of how these discursive

mechanisms for both social actors can play a role in the forging of collective identities. Likewise, a central motivation of this chapter has been connecting findings at the micro-level with both the meso-level (in the light of the online forum as the context in which discourse is produced) and the macro-level, trying to build bridges between these textual representations and the many implications they may have on a more psycho-sociological level.

CHAPTER 8 | INVESTIGATING FIGURATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL ACTORS IN ONLINE CONTEXTS OF IPV

8.1 Introduction

This chapter embodies the final exploration of the discourse by female survivors of IPV in the online forum this considered in this research. The combination of perspectives adopted so far has been done following a deductive approach, starting from the analysis of more tangible aspects of the discourse type under scrutiny to the examination of subtler linguistic mechanisms. In fact, this chapter takes a step further towards the study of more abstract discursive traits and sets out to investigate figurative representations of both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV in the Survivors' Forum. Although both this section and the forthcoming ones tend to opt for the more overarching term 'figurative representations', emphasis is mostly put on metaphors. The use of the former is justified by the somewhat proximate boundaries found among other similar tropes. At the same time, this lexical choice is thought to reinforce the overall objective of the chapter, where a rather broad approach is taken to the investigation of figurative representations of these two key social actors.

With this main objective in mind, the following organisation is proposed. Section 8.2 is devoted to putting forward the central theoretical grounds this chapter is built upon. Apart from presenting brief considerations of metaphor as a socio-cognitive-discursive phenomenon, special attention will be paid to so-called *critical metaphor studies* and its general suitability to assist research in which the social and the cognitive components of discourse are brought together.⁵⁷ Considering that Chapter 5 provided a solid description of the many methodological decisions guiding this research as a whole, Section 8.3 makes explicit the specific methodological procedures that were taken into account when identifying metaphorical expressions in the corpus. Section 8.4 is devoted to present the most salient findings and discuss the many implications of them. For the sake of consistency and systematicity, this layout of this section mirrors the one adopted for the presentation of results in

⁵⁷ Section 4.4 and 4.6 in Chapter 4 addressed the role metaphors can play in socio-cognitive approaches to discourse studies.

Chapter 7, where different social actor representations were not only examined more locally in each online community under scrutiny, but also globally by means of a cross-community section. Likewise, the exposition of findings is based upon both quantitative and qualitative relevance. Finally, Section 8.5 draws some of the most relevant conclusions reached through critical metaphor analysis and suggests future directions that research along these lines may follow.

8.2 Bringing the social and the cognitive even closer: metaphor and its discursive significance in Critical Metaphor Studies

According to Cameron (2010), the definition of metaphor as “a device for seeing something in terms of something else” provided by Burke (1945: 503) constitutes a convenient, yet obviously inadequate, starting point to understand what is meant by metaphor and the reasons why it matters. Now that a very broad description of this phenomenon has been offered, and before further engaging in the necessary problematisation of metaphor as a concept, it may be convenient to offer a succinct overview of how these understandings of metaphor have influenced the way in which metaphor itself has been researched.

It is unproblematic to affirm that research interests around metaphor have been predominantly linked to scholars in the field of philosophy and literature. Consequently, metaphors were mostly explored in communicative contexts in which principles like *arts gratia artis* clearly dominated, mostly based on the incontestable potential of metaphors to provide language with a decorative embellishment (Ritchie, 2010). In fact, figurative instances of language were disregarded as default means of communication, and hence metaphors were only analysed in terms of their relation to literal language (Deignan, 2010).

Nonetheless, some scholarly voices in the 20th century began to acknowledge the interactive component of metaphor (Richards, 1936; Black, 1962), which tried to dissociate the idea of metaphors as mere linguistic ornaments by emphasising its cognitive nature (Charteris-Black, 2004). Quite relatedly, arguments in this vein advocated that metaphor is intrinsic to thought rather than a purely linguistic device (Reddy 1979). It was not until the 80s, however, that the so-called ‘cognitive turn’ (Gibbs, 1994) brought about the dramatic shift in metaphor studies. Undoubtedly, the publication of *Metaphors we live by* in 1980 marked a milestone in metaphor studies,

and Lakoff and Johnson's contribution by means of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT hereinafter) revolutionised this field of study to the extent that CMT is still nowadays regarded as one of the most influential understandings of metaphor. Even though an in-depth discussion of the many useful contributions of CMT would certainly fall outside the scope of this dissertation, it is noteworthy to mention that, in their original contribution, Lakoff and Johnson stress the intrinsic cognitive character of metaphor. This reinforced the view of it as a device that works at the level of thinking and by linking two conceptual domains, which have been most commonly labelled as the source and target domains (Deignan, 2010). As further explained and exemplified by Kövecses (2002), it is when a more concrete domain (DIRT, for instance) is mapped onto more abstract domains (AMORALITY) than the two domains are linked by means of a conceptual metaphor (AMORAL IS DIRTY).

As argued by Ritchie (2010), it is undeniable that one of greatest achievements by Lakoff and Johnson's CMT deals with inverting the traditional view of metaphor as a peripheral element of language. Nevertheless, one of its most serious shortcomings is linked to the rather unceasing tendency to explore metaphors in isolation from the communicative contexts they appear in, usually accompanied by the tendency to rely on invented examples to illustrate principles (Ritchie, 2010). More specifically, as Cameron has claimed, "CMT has emphasised an artificial separation [of the many interconnected dimensions of metaphor], downplaying language in order to focus on the cognitive, and disputing the role of culture" (2010: 78). It is precisely this cognitive impetus to locate metaphor in thought and thinking processes what has prompted the need for discourse-based understandings of metaphor, among which Cameron's work stands out.

Discourse-based studies of metaphor argue that the idea of metaphor is a multi-faceted phenomenon (Cameron & Maslen, 2010) that relies on the interconnectedness of the many dimensions (linguistic, cognitive, affective, socio-cultural and dynamic) of metaphor in use (Cameron, 2010). In contrast to previous understandings of it, metaphorical expressions are neither central requisites of flowery prose nor mere manifestations of conceptual systems but, rather, they can become "resources in the negotiation of a shared social reality, and the use or adaptation of a particular metaphor can become meaningful in itself, independently of the meaning or interpretation of the metaphor" (Ritchie, 2010: 59). Thus, as hinted

in the previous definition, metaphorical expressions (or metaphorical vehicles, as discussed later on) are negotiated and adapted in the dynamics of socially-interactive discourse, which may serve to explain why this understanding of metaphors is known as the “discourse dynamics framework” (Cameron, 2010). Conceiving metaphor as a multi-faceted phenomenon therefore requires the endorsement of linguistic and cognitive phenomena as processes, flows or movements rather than as objects (Cameron, 2010), which is quite understandably at odds with the formulation of CMT in which metaphors (and language in general) are seen in terms of “highly generalised and abstract conceptual domains and pre-exist actual uses of metaphor in language” (Cameron, 2010: 77).

At this point, it may be worth specifying the degree to which metaphor as a phenomenon has a multi-faceted character. As argued by Cameron and Maslen (2010), understanding metaphor in its linguistic dimension requires paying attention to how it is used by language users in specific social interactions. This is of crucial importance for the “discourse dynamics framework” because the linguistic unit (word or phrase) is not regarded in itself as the linguistic metaphor, but rather as the ‘vehicle term’ of the metaphor (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). This contrasts with the understanding of ‘linguistic metaphor’ that those assuming a separation between ‘grammar’ and ‘usage’ (Steen, 2008) advocate, who also defend that linguistic metaphor is the instantiation of a metaphor that exists earlier in thought than in language. This also justifies why scholars who support that ‘grammar’ and ‘use’ (or ‘system’ and ‘use’ correspondingly) are not separable envisage metaphor as a dynamic phenomenon in which vehicle terms in metaphorical discourse are continuously negotiated, selected and adapted as text and talk proceed (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). Additionally, this approach also acknowledges metaphorical thinking, although this cannot concern researchers as long as language and discourse are the only source of data.

The previous arguments do not entail that the ‘discourse dynamics framework’ for metaphor analysis underestimates the cognitive side of metaphor. Thus, and despite the fact that CMT is credited as a theoretical source of inspiration, this framework believes that solely relying on CMT is generally insufficient for those scholars concerned with language as discourse (Deignan, 2010). Additionally, the ‘discourse dynamics framework’ regards metaphor as embodied in the sense that “speaking or

writing, listening or reading, are much more than mental processes; our bodies participate and interpret, eyes and head move, skin reacts and responds” (Cameron & Maslen, 2010: 4). Likewise, there is an affective component in metaphor as a phenomenon, in the sense that vehicle terms of linguistic metaphors tend to be loaded with evaluations, attitudes, values, perspectives or beliefs, which are in turn transmitted by means of language in use (Cameron & Maslen, 2010: 5).

Last but not least, the ‘discourse dynamics framework’ also gives prominence to understanding metaphor as a sociocultural phenomenon (Cameron & Maslen, 2010: 6). As suggested elsewhere, this approach to the understanding of metaphor assumes that, as a communicative phenomenon, metaphors emerge from social interaction over different timescales (Cameron, 2008; Gibbs & Cameron, 2008). In contrast to one of the central tenets in CMT, the ‘discourse dynamics framework’ sees people’s language and cognitive structures as prior to their participation in discourse events (Cameron, 2010), and discourse participants are thought to contribute by means of their ideological-discursive backgrounds to the flow of any discursive event. All the components of these backgrounds, in which conventional metaphorical ways of talking-and-thinking are encoded, evolve through the dialogic dynamics of (social) interaction (Cameron, 2010), which also explains that groups of people spending time in the same place or communicating about similar topics (i.e., speech communities) end up sharing and using the same conventionalised metaphors in their discourse (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). Arguments along these lines have been put forward by Musolff (2004) when describing the idea of ‘metaphor scenario’ to highlight that conventionalised metaphors tend to work at the level of socio-cultural groups rather than in specific discourse events. More specifically, the relevance of metaphors scenarios lies on how these culturally-entrenched set of assumptions about the expected aspects of a situation (participants, roles, etc.) and evaluations of/around them made by members of a given discourse community can be used to map these source-based assumptions onto the respective target concepts (Musolff, 2004; Cameron et al., 2010). This connection can rapidly assist listeners in interacting with an ongoing narrative.

The prominence that the previous paragraphs have given to discuss the many dimensions that make metaphor a multi-faceted phenomenon should be sufficient to infer that this empirical exploration will endorse the ‘discourse dynamics framework’

(Cameron & Maslen, 2010) for various reasons, which will be explained in what follows. Before that, and considering that Burke's definition (1945) included at the beginning of this section is far too generic, it seems convenient to provide a more suitable definition of the understanding of metaphor this research is built upon. Based on the previous considerations and related definitions, metaphor as a multi-faceted phenomenon involves "talking and, potentially, thinking about one thing in terms of another, where the two 'things' are different but a similarity can be perceived between them" (Semino, 2008; Demjén et al., 2016: 2). More specifically, the 'thing' or experience being talked about –the topic or target domain– is often abstract, complex, subjective, intangible, or sensitive, while the other experience –the vehicle or source domain– is often more concrete, physical, tangible, and intersubjectively accessible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014; Demjén et al, 2016). This definition is suggested mostly because it generally suits the many considerations included before. Nonetheless, it should be clear from many of the points raised before that metaphor as a phenomenon is a relative rather than an absolute concept (Charteris-Black & Musolff, 2003), and a certain degree of flexibility should always be adopted when approaching research on metaphor.

One of the main reasons why this research is informed by the 'discourse dynamics framework' is connected with the many theoretical foundations shared by this approach to the understanding of metaphor and the view of discourse this whole dissertation takes, which is widely discussed in Chapter 4. This theoretical proximity is accurately described by Cameron et al. (2010: 116) when they claim that

[d]iscourse is an outcome of the cognitive and linguistic processes that people engage in when they speak and write. What is expressed or understood in the flow of discourse is the best outcome available at that time, under those constraints and in those circumstances. These outcomes are not arbitrary; they reflect the multiple influences of past experiences, sociocultural convention and the constraints of processing. Metaphor, like other aspects of language, is subject to those influences, but choice of metaphor has a particular revelatory capacity. A linguistic metaphor is connected into a dense network of ideas, associations, conceptual and affective patterns which are interwoven with correlates from embodied experience. These connections and patterns are not expressed directly [...] but they are fundamental to how we perceive, conceptualise and interact with the world.

It is uncomplicated to link the above definition with many of the arguments put forward by scholars that endorse the socio-cognitive approach to the understanding of discourse, which is discussed in depth in Chapter 4. In fact, as argued by van Dijk (2014: 121), the correlations between discourse and society (or culture) that remain unexplained in many theories in CDS are to be filled by the assumption that personal and social dimensions in discourse processing are inextricably intertwined. As suggested by the previous definition and elsewhere in this section, it is precisely this role of metaphor as a vehicle to connect conceptual patterns with socially dynamic instantiations of discourse that has turned metaphor into a “powerful phenomenon that can reflect conventional and implicit ways of thinking” (Semino et al., 2016: 2).

Not surprisingly, the benefits of undertaking joint research projects where discourse and metaphor studies are combined with critical purposes were soon identified by Charteris-Black (2004), and subsequent explorations along these lines have gradually given rise to *Critical Metaphor Studies*, as widely known at present. As also mentioned in Chapter 4, this synergy was identified as one of the four approaches to discourse studies that has gained greater prominence in recent developments of the field (Hart & Cap, 2014), mostly due to the key role that metaphorical accounts have proved to play when revealing ideological traces in discourse. Likewise, as specified in Section 4.6, the inclusion of metaphor as an analytical tool is advocated by socio-cognitive approaches to the study of discourse (Koller, 2014; van Dijk, 2014), especially for their potential to embody different ways of conceptualising a given reality.

Apart from the theoretical proximity, this research is more embedded within the discourse dynamics framework due to the many difficulties that CMT has been proved to experience when dealing with empirical discourse data (Musolff, 2012). In fact, according to Musolff (2012), the main concern is basically related to the straightforward relationship between source and target domains and the congruent connections between the mapped conceptual domains and the implications of this that CMT advocates. Although CMT seems to find a solution to these incongruent instances between source and target domains by means of the ‘invariance principle’ (Lakoff, 1993), the main issue here appears when trying to find out which implications are to be allowed (or not) when hearers/readers proceed to work these mappings out (Musolff, 2012). To put it differently, and as argued by a wide range of empirical

studies (Charteris-Black, 2004; Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2008), source domain contents (and therefore its implications) can vary and change depending on the contexts around language in use. Unsurprisingly, studies of this sort seek to further investigate issues of social accountability, for instance, led by the assumption that mapping processes cannot be understood in (communicative) isolation but, rather, they are closely intertwined with discourse and its dialogic function.

If Fairclough's three-dimensional account of discourse is here recalled again, the previous arguments can be easily paired with the macro-level of discourse. Nonetheless, studies within the discourse dynamics framework also warn of the importance of approaching metaphor in connection to issues concerning discourse at the meso-level, where factors such as discourse production, reception or distribution are at stake (see Figure 12 in Chapter 4). In other words, as Cameron points out, "if [...] metaphor is shaped by the discourse context in which it is used, then researchers need to take into account that shaping context as they interpret people's use of metaphor" (2010: 147). Cameron continues justifying her point by using structured interviews or written biographies as examples of "two types of discourse that might be used as research data [that can] create very different discourse contexts and conditions for metaphor use" (2010: 147). As can be gathered from many of the arguments so far, the discourse dynamics framework relies heavily on a dynamic view of discourse as activity (Cameron, 2010), which is thought to fit more easily to spoken than to written language (Cameron, 2010) and, additionally, contrasts with the predominance of written data analysed in CMT research. Even if instances of written discourse are examined, the discourse dynamics framework gives prominence to the dialogic (Bakhtinian) sense of texts. Hence, although the act of writing can be a solitary activity, it is assumed that the writer tends to have an imagined audience in mind while composing a text, which is likely to be influenced by her/his previous experiences with text and talk (Cameron, 2010).

Ideally, many of the concepts discussed in the previous paragraphs may resonate with many of the theoretical underpinnings this research is based upon, which have been addressed in Chapters 3 and 4. As mentioned elsewhere, the incorporation of metaphor research into socio-cognitive approaches to the study of discourse by means of Critical Metaphor Studies has proved to provide interesting insights into

discursive phenomena. Apart from this, the huge prominence that the discourse dynamics framework gives to issues pertaining to both the macro and the meso levels of discourse is of crucial importance in this research. On the one hand, as widely developed in previous chapters, the online community under scrutiny offers a type of discourse that is very much embedded in a macro/social context. The mere existence of it is deeply rooted in the view of discourse as (interactive) social practice, and the kind of communicative exchanges are strongly influenced by the peculiarities of IPV as a social/psychological issue. It is therefore very complex to think of language here as not being influenced by its context of use, which is at odds with many researchers interpret and apply CMT. On the other hand, the fact that the discourse analysed in this research has to be necessarily understood on the basis of its digital nature also has major implications. Factors at the level of production, such as the hybrid nature of digital discourse (as discussed in Chapter 3), or the public character of the forum, have a strong impact on how discourse is used, and metaphors are of course no exception.

Therefore, it is not by chance that many empirical studies within Critical Metaphor Studies acknowledge the influence of most of the tenets discussed above and included in the discourse dynamics approach. Although the influence of CTM is in most cases admitted, the role of communicative contexts and their specific traits encourages empirical studies to depart, at least theoretically, from CTM. Nevertheless, it is interesting to find that many of the communicative contexts explored by these studies focus on scenarios that belong to the kind of complex, subjective and in many cases controversial experiences that tend to be conventionally verbalised and conceptualised by means of metaphor (Kövecses, 2000). This has strengthened the idea that metaphor favours the negative (Demjén et al., 2016; Cameron, 2017), which echoes the already-mentioned tendency (see Chapter 4) among CDS researchers to investigate 'negative' or exceptionally 'serious' socio-political phenomena (Unger et al., 2016). Despite the use that the term 'negative' conveys in a general understanding, it may be more useful to think of this type of metaphor-bound scenarios as controversial or thorny, in which emotional intensity from speakers towards the topic is likely to influence issues of metaphorical frequency (Gibbs et al., 2002).

This can be easily grasped if empirical studies along these lines are considered, where the influence of the discourse dynamics approach can be observed in the role metaphor may have for peace-building, empathy and reconciliation (Cameron, 2012; 2017) or confrontational contexts in general (Zanotto et al., 2008). Both confrontation (even with oneself) and emotional intensity are also central in experiences related to health, illnesses or even death, which are usually associated with “physical discomfort or pain, feelings of anxiety, fear, isolation, and, potentially, shame” (Demjén et al., 2016: 2). Explorations of both instantiations and functions of metaphor in physical health are very noticeable. For instance, the role of metaphors in discourses around cancer has been notoriously investigated (Gibbs & Franks, 2002; Reisfield & Wilson, 2004; Appleton & Flynn, 2014; Demmen et al., 2015), and similar approaches have been taken around AIDS (Sontag, 1991) or chronic illness in general (Gwyn, 1999). Furthermore, similar research has concentrated on metaphor and mental health. Studies along these lines have ranged from investigating metaphor in the discourse in depression (Levitt et al., 2000; Charteris-Black, 2012) to different types of posttraumatic stress disorder (Beck, 2016) or trauma talk (Tay & Jordan, 2015). Bearing in mind how many of the processes linked to illness can be related to that of dying, a number of studies have also explored the role of metaphor when conceptualising death in metaphorical ways (Marín-Arrese, 1996; Demjén et al., 2016).

More specifically, driven by the potential of metaphor to express the abstract in terms of the concrete (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), most of the aforementioned studies inspect the potential therapeutic utility of metaphors. The capacity that metaphor has to (re)construct realities in subjective but still very psychologically powerful manners has been explored by therapists since the 90s (Gonçalves & Craine, 1990). Since then, some types of psychotherapeutic treatments –‘the talking cure’ (Tay, 2017)– have sought to understand patients on the basis of their feelings, values or attitudes as expressed in discourse. This has prompted studies focusing on the rather pragmatic role that metaphors can play in therapeutic settings (Tay, 2013), which reveal how metaphor can influence, *inter alia*, the way new insights are introduced or points are made more vividly.

Although most of these explorations have focused on therapeutic encounters in offline environments, the gradual migration of these communicative contexts to

online realms is fostering research concerned with how this transfer is taking place from the perspective of communication. As widely discussed in Chapter 3, many of the affordances granted by online environments are being employed by language users to express more anonymously their concerns with more delicate issues, among which health prevails. Therefore, and although health professionals still refrain from recognising the impact of these practices, online sites aimed at health-oriented communicative exchanges are proliferating. This also explains the reasons why scholars within (critical) metaphor studies are increasingly examining these environments. Studies along these lines have explored a plethora of health conditions from different perspectives. The role of metaphor in online narratives around cancer has again been widely explored (Winzelberg et al., 2003; Seale, Ziebland & Charteris-Black; 2006; Semino et al., 2015), attention has also been paid to how metaphors work in forums aimed at people suffering from eating disorders (Figueras-Bates, 2015; Sidani et al., 2016). It is not surprising then that recent scholarly voices stress that “[a]n exigent area of investigation would be metaphors in the fast-growing domain of e-health discourse; i.e. internet supported therapeutic interventions such as self-help blogs and discussion forums [...] and their similarities and differences with metaphors in face-to-face interaction” (Tay, 2017: 380).

Judging from the way the four previous paragraphs have been developed, it should be unproblematic to infer many of the reasons justifying the suitability of scrutinising the dataset at hand from a critical metaphor studies perspective. On the one hand, as vastly discussed in Chapter 2, IPV is nowadays regarded as one of the most urgent priorities for policies concerning public health (García-Moreno & Watts, 2011). Undoubtedly, the many controversies around it make this social phenomenon a very thorny issue, in which emotional intensity and feelings of anxiety, fear and sadness are at the core of women survivor’s accounted experiences (as proved in Chapter 6). Given the potential of metaphors to (re)present abstract and complex realities in more tangible ways, a first qualitative exploration of the corpus at hand yielded interesting results reflecting the multiple metaphorical vehicles to engage in the discursive representation of themselves as female survivors and of their IPV perpetrators. On the other hand, this exploration is thought to contribute to critical metaphor studies by investigating the role that metaphors may play in this online community. In fact, as argued by Cooper (1996), metaphor is central to the language conventions that often emerge as characterising features of a group, to the extent

that within-group metaphors have been reported to have a crucial role in sustaining intimacy among group members (Cameron, 2010).

All in all, this section has sought to provide readers with the theoretical underpinnings that this final chapter of empirical analysis is built upon. To this end, attention has been mostly paid to the interconnected dimensions that are thought to be important in the understanding of metaphor as a multi-faceted phenomenon. These arguments have also been used to justify the influence that the 'discourse dynamics framework', as namely embodied by Cameron (2010), has had on this investigation. The prominence that this framework supplies to notions such as context and interaction and the close theoretical proximity to central tenets in the socio-cognitive approach to the understanding of discourse have also been discussed in the light of this current research. These theoretical underpinnings are equally central for so-called (critical) metaphor studies, in which metaphor is identified as a phenomenon through which covert and less noticeable aspects of language (and ideologies) can contribute to social processes and experiences (Charteris-Black, 2004). In fact, these concerns are central for many of the studies mentioned in this section, although attention has been paid to issues connected to physical and mental health to emphasise the need to examine this corpus from critical, metaphor-led discourse analysis. Aspects related to the methodological convenience of incorporating much of the *praxis* proposed by these approaches are discussed in the next section.

8.3 Methodological issues

This section intends to explain the main methodological issues encountered in the development of this final empirical exploration of the data. Having in mind some the niches identified in the previous section, attention is firstly paid to the research questions used as a guide for the analytical purposes of this chapter. Then, aspects related to the different procedures that were followed are explained and justified. This is influenced by Low and Todd's recommendations for good practice in metaphor studies (2010), which also responds to Yardley's claim (2000) that describing the procedure that was used is one way to demonstrate transparency in metaphor research.

As will be further specified, the main objective in this chapter is to explore figurative representations of both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV in the former's digitally-recounted experiences with this type of violence. However, it is noteworthy to mention that the need for examining the corpus from the point of view of metaphor was identified when social actor representation was analysed. Therefore, the main research questions leading this chapter should be seen as adjacent to those included in Chapter 7. To emphasise this proximity, research questions for this chapter are worded in a similar fashion:

(RQ3.1) How are female survivors of IPV figuratively represented in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ3.2) How are male perpetrators figuratively represented in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

(RQ3.3) To what extent do these figurative representations vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

It is uncomplicated to notice that, as also included in the title of this chapter, research questions opt for the overarching term 'figurative'. Although emphasis is namely put on metaphorical representations, this is done in order to make room for some other figurative ways of representing social actors that are not done metaphorically *per se*. As a matter of fact, as argued by Low and Todd, "it has repeatedly been found in studies of metaphor in discourse that metaphors are rarely found in the canonical A is B form, whereas similes frequently are" (2010: 220). A similar degree of flexibility is adopted in the whole methodological procedure, which is heavily influenced by the role that critical metaphor analysis plays in most of the metaphor-led discourse approaches identified in the previous section. This is described in what follows.

Before engaging in more specific details, it may be convenient to briefly account for the several methods for metaphor analysis that have been taken into consideration in the current study. One of the major influences is rooted in Charteris-Black's proposal (2004), which entails one of the first systematic attempts to integrate metaphor analysis in (critical) discourse studies. As a matter of fact, this three-staged process acknowledges the stimulus provided by Cameron and Low's earlier attempt, which basically "proceeds by collecting examples of linguistic metaphors used to talk about the topic [...], generalising from them to the conceptual metaphors they

exemplify, and using the results to suggest understandings or thought patterns which construct or constrain people's beliefs and suggestions" (1999: 88). Based on what each of the above-mentioned stages evoke, Charteris-Black (2004) links this resemblance to the prototypically-identified stages in critical discourse analysis (identification, interpretation and explanation) put forward by Fairclough (1995).

By doing this, Charteris-Black (2004) reinforces the possibilities of combining both approaches and, at the same time, recommends a related three-stage protocol for metaphor analysis: (1) metaphor identification, (2) metaphor interpretation, and (3) metaphor explanation. This division was thought to fit well with the analytical motivations of this research, and the purpose of each stage is self-explanatory. Nonetheless, there are many complexities associated with the process of identification, which explains why this first stage is the main concern in the following paragraphs. Once these many considerations are taken into account, we can say that metaphor interpretation (stage 2) is thought to build bridges between the many levels intertwined in metaphor as a phenomenon and their role to construct representations of social importance (Charteris-Black, 2004). Likewise, the third stage is expected to explain the use of a set of metaphors in the light of their discourse function, which may encompass issues such as social agency or ideological persuasion. These three stages are merged when results are discussed in the subsequent sections.

As anticipated before, there is a vast number of aspects that need to be considered at the stage of metaphor identification. Driven by the unspecific account provided by Charteris-Black in his proposal (2004), subsequent attempts to furnish this identification stage have also been taken into account. These are namely those suggested by the discourse dynamics view (Cameron & Maslen, 2010) and the Pragglejaz Group's metaphor identification procedure (2008). These approaches are juxtaposed and combined in the forthcoming paragraphs to outline the procedure that was followed in this research.

All of the approaches mentioned above coincide in the need to familiarise oneself with the discourse data by means of a close reading of the sample of texts. As far as this study is concerned, this first approach to the texts had a different objective in mind, which was related to pinning down the different discursive mechanisms

connected with social actor representation. It was precisely this first reading that signalled the salient presence of metaphoric expressions. A second step in this process of metaphor identification deals with looking for candidate (Charteris-Black, 2004) or possible metaphors (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). One possibility at this stage is to recognise discursive items that are commonly used with a metaphoric sense, which are in turn classified as metaphor keywords (Charteris-Black, 2004). The annotation of these metaphor keywords has been proved to work effectively when treating potential metaphors more quantitatively (Charteris-Black, 2004). Interestingly, this practice can also be used to solve the problem of analysing large amounts of data, which has been recognised as a major challenge in this identification process (Cameron & Deignan, 2003; Cienki, 2008). At this stage, the procedure followed in this research shows some divergences. Thus, bearing in mind that the main research questions leading this study are interested in the representation of social actors, there was no need to identify candidate metaphors by means of keywords. Rather, discursive representations of both women as survivors and male perpetrators of IPV were taken as the main sign to find for possible metaphorical expressions. This was also facilitated by the inclusion of the [+MET] and [-MET] codes in SARDDA, as discussed in Section 7.3 above.

It is within this second step that the three afore-mentioned methodological procedures differ the most. Hence, the Pragglejaz procedure (2007) focuses on how these possible metaphorical expressions work at word level. This explains the prominence given to lexical units, whose metaphorical *valences* need to be confronted in the dictionary to confirm they are being used metaphorically. A broader stance is that defended by the discourse dynamics framework (Cameron, 2008; 2010). In contrast to the tendency used in the previous method, the latter encourages researchers to identify chunks or stretches of language that might be metaphorical (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), which stand for the so-called ‘vehicle terms’ (see Section 8.2). This is consonant with the understanding advocated by this framework, in which “neither language nor metaphor is seen to work only at word level” (Cameron & Maslen, 2010: 104). This seemingly broader perspective is also adopted by Charteris-Black when he affirms that candidate metaphors (or keywords) are noticeable when they present “[an] incongruity or semantic tension –either at linguistic, pragmatic or cognitive level– resulting from a shift in domain use [...], even if this shift occurred sometime before and has since become conventionalised”

(2004: 35). As far as this research is concerned, in sum, chunks of discourse which were identified as potentially metaphorical sought to satisfy the two conditions for metaphor identified by Cameron and Maslen (2010): (1) there is contrast or incongruity between the meaning of the word/phrase/stretch of language and its discourse context and another meaning and (2) a transfer of meaning enables that contextual meaning is understood in terms of more basic meanings.

Still, assuming that metaphor identification is a straightforward process is far from uncontroversial (Low & Todd, 2010), which justifies the need to make many decisions prior to the process of identification itself. Regardless of the many specificities one may add in order to make this procedure as reliable as possible, it is crucial to accept that a certain degree of subjectivity is part of any experience with metaphor (Charteris-Black, 2005; Cienki, 2008). Although the kinds of challenges and ambiguities that arise in the process of metaphor identification resemble those that are likely to occur in any other system to code or categorise language (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), it is convenient to make this procedure as explicit as possible. Following Cameron and Maslen's suggestions (2010) as the main reference, the most important decisions turn to be described now.

In their view, important decisions are related to deciding if common nouns, verbs or prepositions are to be explored metaphorically. As far as this research project is concerned, prepositions were not initially regarded. This was mainly because, as suggested before, there were two metaphor topics (female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV) which received most of the attention. Language chunks, which, despite their grammatical nature, referred to these two social actors, were coded when they were used in metaphorical ways. This also explains why a great degree of flexibility was adopted when considering related figurative mechanisms such as similes or metonymies. Accordingly, cases where literal comparisons were expressed (*She is like her sister*), and incongruity was therefore not observed, were not counted as metaphorical (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). In a similar vein, in contrast to what Cameron and Maslen recommend (2010), not much attention was paid to deciding where vehicle terms begin and end. Rather, the identification process was carried out on the basis of semantic tension and incongruities that evoked figurative images of the two main social actors that went beyond their literal meaning. Nonetheless, it is worth indicating that only those chunks of discourse where the

social actor in question was metaphorically represented were considered. In a similar vein, instances where social actors were activated by means of their actions on metaphorical grounds were taken into account. For instance, cases such as “I’ve seen the devil, I have experienced evil” or “He had a go, stormed upstairs” were coded as metaphorical instantiations. In contrast, very proximate instances such as “One major part of my hell with my perp” were not taken as metaphorical representations of the perpetrator (although “my hell” would definitely be used when exploring metaphorical representations of the abusive relationship).

Generally speaking, it is noteworthy to mention that these decisions were mostly taken with the main objective of this chapter in mind, which attempts to explore figurative representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV in an online community and the implications this may have at more macro levels of discourse. Hence, it is likely that studies driven by motivations more grounded in metaphor studies *per se* can further refine some of the findings.

With these considerations in mind, it should be clear that metaphorical expressions addressed in this chapter were firstly identified by means of the code [+MET] in the taxonomy proposed for social actor representation in digital discourses of abuse (SARDDA, see Figure 27 in Chapter 7) and after two in-depth examinations of the whole corpus. As Cienki warns “most of the coding of metaphor still must be done manually, due to the subtleties of meanings and use in context” (2008: 246), which again emphasises the prominence that use and context receive in these types of approaches to metaphor analysis. Although there may be practical difficulties when dealing with large corpora (Cameron & Deignan, 2003; Cienki, 2008), the size of the corpus under analysis was deemed sufficient in terms of representativeness but large enough to enable manual analysis. As widely discussed in previous chapters, it should not be forgotten that corpus collection was heavily dependent on users’ contributions to the forum, which also influenced the size of the total sample.

Still, metaphor-related findings and claims reported in this chapter are based on the 474 online posts that integrate the whole corpus this research looks at (*circa* 130,000 words), whose details are discussed in depth in Chapter 5. Metaphorical representations of both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV were then transferred to an Excel sheet, as recommended by Maslen (2010). This facilitated

the arrangement of data in convenient, topic-driven ways, which also enabled a more suitable treatment of data in quantitative terms. Organising the data according to categories and then providing the frequency per category should not be regarded as the attempt to make general statements about cognitive processing in human beings in general and members of this online community in particular. Conversely, as claimed by Cienki, “the language used in a group may reflect certain conceptual metaphors which are part of the repertoire of many members of the group, but not of all of them” (2008: 243). Hence, striving to find metaphor systematicity in discourse data seeks “to contribute to understanding what specific people do when engaging in specific discourse events” (Cameron et al., 2010: 129).

All in all, this section has tried to provide an overview of the many methodological decisions that have been taken in order to find answers to the afore-mentioned research questions. Although this has been undertaken with principles of transparency in mind, the process of identifying metaphoricity in the corpus under scrutiny was not an easy endeavour. On these grounds, it would be interesting to add further reliability checks. Most representative findings are included in the next section. As mentioned elsewhere, results are presented and discussed following a similar pattern to that found in Chapter 7 in order to add internal cohesion and systematicity.

8.4 Results and discussions

As anticipated before, this section sets out to present and discuss the results obtained after the application of the previous methodological considerations. If the previous section is recalled, there are two main research questions this chapter is interested in exploring. This justifies the fact that this chapter is broadly divided in two major sections, which is similar in structure to Chapter 7. The first subsection delves into the different figurative expressions female survivors employ to represent themselves in their own recounted-experiences with IPV (RQ3.1). The second section turns to investigate which figurative expressions are used when these survivors represent IPV perpetrators in these online communities (RQ3.2).

These two major sections are further divided into several subsections. The first three offer qualitative explorations of the data, focusing on the most relevant figurative

expressions (namely metaphors) encountered in the three online communities at issue. Furthermore, a final subsection examines how the different metaphorical expressions are used from a cross-community perspective, which is what (RQ3.3) seeks to answer. As in other parts of the study, this cross-community analysis relies on comparing SB1 to SB2, SB2 to SB3 and SB1 to SB3. This is done to understand how metaphorical expressions vary depending on the transition between these communities, particularly between the initial stage (SB1) and the final one (SB3).

Broadly speaking, qualitative explorations of the data are favoured here, which is done by providing numerous examples to illustrate the arguments claimed. Nonetheless, statistical measures are used (χ^2 , p value and log-likelihood) in order to test the degree of significance of the similarities/differences of each variable (metaphor vehicles in this case) in the usual combination of cross-community comparisons (SB1-SB2, SB2-SB3 and SB1-SB3). Similar conventions are followed for these purposes, and colour-code is employed to facilitate these statistical associations.

8.4.1 Representing the self: figurative representations of female survivors of IPV

This section investigates the wide range of metaphorical expressions that IPV survivors make use of when representing themselves discursively. This is structured as follows. First, a quantitative overview of the metaphorical expressions identified by means of the label [+MET] in SARDDA (see Chapter 7) is put forward in order to obtain a very general idea of how figurative expressions are scattered throughout the corpus. Each subcorpus (or online community) is treated separately afterwards in three different subsections. A final subsection is then devoted to providing a cross-community analysis.

The first interesting observation regarding figurative self-references in the corpus under investigation is suggested in Table 46 below. As the shadowed cells indicating normalised frequencies point out, a gradual increase is observed from SB1 to SB3 as far as figurative expressions are concerned.

Table 46 | Figurative representations of IPV survivors as SAs (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Figurative features SARDDA	SB1 (46,733 words)			SB2 (40,324 words)			SB3 (42,866 words)		
	(N)	(ptw)	%	(N)	(ptw)	%	(N)	(ptw)	%
3_-MET	103	22	71.5	80	19.8	62	101	23.6	54.6
3_+MET	41	8.8	28.8	49	12.2	38	84	19.6	45.4
TOTAL SELF	144	30.8	100	129	32	100	185	43.2	100

This tendency to engage in more figurative self-representations can be related to similar observable trends in the corpus. On the one hand, it is noteworthy to take into account that a similar rise was spotted regarding the evolution of non-neutral mechanisms from SB1 to SB3. On the other hand, figurative representations of IPV perpetrators witness a similar progression, as Section 8.4.2 will further elaborate. With this in mind, the following subsection focuses on how these figurative representations are instantiated in each online community under scrutiny.

8.4.1.1 Figurative representations of the self as female survivors in SB1 (Is it abuse?)

At this point, most readers will be familiar with the type of discourse that prevails in SB1, which basically reflects a group of users questioning other peers in this digital environment about whether what they are experiencing is seen as abusive (or not) in this digital environment.

Table 47 below presents the most frequent vehicle terms survivors in SB1 use to engage in metaphorical self-representations. At first sight, one of the most striking findings is related to the wide range of source domains that users employ. This was one of the main challenges when trying to group metaphors systematically (Cameron, 2010), especially because Cameron's recommendation was followed when she suggests that "as far as possible, labels for groupings are taken from the actual words that appear in the transcript" (Cameron, 2010: 119).

The main problem here, however, was connected to issues of semantic specificity. To put it differently, it was preferred to present vehicle terms respecting as much as possible users' subtle nuances when metaphorically representing themselves, and, for instance, it was deemed necessary to specify if the source domain referred to an

object which seemed to be broken or not. Nonetheless, several connections are made when results are discussed qualitatively.

Table 47 | Figurative representations of IPV survivors in SB1 (raw numbers, unique references, and %)

Figurative representations of the self in SB1	N	Unique ref	% TOTAL (/41)
SELF IS DUAL ENTITY	6	6	14.6
SELF IS DISPOSABLE ENTITY	4	4	9.8
SELF IS FRAUD	4	4	9.8
SELF IS PRISONER	4	4	9.8
SELF IS ANIMAL	3	3	7.3
SELF IS PROTECTOR / SAVIOUR	3	3	7.3
SELF IS OBJECT	3	3	7.3
SELF IS BROKEN ENTITY	2	2	4.9
SELF IS WEAK / DEPRESSED ENTITY	2	2	4.9
SELF IS DIRTY ENTITY	2	2	4.9
SELF IS DRAMA QUEEN	2	2	4.9
SELF IS WORTHLESS ENTITY	2	2	4.9
SELF IS WAR/BATTLE FIGHTER	2	2	4.9
SELF IS PLAYER (CHESS)	1	1	2.4
SELF IS PRINCESS	1	1	2.4
TOTAL NUMBER OF FIGURATIVE REP. OF SELF IN SB1	41	41	100

Despite the obvious difficulties when identifying recurrent metaphorical expressions, a very salient vehicle term survivors use rather uniformly throughout the three communities is that evoking images of a divided, dual self. Most of these self-conceptualisations tend to describe an inner self that is divided into different, usually conflictive, parts (MS1).⁵⁸ What is more, one of the most interesting aspects in this regard lies in the tendency to present this dualism by means of metonymical references to two body parts, mostly *brain* and *heart* (MS2), which are usually personified (MS3, MS4).

(MS1) **Part of me** *thinks* I sabotage myself as no one will look at me the weight I am [SB1_2.1]

(MS2) if it is really abuse (which in **my heart** I know it is, but just not 100% able to trust my judgment) [SB1_2.37]

(MS3) **my brain says** its really not *but my heart says* it because he loves me [SB1_1.12]

(MS4) It is the fact that **my head says** one thing *but my body does* another [SB1_2.10]

⁵⁸ Following what I did in chapter 7, examples illustrating metaphorical representations of female survivors are indicated via (**MS**+NUMBER). Similarly, all examples included in this chapter have not been altered in any form, respecting the way the post was originally written by its user. Nonetheless, bold and italics have been added with empathic purposes.

These examples suggest how survivors in this online community usually manifest these conflicting feelings by opposing their rational judgement (*brain*) to their emotional sides (*heart*), and it is precisely the latter that is used to stay in the relationship and minimise the perpetrator's violent actions.

As recognised by relevant literature, and as discussed in Chapters 2 and 7, IPV survivors' low self-esteem tends to be one of the most important aspects to comprehend why many of these women refrain from recognising the abusive relationship they are in and, subsequently, from leaving it. These psychological traits are discursively represented in metaphorical terms in this community. Whereas some cases opt for more abstract, absolute terms such as *nothing* (MS5), some others engage in a more detailed description of how these women can be conceptualised (MS6). Even if the lexical choice *something* leaves it somewhat open, there are some other examples that reinforce this idea of survivors who represent themselves as objects or entities that can be dumped, which has very clear connotations if transitivity patterns are taken into account (MS7, MS8).

(MS5) He says that he rescued me. That I was **nothing** before I met him [SB1_1.19]

(MS6) I am worthless and like I am **something on the bottom of your shoe** [SB1_1.40]

(MS7) He then proceed **to dump me** then and there, and I'm going on day (detailed removed by moderator) of not talking to him [SB1_1.8]

(MS8) His behaviour was odd, and at the same end of the weekend, **I was dumped** in a five minute conversation [SB1_2.4]

Quite relatedly, these users' representations of themselves as objects that can be disposed of are also observed in some other cases. As will be explored throughout this section, metaphorical expressions are not always realised by means of the canonical form (A is B). In this vein, it is common to come across examples where similar disposable entities are associated not to one self, but to the feelings they are experiencing as an aftermath of abuse. Although some of these instances reflect more conventionalised uses of these terms (MS9, MS10), some others are more clearly related to the sexual abuse that some of these survivors report in SB1 (MS11, MS12). Thus, feeling *dirty* tends to be the outcome of being used (MS11), which also strengthens the afore-mentioned ideas related to these objectified

conceptualisations. Likewise, as implied in (MS12), this feeling is also boosted by the fact that many survivors of IPV in this forum are forced to act against their will.

(MS9) I'm also drunk and I feel like **shit** [SB1_2.45]

(MS10) I couldn't eat for days due to feeling poorly, lost some weight and just feeling generally **crappy** [SB1_2.25]

(MS11) I feel so dirty, so used [SB1_2.41]

(MS12) I feel **so dirty** that I did some of the things he wanted but I didn't want to [SB1_1.14]

Evidence of this low self-esteem is also metaphorically represented in survivors' discourse by means of terms that can be broadly associated with fakery or exaggeration. As illustrated in examples (MS13) and (MS14) below, survivors in SB1 report to feel as if there were frauds, which somehow underpins that these women may have the impression of being deceiving others. In fact, if SB1 is analysed in detail, it is not complex to find cases where this 'feeling like fraud' is sometimes dependant on other users' explicit testimonies. This automatically creates a comparison in which some other users do not seem to fit (MS14). Additionally, and also on the basis of these comparisons with some others' stories, many survivors feel they may be magnifying the abuse they are witnessing, especially if episodes of physical and/or psychological violence are less noticeable in their relationships (MS16). In some other cases (MS17), it is possible to distinguish how the perpetrator are also leading survivors to feel they are exaggerating.

(MS13) I **feel like a fraud** all of a sudden, maybe I've assumed the worst and I've been unfair [SB1_2.27]

(MS14) I **feel like a fraud**, especially after reading some other members posts where violence is a part of their daily life [SB1_2.1]

(MS15) I have not been physically or sexually abused, and **feel like a fraud/drama queen** [SB1_2.35]

(MS16) he made me feel like I was making a big deal out of it all and **I was a drama queen** [SB1_1.37]

Precisely, this role of the perpetrator as a very controlling entity (metaphors of this sort will be explored in Section 8.4.2) that manages to subjugate survivors' behaviour, opinions and acts is closely related to another group of frequent metaphor vehicles in SB1. As Table 47 above pinpoints, it is possible to find self-representations in which users conceptualise themselves as prisoners. It turns out

that this type of metaphorical representation is certainly pervasive across the three online communities and it also correlates the frequency with which perpetrators are conceptualised as figures of authority, as will be shown below. Interestingly, this type of metaphorical vehicles can be achieved through several forms. In some cases, images of an imprisoned/trapped self can be grasped through the use of verbs (MS17, M18), which are frequently used in the corpus as a whole. However, some other cases offer more explicit discursive realisations by means of which users stress this connection between their house and the prison they feel to be in (MS19). Still, it is curious to observe how this idea of the house as a *locus* of confinement can also be used more literally, although the connotations it offers are certainly the same (MS20). In a similar vein, it is even possible to identify cases in which this idea of imprisonment is achieved via representations that rely on making use of metaphors that conceptualise the survivor as a captive animal (MS21).

(MS17) I have nowhere to go. He's back Friday and I feel **trapped** [SB1_1.40]

(MS18) I could of [sic] **escaped** when he was undressing but he would only push me back on the bed [SB1_1.44]

(MS19) fast forward to me staring out the window in **my own self made** [sic] **prison** [SB1_1.6]

(MS20) This is all done while I have to sit in **which ever room** [sic] **I have been trapped in** at the time whilst he shouts at me for hours and hours at a time [SB1_2.37]

(MS21) Rather than living in **a gilded cage** which others envied [SB1_2.5]

Despite this usual frequency (in which one's house suddenly becomes one's prison), two instances in this community also present alternative conceptualisations of these users' homes (MS22, MS23). Therefore, it is interesting to come across examples in which some parts of the house metaphorically become improved barriers that are used to protect themselves against the perpetrator. This can be of help when trying to understand the role that the domestic environment may have some of these survivors. However, the use of this metaphor may also have thought-provoking repercussions to comprehend one of the most interesting shifts across these communities. As the next sections will further discuss, self-representations in this forum seem to undergo a conceptual shift that favours war/battle-related metaphors. Thus, these two metaphors may already suggest this change in conceptual terms, which will be more salient in the final community.

(MS22) I went straight upstairs, broke the bathroom lock and then **barricaded**⁵⁹ myself in our bedroom. I refused to talk to him for a few days. Then he told me through the door – he’s sorry, my reaction is scaring him, why aren’t I shouting [SB1_2.4]

(MS23) Gradually I became afraid to open my mouth cos he would yell and scream, then the threats moved in. Shut up or I will punch your face through your skull. Or the night I **barricaded** myself in the lounge after a row where he came at me with a knife [SB1_2.7]

All in all, based on the most frequent figurative expressions when referring to themselves, there are several traits that can characterise female survivors of IPV in this online community. As indicated above, self-representations stressing these women’s psychological/emotional dichotomies are very salient in SB1. This dualism tends to be discursively instantiated by metonymical confrontations (*brain* versus *heart*) in which the emotional part seems to justify many violent actions on the perpetrator’s side. Furthermore, metaphorical vehicles that accentuate these users’ low self-esteem are already found here. This tendency is evidenced by the remarkable presence of lexical choices that comprise terms such as *fraud* or different verbs by which users objectify themselves as disposable entities. Last but not least, survivors in SB1 show a wide range of metaphorical expressions that foreground conceptualisations of themselves as prisoners, either of the situation they are in or of the authoritative figure of the perpetrator.

8.4.1.2 *Figurative representations of the self as female survivors in SB2 (Getting out)*

Following a similar pattern to that adopted before, this section inspects the several ways in which survivors of IPV represent themselves figuratively in this second online community (SB2). To start with, Table 48 below includes results arranged according to the frequency in which vehicle terms are used for self-representation purposes in SB2. As pointed out in the previous section, the willingness to reflect the degree of specificity in source domains brings about a wider range of possibilities in this regard, which poses challenges for a systematic treatment of them. Nevertheless, one the first spotted differences if SB1 metaphorical vehicles are borne in mind concerns the increase of instances in which the metaphorical expression SELF IS DUAL ENTITY

⁵⁹ This metaphor is linked to the term “barricade”, from the French “barrique” (barrel) as an object or temporary structure built across a road, gate or door to prevent people from getting through (Macmillan Dictionary, 2018).

occurs in this community. Regardless of issues of frequency, attention will also be paid to less frequent but equally interesting instances, especially since the most frequent ones have been already discussed in the previous section.

Table 48 | Figurative representations of IPV survivors in SB2 (raw numbers, unique references, and %)

Figurative representations of the self in SB2	N	Unique ref	% TOTAL (/49)
SELF IS DUAL ENTITY	13	13	26.4
SELF IS PRISONER	6	6	12.4
SELF IS DISPOSABLE ENTITY	4	4	8.2
SELF IS WEAK / DEPRESSED ENTITY	4	4	8.2
SELF IS FRAUD / FAILURE	3	3	6.1
SELF IS OBJECT	3	3	6.1
SELF IS FICTIONAL CREATURE	3	3	6.1
SELF IS BROKEN ENTITY	2	2	4.1
SELF IS NATURAL ELEMENT	2	2	4.1
SELF IS FOOL	2	2	4.1
SELF IS ANIMAL	1	1	2
SELF IS PROTECTOR / SAVIOUR	1	1	2
SELF IS WORTHLESS ENTITY	1	1	2
SELF IS PROBLEM	1	1	2
SELF IS LOST ENTITY	1	1	2
SELF IS (WAR/BATTLE) FIGHTER	1	1	2
SELF IS CHILD	1	1	2
TOTAL NUMBER OF FIGURATIVE REP. OF SELF IN SB1	49	49	100

Unlike the more uneven distribution of metaphorical vehicles in SB1, a remarkable difference in SB2 is related to a higher salience of self-representations that bring to mind dual images (26.4% of the total). Although figurative references under this domain are also prominent in SB1, it is possible to recognise different nuances in the way these metaphors are used in this community. By and large, most of these dichotomous expressions seem to reflect the dilemma that many of users in this community are facing: leaving or staying in the abusive relationship. In order to represent this fluctuation, users sometimes add metaphoricity to verbs of movement (MS24), which stress the dynamicity of going backwards and forwards without a clear resolution. In some other cases, however, these representations acquire a more marked character in visual terms, reinforced by the rather unequivocal feeling of familiarity that the movement of a yo-yo can certainly enhance (MS25).

(MS24) I keep **swaying** between wanting to take that leap of faith as the dv lady calls it and giving up [SB2_2.70]

(MS25) I keep **yo-yoing** between leaving and staying [SB2_2.61]

In a similar fashion to some instances in SB1, dual representations of survivors also resort to metonymy. As also found in related examples in the previous community,

users' rationality and emotionality seem to uphold completely different, irreconcilable views. Example (MS26), for instance, suggests the symbolically emotional part (*heart*) is to be held responsible for automatically surrendering to the perpetrator's requests or needs. Conversely, users' emotionality and intuitions seem to be closer to what is more convenient, whereas the perpetrator's ability to manipulate users in psychological/emotional terms is the main source of this dichotomy (MS27). Despite this, it is also curious to come across cases in which both parts (the emotional and the rational, represented again metonymically) are completely overwhelmed (MS28).

(MS26) My head knows I should've said No... but almost without thinking, my heart & mouth said 'Yes'... [SB2_1.88]

(MS27) I know in **my heart** that this isn't right but he is very good at messing with **my head** during the holidays he visited family members n what he said wwas ttotally [sic] messed up [SB2_1.29]

(MS28) I don't think my body or brain can take anymore [crying_emoji] Xx [SB2_2.4]

Apart from this, some metaphorical expressions of dualism in SB2 are discursively realised by less recurrent means so far. In fact, as indicated in Table 48 above, vehicle terms resorting to fictional creatures are also observed. As shown in example (MS29) below, metaphorical dualism can be instantiated by means of this degree of fictionalisation. If previous metonymical dichotomies are considered, it seems that, in this case, this user's emotionality is conceptualised by means of the devil, whereas her rational side (telling her to stay away) is in this case the angel. Apart from this, it is interesting to notice of 'reason' is also being personified here. These two fictional, religion-motivated images are also used to describe users' negative actions and psychological states (MS30), although in some cases these representations seem to mirror the perpetrator's own words (MS31). Metaphorical fictionalisation is also observed in this tendency towards self-negativity so frequently found in this online community (MS32).

(MS29) **the devil** on my shoulder tells me to believe it and **the angel** is telling me to stay away [SB2_1.96]

(MS30) I was **no angel** [SB2_2.27]

(MS31) he screamed saying that I'm not well mentally and I have **the devil in my head** [SB2_1.36]

(MS32) I can't even walk the streets of the area we live because everyone thinks I'm **some kind of monster** [SB2_1.37]

As described elsewhere in this chapter, also drawing on conclusions reached in previous chapters, SB2 as an online community stands out for representing the complexity that many of these low-self-esteem women need to handle when leaving an abusive relationship (when most of them have widely identified abusive patterns in their partners). In fact, based upon the amalgamation of some of the source domains included in Table 48 above, it is common to find conceptualisations of the adverse situation that survivors in SB2 are undergoing. Although space and time constraints have prevented including figurative representations of the abusive relationship itself in this chapter, it is necessary to retrieve some of them to explain some the metaphor vehicles that prevail in this community. As vastly identified by relevant literature, the metaphorical mapping *BAD IS DOWN* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2008; Semino, 2008) can be seen working in different semantic domains in everyday language. Then, it is unsurprising to find that many situations within users' abusive relationships are signalled by a plethora of metaphorical expressions that strengthen this metaphorical mapping. Thus, it is common among users in this community (but also in the other two) to conceptualise aspects around this type of relationships as going 'down'. Consequently, users in this forum recognise this fall since marriage (MS33) to more specific violent episodes (MS34, MS35).

(MS33) Soon our marriage **descended** in daily rows [SB2_1.62]

(MS34) Last night was **a plummeting horrific depth for me** and am in work after about 4 hours sleep covering painful marks etc. [SB2_1.19]

(MS35) Since then I've been in **emotional free fall**, ending up with the crisis team [SB2_2.11]

These kinds of metaphors gain further significance in the light of the many figurative expressions in SB2 that somehow suggest the need to start from scratch (that is, from this deep stage survivors conceptualise) in order begin their process of recovery. Example (MS36) illustrates this process of rebuilding very clearly, which also presupposes a previously-destroyed emotional background. A similar image is brought about by example (MS37), where apart from the idea of picking oneself up, a dual representation between the formerly abused self and the post-abuse self is achieved by the reduplication of first personal pronouns (*I, myself*). Nevertheless, most representations still emphasise the rather weak (either physical or emotional) state these women are in (MS38, MS39). As anticipated before, it is also interesting to observe how many of these examples rely on the UP-DOWN image schema

underlying the metaphorical mappings GOOD IS UP / BAD IS DOWN and HAPPY IS UP / SAD IS DOWN (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

(MS36) I class myself as a survivor not a victim it has been hard **building myself up from rock bottom** [SB2_1.66]

(MS37) I have been able **to pick myself up** and move on mentally, emotionally, psychologically and financially [SB2_1.70]

(MS38) After all, **he wore me down** last year.... [SB2_1.62]

(MS39) I know **I need to muscle up** and tell him where to get off, but I'm finding it so so hard to do [SB2_1.41]

By and large, this section has delved into some of the most relevant metaphorical expressions users employ to represent themselves (and the situations they are in) in 'Getting Out' (SB2). As mentioned before, attention has been to paid to instances that, regardless of their frequency, are deemed suitable to describe this online community in linguistic terms. Thus, and mirroring SB1 in many regards, representations of the self as a metonymically dual entity have been discussed. In a similar vein, the more salient tendency to use fictionalised metaphoric references in SB2 has been brought to forth; and examples evidencing the weakness reported by some users in this community have also been considered.

8.4.1.3 Figurative representations of the self as female survivors in SB3 (Life after abuse)

This final subsection has the objective to scrutinise the most pertinent vehicle terms used by female survivors of IPV in SB3, which gathers women sharing their experiences about their lives after abuse. As anticipated in Section 8.4.1 above, this community is of special interest if the high levels of metaphorical self-representations are taken into account.

Table 49 below provides an outline of the most salient metaphorical expressions used for self-referential purposes in SB3. Although the wide range of vehicle terms is also present in this community, one of the most noticeable changes in SB3 concerns the percentage distributions. Almost three quarters (66.7%) of the metaphorical expressions are based on the five most common vehicle groups. Nonetheless, more accurate quantitative comparisons will be included in the next section, where statistical measures will be carried out to explore if the divergence in source domains across communities is significant (or not) and to what extent.

Based on the presentation of these results, the metaphorical expression SELF IS DUAL ENTITY is again the most frequent one in SB3 (17.9%), proving that self-references that foreground this divided nature become the most recurrent metaphorical pattern in the three online communities.

Table 49 | Figurative representations of IPV survivors in SB2 (raw numbers, unique references, and %)

Figurative representations of the self in SB3	N	Unique ref	% TOTAL (/84)
SELF IS DUAL ENTITY	15	15	17.9
SELF IS LIBERATED ENTITY	13	13	15.5
SELF IS (WAR/BATTLE) FIGHTER	11	10	13.1
SELF IS BROKEN ENTITY	11	11	13.1
SELF IS PRISONER	6	6	7.1
SELF IS DISPOSABLE ENTITY	4	4	4.8
SELF IS ANIMAL	4	4	4.8
SELF IS WORTHLESS ENTITY	3	3	3.6
SELF IS WASTED /WEAK / DEPRESSED ENTITY	3	3	3.6
SELF IS ENCLOSED ENTITY	3	3	3.6
SELF IS WORTHY/ NEW ENTITY	3	3	3.6
SELF IS OBJECT	2	2	2.4
SELF IS PROBLEM	1	1	1.2
SELF IS FOUND ENTITY	1	1	1.2
SELF IS FRAUD	1	1	1.2
SELF IS FOOL	1	1	1.2
SELF IS ADDICTED ENTITY	1	1	1.2
SELF IS (ABANDONED) BABY	1	1	1.2
TOTAL NUMBER OF FIGURATIVE REP. OF SELF IN SB1	84	83	100

However, an in-depth analysis of the textual examples within these expressions reveal some subtleties which are worth considering. Broadly speaking, it is still possible to come across references where one part of the self, activated by means of metonymy, seems to be questioning the other part about the process of undergoing a relationship of this kind (MS40). Therefore, it seems as if this process of rebuilding oneself after an abusive relationship (discussed in the previous section) strengthens this dual conceptualisation of oneself. This is suggested by many of the examples in this community where women seem to clearly distinguish between these two different entities (MS41, MS42). In some other case, there is a perceived feeling of disembodied alienation in which a part of one's body does not seem to be owned by oneself (MS43). This transformative power behind experiencing an abusive

relationship is conveyed more drastically in cases where former versions of the self are personified and made to interact with the new self (MS44).

(MS40) **Your brain** can't quite comprehend how *you* got here [SB3_1.34]

(MS41) I'm **so ashamed of this person I have become – I have forgotten how to socialize** [SB3_2.65]

(MS42) I **don't think I will ever be my former self**, I am wiser, and doing things more for me and being [SB3_2.59]

(MS43) i felt like **my body wasn't mine anymore like I wasn't me** [SB3_2.66]

(MS44) It's like the old me has popped up to say hello! [SB3_2.57]

This process of rebuilding oneself can also be interpreted, if understood metaphorically in the light of more colonialist/belligerent terminology, as the process of reconquering oneself (or the former self before abuse). As Table 49 points out, the metaphorical expression SELF IS (WAR/BATTLE) FIGHTER stands out in this community, which gains further significance if the paucity of expressions of this sort in SB1 and SB2 is taken into account. First of all, it is interesting to spot a more recurrent tendency among users in SB3 to explicitly conceptualise the abusive relationship as a battle (MS45, MS46). More specifically, users seem to emphasise the exhaustion that both the whole situation (MS47, MS48) and the fighting against the perpetrator generates (MS49).

(MS45) everyday I feel worse, its **an uphill battle** and I dont see an end to it [SB3_1.3]

(MS46) Is anyone else **battling** with the same feelings? [SB3_2.94]

(MS47) Is there ever a time when you stop having to **gird your loins for another battle?** [SB3_2.37]

(MS48) I just woke up this morning and so fed up of **struggling** I feel like **giving up** today I really don't wanna be here [SB3_1.34]

(MS49) But it's so exhausting to **keep fighting him** [SB3_2.22]

This reported fatigue is also perceived in related metaphorical conceptualisations. On the one hand, it is interesting to observe that the exhaustion users feel at this stage seems to be more closely associated with their mental/emotional/psychological states. As illustrated in examples (MS50) and (MS51), an abusive relationship seems to work as a kitchen blender and reduce survivors' mental sides (*brain*) to a rather unspecified mass (*mush*). Likewise, this mental exhaustion is also suggested by cases in which users (and some of their feelings) become an empty container where strength or vitality are no longer part of

it (MS52). This is even more interesting if the many conceptualisations of the perpetrator as an abstract/non-corporeal entity that fills survivors' heads (which are dealt with in the next block) are considered.

(MS50) my brains like **mush!** [SB3_1.11]

(MS51) my brain has turned to **mush** [SB3_1.14]

(MS52) He shouted at me again and I even forgot why. **I was so drained** [SB3_2.61]

Despite the presence of this widespread tiredness, it would be unfair not to bring to the fore the many instances in which survivors engage in a more proactive type of discourse that reflects the more marked tendency towards positivity found in this community (as already suggested by findings in Chapters 6 and 7). One way in which this discursive empowerment is instantiated is not far from the battle/war domain. Although these examples include idiomatic expressions whose metaphorical meanings are widely conventionalised (MS53, MS54), it is still interesting to observe how these expressions rely on warfare elements (namely *guns*) to foreground this metaphorical armament with which users are equipped in order to fight (and win) the battle (MS55).

(MS53) Time to break out **the big guns** again! [SB3_1.65]

(MS54) I **stuck to my guns** and now have no contact with him. He doesn't even see the kids. [SB3_2.94]

(MS55) I've seen the devil, I experienced evil, **I fought and I won** ME [SB3_1.92]

Quite arguably, the process of fighting and winning the battle of what abusive relationships entail also brings about a higher presence of metaphorical expressions that conceptualise survivors as liberated entities (15.5% of the total). Despite the more palpable sense of freedom in most of the examples, some of them still suggest a degree of caution to accept this new situation, and feelings of fear have not entirely vanished (MS56, MS57). Nevertheless, in many cases there is a tendency to emphasise the process of escaping from the perpetrator. Although some lexical choices (*break free*) foreground this metaphorical connotation (MS58), some other cases seem to pay more attention to the role that marriage (conceptualised as a restrictive tie) played in survivors' perceived deprivation (MS59). An additional degree of metaphorical subtlety is also observed in cases where survivors' willingness to emphasise their freedom is accomplished by another metaphor. As seen in example (MS60), it is interesting to observe how users' perceived freedom

is activated by means of an animal metaphor (and also metonymically), which very subtly evokes the image of a rather vulnerable entity that is gradually recovering before *flying* again.

(MS56) It's been over a year since **I've been free** from the *dreaded* ex [SB3_2.67]

(MS57) keep telling myself **i escaped** and im alive, so why do i feel so *scared* [SB3_2.31]

(MS58) I'm proud of myself that I **broke free** [SB3_1.86]

(MS59) Today I am **free**. I have **no ties of marriage** to him anymore [SB3_2.10]

(MS60) i am slowly allowing **wee wings to unfurl** from me [SB3_1.91]

Before bringing this subsection to an end, it is worth discussing how the different processes that users in SB3 seem to stress can influence users' perceptions of themselves in self-esteem terms. If previous subsections are recalled, it is unproblematic to find many metaphorical expressions that give more prominence to negative self-representations. Despite the overall trend towards positivity in SB3, generalising this pattern is certainly risky because of the still present traces of users' low self-esteem at this final stage. Thus, images of survivors as broken objects are also found (MS61), even though some of them acknowledge the rather useless efforts made in the process of 'fixing' (MS62).

(MS61) this is torture anyway and **i am a broken thing** [SB3_2.12]

(MS62) I have all the tools in my toolbox **to fix me**, but it's pointless [SB3_1.49]

However, and quite importantly, a qualitative exploration of the data can reveal the need to further refine the metaphor-related coding process in this case. To put it differently, despite the pervasiveness of metaphorical vehicles that underpin survivors' damaged emotional wellbeing, different interpretations are reached if non-metaphorical aspects are taken into account. Thus, it is unproblematic to find cases in this community where conceptualisations of oneself as a broken entity are grounded in the past, which is manifested via the tendency towards the past tense anticipating these figurative expressions. In some cases (MS63, MS64), images of the self as an entity broken into pieces are linked to the moment of leaving the abusive the relationship and the perpetrator. Likewise, some other expressions refer to the ruined (emotional, physical or financial) state the survivor was in (MS65) as opposed to the present (MS66).

(MS63) to take me back **to the broken thing I was** when I left him [SB3_2.37]

(MS64) I couldn't understand why I was so **shattered** to loose [sic] him. When it happened **I was in pieces** – crying uncontrollably, being physically sick [SB3_2.11]

(MS65) He use [sic] to make me feel so small and **worthless** [SB3_2.91]

(MS66) I used to think **i was ruined** forever i am not now [SB3_2.43]

As a matter of fact, and quite relatedly, metaphorical expressions in this community also foreground this process of rebuilding that some users report to be experiencing in this online community (MS67), although the means to achieving it may be far from feasible (MS68). This goes hand in hand with higher presences of figurative representations in which users seem to be more aware of their worth (MS69, MS70), which altogether reinforces the presence of these more positive discursive traits in users contributing to this online community.

(MS67) I have been able to **rebuild** myself [SB3_2.45]

(MS68) Took tablets for anxiety and gradually **rebuilt my life** [SB3_1.19]

(MS69) I know that **I am worth the best** [SB3_1.92]

(MS70) I finally understand **my worth** [SB3_1.39]

Judging from the metaphorical expression discussed so far, then, it is feasible to claim that figurate self-representations in SB3 also mirror the overall positive discursive tone that findings in previous chapters have also identified. More specifically, it has been observed that metaphors evoking these users' dichotomous identity are also prevalent in this community, despite the more drastic divisions found at this final stage. Likewise, as the next section will further elucidate, metaphors pertaining to the domain of war are more noticeable in SB3. Interestingly, a liberated version of the self seems to be the figurative outcome of the exhaustive battle that abusive relationships are reported to be, apart from more strengthened and valuable perceptions of these survivors' self-esteem.

8.4.1.4 Figurative representations of female survivors of IPV: a cross-community analysis

The previous subsections sought to provide readers with qualitative-driven analyses on the basis of the most frequent and relevant metaphorical expressions that female survivors in this online community use for self-referential purposes. In this final subsection, however, attention is paid to how these most salient representations vary across from SB1 to SB3. As usual, this cross-community exploration mostly relies on

several statistical measures (χ^2 , p value and log-likelihood) in order to test the degree of significance of each metaphorical vehicle when the three online communities are contrasted (SB1 to SB2, SB2 to SB3, and SB1 to SB3).

Before engaging in the outline of specific details, it is first convenient to obtain a general understanding of how metaphorical expressions that these female survivors employ vary if a cross-community comparison is at issue. As already anticipated in Table 46 above (see Section 8.4.1), a higher tendency to engage in metaphorised self-representations can be already grasped if normalised frequencies are contrasted (8.77, 12.15, 19.59 in SB1, SB2, SB3 respectively). Furthermore, as Table 50 below indicates, the most significant shift as far as metaphoricity is concerned is observed between the initial and the final stages.

Table 50 | Female survivors of IPV as metaphorised SAs across communities (statistical significance)

	SB1-SB2			SB2-SB3			SB1-SB3		
	χ^2	p	LL	χ^2	p	LL	χ^2	p	LL
3_-MET	0.40	NS	0.50	1.16	NS	1.33	0.16	NS	0.23
3_+MET	2.07	NS	2.38	6.75	0.01	7.30	18.02	0.001	19.05

This can also be used to explain the higher metaphorical density found in SB3 in comparison with the other two communities when self-representation issues are at stake. This acquires a greater degree of significance if metaphorical expressions to refer to the perpetrator (in Section 8.4.2.4 below) are taken into account. Apart from this, it can be used to claim that metaphorical expressions for self-representation purposes vary more significantly from SB1 to SB3 (LL=19.05) than the amount of expressions used to activate the perpetrator metaphorically (LL=15.32).

Furthermore, this subsection also seeks to compare how the multiple source domains that have been qualitatively discussed in the previous sections vary across the three online communities in order to obtain a more holistic view of the evolution of these metaphorical vehicles. This is done in Table 51 below, where all possible vehicle terms that female survivors in this online setting used to represent themselves metaphorically are ordered on the basis of their quantitative predominance. First of all, it is noteworthy to mention that there is a total of 26 possible vehicle terms through which these metaphorical self-representations can be discursively instantiated. As the next section will elaborate, one interesting difference is related to the total amount of source domains used for these purposes (26) if the

amount of source domains these survivors used for representing the perpetrator figuratively is compared (15).

Table 51 | Most frequent vehicle terms to metaphorically represent female survivors of IPV across communities

SELF IS...	SB1		SB2		SB3		TOTAL	TOTAL
	(N)	(ptw)	(N)	(ptw)	(N)	(ptw)	(N)	(%)
DUAL ENTITY	6	1.3	13	3.2	15	3.5	34	19.5
PRISONER	4	0.9	6	1.5	6	1.4	16	9.2
BROKEN ENTITY	2	0.4	2	0.5	11	2.6	15	8.6
WAR/BATTLE FIGHTER	2	0.4	1	0.3	11	2.6	14	8.1
LIBERATED ENTITY	0	0	0	0	13	3	13	7.5
DISPOSABLE ENTITY	4	0.9	4	1	4	0.9	12	6.9
DEPRESSED / WEAK ENTITY	2	0.4	4	1	3	0.7	9	5.2
FRAUD / FAILURE	4	0.9	3	0.7	1	0.2	8	4.6
ANIMAL	3	0.6	1	0.3	4	0.9	8	4.6
OBJECT	3	0.6	3	0.7	2	0.5	8	4.6
WORTHLESS ENTITY	2	0.4	1	0.3	3	0.7	6	3.5
PROTECTOR/SAVIOUR	3	0.6	1	0.3	0	0	4	2.3
FICTIONAL CREATURE	0	0	3	0.7	0	0	3	1.7
FOOL	0	0	2	0.5	1	0.2	3	1.7
ENCLOSED ENTITY	0	0	0	0	3	0.7	3	1.7
WORTHY / NEW ENTITY	0	0	0	0	3	0.7	3	1.7
DIRTY ENTITY	2	0.4	0	0	0	0	2	1.2
DRAMA QUEEN	2	0.4	0	0	0	0	2	1.2
NATURAL ELEMENT	0	0	2	0.5	0	0	2	1.2
PROBLEM	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.2	2	1.2
CHILD / BABY	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.2	2	1.2
PLAYER (CHESS)	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0.6
PRINCESS	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0.6
LOST ENTITY	0	0	1	0.3	0	0	1	0.6
FOUND ENTITY	0	0	0	0	1	0.2	1	0.6
ADDICTED ENTITY	0	0	0	0	1	0.2	1	0.6
TOTAL METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS (SELF)	41	8.8	49	12.2	84	19.6	174	100

More specifically, survivors of IPV contributing to this online forum represent themselves as dual entities in 19.5% of the cases. As the previous three subsections further elaborated, however, subtle differences are observed if these images of the dual self are contrasted. Broadly speaking, users in SB1 seem to be in two minds when trying to assess if what the type of acts they are witnessing can be considered abusive or not, a dilemma which is usually conceptualised by means of metonymical references to users' brains and hearts. Users in SB2, however, seem more in doubt about staying in or leaving the relationship, which is in fact one of the most remarkable discursive characteristics of this intermediate community. Finally, users

in SB3 can be said to drastically maximise this tendency to represent themselves as dual beings to the extent of evoking visions of themselves as two different parts that can even be seen interacting with each other.

The second most frequent vehicle term for self-referential purposes found in this online forum relies on the metaphorical expression SELF IS PRISONER. Although this source domain seems to appear in a rather uniform fashion, it is still interesting to observe how some subtle differences are observed. For instance, it is curious to find out how survivors' homes can have completely divergent connotations depending on the user. Whereas this domestic realm is seen by some as the prison itself, instances in which the same location is more closely related to visions of a fortress were also spotted. As a matter of fact, a certain degree of controversy is also found if the third most frequent source domain is taken into account. As shown in Table 51 above, a mere quantitative approximation to these figures would suggest a higher tendency among users in the third community to construct themselves as broken entities. Despite the fact that metaphors of this sort are found in SB3, it was necessary to enlarge the span of analysis to observe that many of these lexical metaphors were contradicted by the past tense which surrounded many of these cases. As Subsection 8.4.1.3 examined, self-representations linked to broken entities referred to situations belonging to past realms.

One of the most interesting aspects as far as metaphorical expressions are concerned deals with mechanisms that figuratively represent survivors as war/battle fighters. As a matter of fact, this shift in terms of conceptualisation is one of the most salient in a cross-community comparison, as will be elaborated upon below. Broadly speaking, and despite the many times in which these battles are described as being exhaustive, survivors in SB3 see themselves as fighters of a battle in which the perpetrator is located at the other end. As discussed elsewhere, it seems as if the engagement in this fight to rebuild oneself also brings about more metaphors related to liberation and freedom, higher self-esteem and self-assurance.

In sum, the eight most frequent source domains used with self-referential purposes amount to 69.5% of all the figurative expressions found in this corpus. This explains why Table 52 below focuses specifically on these domains –to try to help identify if the divergence in their use across the three communities is statistically significant or

not. To this end, following a similar fashion as in previous instances, several statistical measures were carried out to further investigate the extent to which this conceptual shift is connected to the three online communities under scrutiny.

Table 52 | Most frequent vehicle terms to metaphorically represent female survivors of IPV across communities (statistical significance)

SELF IS...	SB1-SB2			SB2-SB3			SB1-SB3		
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL
DUAL ENTITY	2.89	NS	3.78	0	NS	0.05	3.78	NS	4.80
PRISONER	0.30	NS	0.75	0	NS	0.01	0.20	NS	0.59
BROKEN ENTITY	0	NS	0.02	4.45	0.05	6.32	5.65	0.05	7.66
WAR/BATTLE FIGHTER	0	NS	0.21	6.21	0.05	9.15	5.65	0.05	7.66
LIBERATED ENTITY	0	NS	0	10.36	0.01	17.24	12.16	0.001	19.17
DISPOSABLE ENTITY	0	NS	0.04	0	NS	0.01	0	NS	0.01
DEPRESSED/WEAK ENTITY	0.34	NS	1.01	0	NS	0.21	0	NS	0.30
FRAUD / FAILURE	0	NS	0.03	0.31	NS	2.12	0.63	NS	1.68

If the different degrees of significance included in Table 52 above are taken into account, several conclusions can be reached. First of all, it is remarkable to observe that the two most frequent source domains are used more uniformly throughout the three online communities. Therefore, it is not possible to affirm that these source domains are particularly salient in any of the three communities. Conversely, a strong significance is observed when dealing with the metaphorical expression SELF IS LIBERATED ENTITY, which is partly justified by SB3 users' increased perception of freedom at this last stage. Likewise, the figurative expression SELF IS WAR/BATTLE FIGHTER stands out in SB3, since warfare-motivated metaphors are still not very significant at the initial stage. As already pointed out, and despite the fact that the metaphorical vehicle evoking broken entities also seems to be particularly central in SB3, a great degree of metaphorical expressions of this sort had to be explored from the grammatical context in which they occur.

8.4.2 Representing the other: figurative representations of male perpetrators of IPV

This second analytical section sets out to present and discuss the most relevant findings in relation to the second research question this chapter attempts to answer. Therefore, its main objective is to examine in which forms male perpetrators of IPV are figuratively represented in these forum survivors' experiences with this sort of violence. It should be noted that these metaphorical representations were treated separately from those literal representations included in Chapter 7. After providing

a general overview of how the metaphorical expressions occur in the three online communities under investigation, emphasis will be put on how these appear in each of them separately. This is done in the first three subsections. Once this is done, a cross-community analysis is included in the final subsection in order to get a more global impression of how both these figurative representations and the many forms in which they are discursively instantiated evolve across the three communities.

Table 53 below illustrates an overview of how the figurative representations appear in the corpus as a whole. Although statistical significance is not included here (see Section 8.4.2.4 below), this table may be useful to understand how metaphorical representations of the perpetrator are scattered throughout the three communities, before investigating each of them separately. It should be noticed that SARDDA features involving figurative representations are included [+MET], and these will be the focus of this chapter.

Table 53 | Figurative representations of IPV perpetrators as SAs (raw numbers, normalised frequencies, %)

Figurative features SARDDA	SB1 (46733 words)			SB2 (40324 words)			SB3 (42866 words)		
	(N)	(ptw)	%	(N)	(ptw)	%	(N)	(ptw)	%
3_-MET	189	40.4	89	145	35.9	77.1	186	43.4	77.2
3_+MET	24	5.1	11	43	10.7	22.9	55	12.8	22.8
TOTAL PERP	213	45.5	100	188	46.6	100	241	56.2	100

Interestingly, if the normalised frequencies (ptw) are contrasted, it is uncomplicated to find out how these metaphorical representations of the perpetrator increase in the final stage (SB3, 'Life after abuse'). This gradual growth in the total number of metaphorical expressions could be understood as evidence of how the analyst's awareness of metaphoricity rises the more a text is read (Gibbs, 1994). However, figures included in Table 53 derive from two in-depth manual analyses, which certainly undermines this interpretation. Hence, another way to interpret this may be related to findings reached in previous chapters. First, it should be mentioned that LIWC scores for the third personal pronoun 'he' decreased significantly if SB1 and SB3 were contrasted. Nonetheless, as suggested in Chapter 7, survivors posting in 'Life after abuse' employed a higher amount of mechanisms that activated the perpetrator in non-pronominal ways. This rise in terms of metaphorical expressions seems to support the latter tendency. Second, this can also be understood if the LIWC score for 'Analytical' is considered (see Chapter 6), since SB3 presented the

highest score if the other two communities are contrasted. As discussed in Chapter 6, the higher the score for ‘analytical’, the more complex and abstract the language users’ styles are.⁶⁰

If the previous findings are taken into account, it is not problematic to distinguish a more salient trend among users contributing in SB3 to discursively represent the perpetrator in more metaphorical ways. Nonetheless, the analysis of these figurative representations in more detail revealed interesting divergences in the sort of metaphorical representations employed in each of these three online communities. This is explored in the forthcoming subsections.

8.4.2.1 Figurative representations of male perpetrators of IPV in SB1 (Is it abuse?)

Table 54 illustrates the most frequent ways in which the perpetrator is figuratively represented in this initial online community. This is done following the same tendency than in the previous sections. Metaphorical expressions are sorted depending on the number of their occurrences in each community. Although distribution percentages are also included, attention is also paid to the number of unique references in which each metaphor is used. This is included in order to evidence cases in which a given survivor makes repeated use of the same type of metaphor, which would lead to a rather skewed account of results.

As Table 54 illustrates, the more salient metaphorical representation used to represent the perpetrator in SB1 is connected to different forces of nature. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice that these representations are not realised directly (PERPETRATOR IS X) but rather by means of the actions they are involved in, as seen in examples (MP1), (MP2) and (MP3).

⁶⁰ Although the difference between the three communities in ‘analytical’ was not statistically significant, the score for this LIWC category increased from SB1 (17.6%) to SB3 (20.4%). Also, it is noteworthy to mention that significant differences between ‘analytical’ scores for the VIOL and the NON_VIOL corpora, which might suggest an overall tendency to display a more abstract language style in the former.

Table 54 | Figurative representations of IPV perpetrators in SB1 (raw numbers, unique references and %)

Figurative representations of the perpetrator in SB1	N	Unique ref	% TOTAL (/24)
PERPETRATOR IS FORCE OF NATURE	6	6	25
PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF AUTHORITY	5	5	20.8
PERPETRATOR IS ANIMAL	4	4	16.7
PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF PERFORMING ARTS	5	2	20.8
PERPETRATOR IS DISPOSABLE ENTITY	1	1	4.2
PERPETRATOR IS SAVIOUR	1	1	4.2
PERPETRATOR IS FICTIONAL CHARACTER (DAVID PLATT. CORONATION STREET)	1	1	4.2
PERPETRATOR IS PLAYER (CHESS)	1	1	4.2
TOTAL NUMBER OF FIGURATIVE REP. OF PERP IN SB1	24	21	100

Hence, these representations emphasise the violent reactions that seem to characterise the perpetrators' temper, to which survivors have very little (if anything) to say. This can be interpreted as a sign of these survivors' passive stance when confronted with these types of behaviour, which in a way mirrors the insignificant degree of agentivity most human beings experience when uncontrollable natural phenomena strike. These references to natural forces are also observed in more idiomatised expressions (MP4, MP5), which in these two cases are also metonymical. Despite the huge controversy when deciding whether idiomatised expressions of this sort should be taken as metaphorical, these are included in this section due to the absence of them in the other two communities, which emphasises the tendency among these users to resort to nature-related source domains to describe the target.

(MP1) 2 days after we moved to a new house and **flared up** saying he wants to leave [SB1_2.30]

(MP2) He stood up and threw his phone at the wall [...] and **stormed** upstairs [SB1_2.46]

(MP3) then he **stormed off** and came back when the boys had gone outside to play [SB1_2.34]

(MP4) He comes home with **a face like thunder** [SB1_2.47]

(MP5) then drove a bit aggressively and had **a face like thunder** [SB1_2.3]

The second most frequent pattern found in SB1 stands for one of the most pervasive metaphorical representations of the perpetrator in the three communities. The vehicle term FIGURE OF AUTHORITY is thought to be vague enough to fit the multiple lexical options included in it. As argued above, it is interesting to observe that these metaphorical expressions are not straightforward. In most cases, these survivors are

recounting the experiences they had lived as a consequence of living with the perpetrator. Nonetheless, the rather indirect ways in which women blame the perpetrators for it may respond to these women's tendency to excuse perpetrators' responsibility and linger on self-blaming attitudes. This is achieved in several ways. As seen in (MP6) below, and although a more direct type of metaphor could have been used (i.e., *he was [like] a dictator*), it is not unusual to find that survivors opt for describing the situation surrounding the abusive context instead. Similar metaphorical mechanisms to indirectly represent the perpetrator by means of figures of extreme authority are exemplified in (MP7) and (MP8).

(MP6) **It was like a dictatorship and censorship**-censoring what I knew. understood and read [SB1_2.17]

(MP7) **the gestapo** would definitely give him a job [SB1_1.6]

(MP8) He's got me well trained... **like one of Pavlov's dog**... and I hate myself for it [SB1_2.2]

On the one hand, the perpetrator is said to be eligible for a job as a member of the Gestapo, the secret state police in Germany during Nazi times. Although some of these metaphorical references are underpinned by the description surrounding in the local context of a given post, survivors' use of metaphors of this kind may play a crucial pragmatic role for the in-group, since the inclusion of such metaphors might be used to quickly provide a description of the actions ascribed to the perpetrator without having to add further details.⁶¹ On the other hand, it is interesting to find cases in which the metaphorical representation of the perpetrator necessarily entails providing a metaphorical account of oneself. As (MP8) above suggests, the perpetrator is conceptualised as the Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov, whose experiments with dogs are widely known for contributing to theories of classical conditioning. Although this survivor claims to hate the situation she is in, the fact that she feels "well trained" reinforces the idea of the survivor as an alienated being with very little room for agentivity, as also conveyed by previous examples. Apart from the rather controversial implications of this, it should be borne in that this can only be achieved by means of conceptualising herself as an animal (*Pavlov's dog*), which adds a further degree of dehumanisation.

⁶¹ A more accurate description of what this user may want to imply by the use of this metaphor can be found if history-related sources are consulted. As Gellately points out (1991), it was frequent for the Gestapo to include various forms of blackmail, threats and extortion to make suspects confess, who would be exposed to various forms of harassment and torture in case s/he declined to contribute to the resolution of a case.

In fact, as shown in Table 54 above, the third more frequent way to metaphorically represent the perpetrator is achieved via vehicle terms that are grounded in the animal kingdom. In most cases, as examples (MP9), (MP10) and (MP11) below illustrate, metaphorical representations of the perpetrator seem to centre on the actions associated with them. Similar to what previous examples indicated, (MP10) and (MP11) below seem to evoke a more passive attitude on these women's side. On the one hand, the kind of financial and emotional bloodsucking allocates the perpetrator to the agentive role, whereas the self (who is being leeches off) seems to have very few alternatives to change this situation. A similar image is observed in (MP11), which denotes the very subtle but still effective way in which the perpetrator succeeds in controlling both the rational and the emotional sides of the survivor, who again seems unable to stop it. Finally, (MP12) is included here to highlight the need to approach metaphor analysis with a certain degree of flexibility. Although some voices argue against considering idioms as metaphorical expressions, a case such as this one is worth a mention. As can be easily grasped, there is an intentional semantic alternation of the idiomatised expression to strengthen the metaphorical mapping between the perpetrator and the idea that this idiom evokes.

(MP9) **Snarling like some kind of animal**. He slept on the sofa and I slept with my child [SB1_2.32]

(MP10) but the relationship felt parasitic –he **leeches off** me, financially and emotionally [SB1_2.35]

(MP11) I thought that was it but somehow he **wormed** his way into my head/heart [SB1_2.7]

(MP12) a leopard does not change *his* spots [SB1_1.42., own italics]

Before turning to the next community, it is worth looking at another frequent way to represent the perpetrator metaphorically which happens to be quite representative of this community. Although the number of instances represents 20.8% of the total, the metaphorical representation PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF PERFORMING ARTS is used repeatedly by the same two users. This explains why, in terms of overall representativeness, this metaphor is given less prominence. Nonetheless, both these metaphorical representations are of interest for several reasons. First, as examples (MP13) and (MP14) show, the representation of the perpetrator as a hypnotiser or a magician reinforces this certain degree of de-agentivity on the survivor's side, to the extent of not really knowing how to fully explain what is

happening ('or something'). In a similar vein to what is observed in examples (MP15) and (MP16), it is interesting to observe how the same user seems to be aware of using the same metaphor, since it is used consistently within the same forum post.

(MP13) feeling **hypnotised** into trusting again [SB1_1.24]

(MP14) There have been so many little weird incidents with him that I can't work out and I feel like **I'm under his spell** or he has **hypnotised** me or something [SB1_1.24]

(MP15) he must have really done **a number on me**, and I never saw it coming [SB1_2.2]

(MP16) I thought once I recognised this. it would help me to break free, yet **I am still dancing to his tune** [SB1_2.2]

By and large, and despite the multiple ways in which the perpetrators are figuratively represented in SB1, there seems to be an underlying pattern. As most of the examples discussed throughout this section convey, metaphorical accounts tend to make use of miscellaneous domains in which roles related to agentivity and de-agentivity are generally associated with the perpetrator and the survivor respectively.

8.4.2.2 *Figurative representations of male perpetrators of IPV in SB2 (Getting out)*

This subsection continues to explore the figurative ways in which female survivors of IPV construct male perpetrators at this half-way stage. Table 55 below presents findings based on the kind of vehicle terms used to conceptualise the perpetrator. As usual, it includes raw numbers, number of unique users employing a metaphorical expression in particular, and their distribution in percentage terms.

Table 55 | Figurative representations of IPV perpetrators in SB2 (raw numbers, unique references and %)

Figurative representations of perpetrator in SB2	N	Unique ref.	% TOTAL (/43)
PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF AUTHORITY	12	12	27.9
PERPETRATOR IS WAR ENEMY	11	11	25.6
PERPETRATOR IS SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY	5	5	11.6
PERPETRATOR IS ANIMAL	4	4	9.3
PERPETRATOR IS FORCE OF NATURE	4	4	9.3
PERPETRATOR IS FICTIONAL CREATURE (MONSTER, GIANT)	3	3	7
PERPETRATOR IS DIRTY ENTITY	2	2	4.7
PERPETRATOR IS PART OF PERFORMING ARTS	1	1	2.3
PERPETRATOR IS CHILD	1	1	2.3
TOTAL NUMBER OF FIGURATIVE REP. OF PERP IN SB2	43	43	100

As indicated in Table 55 above, representations of the perpetrator are accomplished by the metaphorical mapping PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF AUTHORITY in almost one third of the cases (27.9%), which seems to be consistent with the tendency observed in SB1. As a matter of fact, many of these representations certainly resemble those encountered in SB1 in the type of image they evoke. Broadly speaking, metaphorical representations of this sort are in many cases indirectly achieved. Despite its more explicit and dreadful character, example (MP17) shows a certain degree of similarity with Pavlov's example above. Although the user seems to be aware of the rather metaphorical (or non-literal) use of the verb "improve" by signalling it by means of the quotation marks, the appalling situations this woman is describing definitely go beyond any acceptable treatment towards any living entity. Quite relatedly, the perpetrator is sometimes conceptualised as the survivor's owner (MP18). Although again this is not done directly in discursive terms, the effect of some lexical choices may contribute to the creation of metaphorical scenarios that resemble images of slavery in which there is total submission towards one oppressive figure (MP19).

(MP17) he kept trying to "**improve me**", sometimes with an electric cable. belt or, just by throwing a shoe at me really hard [SB2_1.58]

(MP18) He **allowed** me to rest until my son was born and then two weeks after giving birth [...] After 2 weeks of giving birth. **I was sent back to work**, while he stayed at home [SB2_1.62]

(MP19) I am scared every time I stand up against his wishes [SB2_2.26]

Metaphorical representations of the perpetrator as an oppressive/controlling figure are also reinforced by the common tendency among users in this community to conceptualise the situation they are in as a trap. Although some users seem to show a greater degree of awareness than in SB1 (MP20), the feeling that prevails is that of being unable to escape from the abusive relationship (MP21). It is interesting to observe again how some users combine metaphorical and literal uses of feeling/being trapped (MP22), a merge that may even work in bringing the more abstract and the more tangible meanings of this experience even closer. This twofold understanding of freedom (literal and metaphorical) is also evoked when users express their wish to stop being in a relationship of this kind (MP23).

(MP20) **I feel so trapped**. I KNOW I shouldn't put up with it [SB2_1.12]

(MP21) Im really struggling at the moment. feel controlled by my ex again, like **there is no escape** [SB2_1.80]

(MP22) He had control over me in the relationship, through his dependence on me, violence, abuse, aggression and **making me feel trapped (sometimes literally trapping me in the house)** [SB2_2.40]

(MP23) But I dream about the day **I'll be free from him** [SB2_1.12]

It is perhaps due to this willingness to escape from the controlling abuser and the abusive relationship that the second most frequent metaphorical vehicle frames the perpetrator by means of PERPETRATOR IS WAR ENEMY (25.6% of the total). It is worth recalling that actions linked to the perpetrator in SB1 evoked domains which are more difficult to understand from a rational point of view (*hypnotiser*) or in which levels of agentivity on the survivor's side was generally de-emphasised (*he leeches off me*). Conversely, many of the actions in which the perpetrator is figuratively engaged in SB2 seem to be rooted in the realms of confrontation, where war-related lexical items are particularly predominant. As illustrated by examples (MP24), (MP25) and (MP26) below, even everyday aspects of (abusive) relationships (*phone calls, rants*) seem now more intertwined with warfare. Interestingly, as also discussed in Chapter 7, issues concerning psychological/emotional abuse seem to be more central in SB2, which is reflected in cases where the perpetrator is constructed as being in charge of emotionally attacking the self (MP27, MP28).

(MP24) it opens the floodgates and **he bombards** me again –phone calls, texts etc [SB2_2.39]

(MP25) he was on one of **his explosive rants** but im too scared god knows what he could do [SB2_1.29]

(MP26) **He'll go ballistic** and lose what little reason he has left [SB2_1.1]

(MP27) at least he's got one less way to emotionally **attack** me [SB2_2.68]

(MP28) since from then **his new weapon** has been to emotionally try and destroy me [SB2_2.34]

Many of these metaphorical representations strengthen the role of perpetrator at the controlling end of the abusive situation. Nonetheless, it is possible to interpret this conceptual shift as mirroring users' changed perception of the abusive relationship that many of them are trying to leave. In contrast to those domains in SB1 in which women's passive attitudes were highlighted, conceptualising the perpetrator as a war-related enemy also entails a more proactive stance among these survivors. This is somewhat suggested by textual evidence found in SB2, where users' conceptualisations of the abusive relationship as something that can be won or lost (like a battle) depending on the tactics one uses seem to construct these users at

the other end of a conflicting situation and not patiently waiting until it finishes (MP29, MP30).

(MP29) He will think **he's won** but he won't see the benefits to me [SB2_2.66]

(MP30) He is being extra nice because **a lot of his tactics** don't work anymore [SB2_2.2]

Nonetheless, the character of the third most salient metaphorical vehicle in SB2 may seem at odds with the findings that have been previously discussed. As suggested by Table 55 above, 11.6% of all metaphorical expressions found in this community construct the perpetrator as a SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY. Although the naming of this vehicle group may be disconcerting at first, examples below will help illustrate this point. Most of the examples above can be said to contribute to conceptualising this second stage as a belligerent scenario in which perpetrators' attacks are identified more tangibly. However, this is not always the case.

In fact, it is interesting to observe how the perpetrator (though less frequently) is also constructed as an entity that cannot be easily identified. As showed in example (MP31), some users express the lack of rationality behind that feeling, but in fact the perpetrator is described as a ubiquitous creature who is capable of controlling everything the survivor does without being physically present. This lack of corporeality provides the perpetrator with an aura of spirituality that is reinforced by two additional examples. For instance, lexical choice in example (MP32) can be said to invoke religious connotations, especially if the power given to the perpetrator to take one's life is considered (MP33), these metaphorical representations may certainly resemble that of an omnipresent deity.

(MP31) I want to but I feel that he can somehow see what I am doing, I know this is ridiculous –he's miles away but I feel he can see right through me. [SB2_2.55]

(MP32) but he believes he's so **high** and **mighty** and above the law [SB2_1.59]

(MP33) At the moment although am feeling sick I feel I can do this –need a new life or he is going to take my life very soon [SB2_2.6]

Although the salient co-existence of these two metaphorical vehicles within the same community can be striking at first, it should be remembered that SB2 is characterised by its rather transitory nature. This also explains why different findings have identified

this tendency to fluctuate in the light of some other linguistic pointers (see Chapter 7).

8.4.2.3 Figurative representations of male perpetrators of IPV in SB3 (Life after abuse)

This final subsection concentrates on the most salient metaphorical forms by means of which survivors contributing to SB3 discursively represent IPV perpetrators. As usual, Table 56 below presents findings based on the frequency of the most common vehicle terms. Again, it indicates raw numbers, number of unique references to a given metaphorical representation and its distribution in percent. In a similar vein to what metaphorical expressions in the previous two communities suggested, users in SB3 seem to maintain this conceptualisation of the perpetrator as a figure of authority (25.5% of all metaphorical expressions).

Table 56 | Figurative representations of IPV perpetrators in SB3 (raw numbers, unique references and %)

Figurative representations of perpetrator in SB3	N	Unique ref	% total (/55)
PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF AUTHORITY	14	14	25.5
PERPETRATOR IS FICTIONAL CREATURE (MONSTER. DEVIL)	8	8	14.6
PERPETRATOR IS WAR ENEMY	7	7	12.7
PERPETRATOR IS SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY	7	7	12.7
PERPETRATOR IS CRIMINAL	5	5	9.1
PERPETRATOR IS CENTRIPETAL FORCE	4	4	7.3
PERPETRATOR IS DIRTY ENTITY	3	3	5.5
PERPETRATOR IS ANIMAL	2	2	3.6
PERPETRATOR IS FORCE OF NATURE	2	2	3.6
PERPETRATOR IS PLAYER	1	1	1.8
PERPETRATOR IS PART OF PERFORMING ARTS	1	1	1.8
PERPETRATOR IS HUNTER	1	1	1.8
TOTAL NUMBER OF FIGURATIVE REP.OF PERP IN SB3	55	55	100

Then, seeing the perpetrator as someone who dictates is still possible in SB3, which is accomplished by means of the actions ascribed to him (MP34). Representations of the perpetrator as someone who is capable to exerting violence in spite of not being physically present are also found in this community (MP35, MP36).

(MP34) He is still **dictating** from afar. Still, he tries to order me about [SB3_2.84]

(MP35) Literally feel sick that I might get it wrong and have **to be punished**. *Even though he is not here* [SB3_1.26]

(MP36) **I am scared that I will be punished** *even though he is not here* [SB3_1.54]

This ubiquitousness of the perpetrator and the lack of corporeality through which he is frequently conceptualised becomes slightly different in SB3 if compared to previous communities. Whereas some images around him in SB2 linked this oppressive figure to a deity, the level of abstraction becomes even less tangible in this community. As shown in example (MP37) below, there are instances in which users resort to elements that are not easily materialised (*a vibe*) even though material actions are associated with it (*killing*). This lack of materiality is also illustrated by example (MP38). According to this user, the mere mental space the perpetrator takes is what stops her from not being able to engage in different activities. This notion of the perpetrator as a mental concept that is difficult to overcome in emotional terms is repeated several times among other users in SB3. In some cases (MP39), a metaphorical analogy is created between the mental and the physical process of vacating. In some others, users seem to correlate the mental presence that the perpetrator requires with poorer emotional states (MP40), as well as encouraging other members in the community to refrain from enabling it (MP41). Curiously enough, it is remarkable to observe how the perpetrator (in a rather abstract form) seems to mostly affect users' mental/emotional states (less physical) at this final stage, which is somehow reinforced by the salient metonymic reference to the self (*my head/my brain*). Overall, this may be used as another piece of evidence of the psychological aftermath that IPV survivors at this final stage of the abusive relationship are still experiencing.

(MP37) he is just a **negative vibe which kills my spirit** yet i miss him [SB3_2.71]

(MP38) it made me giggle because **I never had the brain space to do that while with him** [SB3_2.39]

(MP39) I am hoping that **he'll vacate my head** like he's vacated our lives [SB3_1.8]

(MP40) Ive finally realised that I am worse when **he is back into my head !!** [SB3_2.33]

(MP41) If **we can't allow them into our heads** then we can't be mistreated again [SB3_1.64]

This high degree of metaphorical abstraction gains further significance if the second most frequent source domain is taken into account. As Table 56 above points out, 14.6% of the representations are accomplished by means of the metaphorical expression PERPETRATOR IS FICTIONAL CREATURE. Although expressions of the sort were also found in previous communities, the divergence in use of this domain is particularly significant if SB1 is recalled (as the next section will further elaborate).

Nonetheless, a wider range of fictional characters appears in SB3. Even if less frequently, it is possible to come across representations of the perpetrator which bring to mind images linked to fictional creatures such as the devil (MP42) or, in more idiomatic ways, a giant (MP43). Nonetheless, representing the perpetrator(s) by resorting to the notion of *monsters* is more frequent. Employing this fictional term seems to provide users with a greater degree of agentivity (MP44), which is in some cases reinforced by verbs that underscore meanings of optionality (such as *pick* in MP45). Furthermore, this fictional term is also used with collectivisation purposes, a tendency that becomes distinctive in SB3 as Chapter 7 reveals.

(MP42) I've seen **the devil** [SB3_1.92]

(MP43) **The second abuser clung on to keep me under his thumb** but i've broken away there too [SB3_2.43]

(MP44) it reminds me of **what a monster he is** and how much better we all are to have him out of our lives [SB3_2.45]

(MP45) I wouldn't *pick* such **a monster** out of the crowd. Don't misunderstand that! [SB3_1.7]

(MP45) Just putting out there? Another reason for leaving **the monsters**. All gone now [SB3_1.33]

The previous examples can also be taken to illustrate the more empowered discursive traces that are prominent in SB3. Despite the observed decrease in representing the perpetrator by evoking war-related images (PERPETRATOR IS AN ADVERSARY) (if compared to SB2), metaphorical expressions of this sort in SB3 account for 12.7% of the total. Nonetheless, it is interesting to perceive a slight fluctuation in the way users in this community seem to be more aware of the conflict the abusive relationship has become. This interpretation is based, for instance, on the repeated uses of the battler-driven noun 'tactic' (MP46, MP47, MP48), to the extent of asking for advice to other survivors (conceptualised now as members in the same fighting side) or acknowledging that the failure of some of them are triggering either a loss of power or winning a battle (MP49).

(MP46) i believe this to be **a tactic** so it can get back to me so ill think he has no involvement! [SB3_1.24]

(MP47) Is this **a change of tactic**? What do you think? [SB3_2.88]

(MP48) im just relieved **his tactics** are starting to fail and he's loosing [sic] power [SB3_2.43]

(MP49) I do I feel like **he's winning** even though he's not there [SB3_2.28]

All in all, metaphorical representations of the perpetrator in this community seem to follow two different directions. On the one hand, although conceptualising the perpetrator as a figure of authority seems to be consistent across the three communities, perpetrators in SB3 are characterised for higher degrees of abstraction. This can be instantiated in several ways. First, perpetrators are sometimes described as being capable of enacting physical processes (many of them related to violent actions to which they are associated) despite an absence that is frequently explicit in these women's discourse. This may point at issues of psychological/emotional over-dependence on the perpetrator, which have been previously discussed in different chapters. Striking connections can be established if the many instances in which the perpetrator is metaphorically represented via rather immaterial entities which are said to work particularly at these users' mental states (metonymically represented in terms of their *heads*). Similarly, resorting to metaphors in which the perpetrators are fictional creatures (namely *monsters*) is also characteristic of SB3. On the other hand, however, perpetrators in this community are more consciously represented at the confronting end of a battle that can be lost or won depending on the tactics being disposed. Perhaps more indirectly, representing the perpetrator as an entity to fight against also turns survivor into more empowered entities that also part of a belligerent scenario.

8.4.2.3 Figurative representations of male perpetrators of IPV: a cross-community analysis

Once the figurative representations around male perpetrators of IPV have been presented and discussed in each online community separately, this section seeks to provide a global view on how these metaphorical accounts vary across the three communities at issue. First of all, it is noteworthy to recall Table 53 above, in which a gradual tendency to represent male perpetrators as social actors was identified across the three communities on the basis of normalised frequencies. Despite this increase, statistical significance tests can be consulted to examine at which point this higher tendency to metaphorise the perpetrator exactly takes place. Table 57 below provides useful information for this purpose.

Table 57 | Male perpetrators as metaphorised SAs across communities (statistical significance)

	SB1-SB2			SB2-SB3			SB1-SB3		
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL
3_-MET	1.02	NS	1.14	2.71	NS	2.89	0.39	NS	0.46
3_+MET	7.89	0.01	8.63	0.65	NS	0.83	14.16	0.001	15.32

As the colour-coding easily indicates, there are not significant divergences if the total instances of literal references to the perpetrator are borne in mind. A rather different picture can be obtained as far as [+MET] is concerned, which in fact offers insightful results. Based on these two tests of statistical significance, the strongest correlation is found between SB1 and SB3 ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, it can be claimed that metaphorical representations of the perpetrator as a social actor is very significant if the initial and the final stages these communities entail are juxtaposed. It is unproblematic to affirm that users in the online community under scrutiny engage in more metaphorical accounts of their experiences with male perpetrators of IPV at the final stage ('Life after abuse'). This tendency also supports findings in Chapter 7, where the application SARDDA evidenced a greater tendency among users in this community to represent the perpetrator by means of non-pronominal lexical mechanisms. Both these pointers contradict the corpus-assisted analysis presented in Chapter 6, which again warns of the importance of mixed-methods approaches.

With these ideas in mind, it is now convenient to concentrate on the possible ways in which this gradual metaphorical representation of the perpetrator is instantiated in survivors' online discourse. Although the three previous sections were devoted to scrutinising these processes as happening in each of the communities, it is worth examining the evolution of these metaphorical vehicles in a cross-community analysis. Table 58 below encapsulates previous findings and arranges the different vehicle terms on the basis of their overall salience.

Perhaps the most striking finding one can obtain by looking at the table above concerns the frequency in which the perpetrator is represented as a figure of authority. This metaphorical vehicle is used in one fourths (25.4%) of the total references, which in itself points at the overall feeling of awe among users in this online community towards the perpetrators. Furthermore, it is remarkable that this tendency escalates from SB1 to SB3, which could be interpreted as a gradual increase in viewing the perpetrator as more authoritative at the final stage. The

second most frequent domain used to represent the perpetrator in the total corpus at issue sees the perpetrator as a war enemy (14.8%). Despite the irregular pattern in which it occurs, this type of metaphorical representation stands out at the second stage (SB2). Following this, the next three metaphorical vehicles (FORCE OF NATURE, FICTIONAL CHARACTER and SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY) amount to the same percentage (9.84), and animal metaphors for the perpetrator are used in 8.2% of the cases. Interestingly, the sum of all these source domains (77.9%) suggests that the vast majority of the metaphorical representations are done by resorting to these source domains, which justifies the reason why emphasis is put on them in what follows.

Table 58 | Most frequent vehicle terms to metaphorically represent male perpetrators across communities

PERPETRATOR IS...	SB1		SB2		SB3		TOTAL	TOTAL
	(N)	(ptw)	(N)	(ptw)	(N)	(ptw)	(N)	(%)
FIGURE OF AUTHORITY	5	1.1	12	3	14	3.3	31	25.4
WAR ENEMY	0	0	11	2.7	7	1.6	18	14.8
FORCE OF NATURE	6	1.3	4	1	2	0.5	12	9.8
FICTIONAL CREATURE	1	0.2	3	0.7	8	1.9	12	9.8
SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY	0	0	5	1.2	7	1.6	12	9.8
ANIMAL	4	0.9	4	1	2	0.5	10	8.2
FIGURE OF PERFORMING ARTS	5	1.1	1	0.3	1	0.2	7	5.7
DIRTY ENTITY	0	0	2	0.5	3	0.7	5	4.1
CRIMINAL	0	0	0	0	5	1.2	5	4.1
CENTRIPETAL FORCE	0	0	0	0	4	0.9	4	3.3
PLAYER	1	0.2	0	0	1	0.2	2	1.6
DISPOSABLE ENTITY	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0.8
SAVIOUR	1	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0.8
CHILD	0	0	1	0.3	0	0	1	0.8
HUNTER	0	0	0	0	1	0.2	1	0.8
TOTAL METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS (PERP)	24	5.1	43	10.7	55	12.8	122	100

Presenting results as Table 58 above does may suffice to obtain a global view of the most frequent vehicle terms used in this online forum. However, it is necessary to explore how these domains evolve across the communities to reach subtler conclusions. Table 59 below focuses on the six most predominant vehicle domains and checks whether statistical significance is observed in a cross-community comparison.

As stated before, the gradual increase in representing the perpetrator as a figure of authority could be employed to assume that survivors in this forum perceive the perpetrator more authoritatively in SB3 than in SB1. This interpretation needs to be necessarily revised on the basis of statistical measures in Table 59 below. The first interesting interpretation based on them concerns the more significant progression that metaphorical expressions score when SB1 and SB3 are compared. On these grounds, it is possible to ascertain a regular pattern if metaphors associated with nature (PERPETRATOR IS FORCE OF NATURE, PERPETRATOR IS ANIMAL) are at issue. Conversely, significant differences are found if the remaining source domains are contemplated. According to these results, a greater degree of difference is found when conceptualising the perpetrator as a war enemy and/or as a spiritual or non-corporeal entity. After this, the most significant difference is found to provide more fictionalised accounts of the perpetrator, whereas seeing the perpetrator as a figure of authority suggests the least subtle significance.

Table 59 | Most frequent vehicle terms to metaphorically represent male perpetrators across communities (statistical significance)

PERPETRATOR IS...	SB1-SB2			SB2-SB3			SB1-SB3		
	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL	χ^2	<i>p</i>	LL
FIGURE OF AUTHORITY	3.11	NS	4.09	0	NS	0.06	4.10	0.05	5.25
WAR ENEMY	10.68	0.01	16.93	0.70	NS	1.16	5.68	0.05	10.32
FORCE OF NATURE	0	NS	0.16	0.23	NS	0.81	0.88	NS	1.76
FICTIONAL CREATURE	0.42	NS	1.36	1.22	NS	2.06	4.54	0.05	6.82
SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY	3.83	NS	7.70	0.03	NS	0.22	5.68	0.05	10.32
ANIMAL	0	NS	0	0.23	NS	0.81	0.09	NS	0.52

Based on this cross-community analysis, then, users in SB3 seem to conceptualise the perpetrator as their war enemies more noticeably, although this shift in conceptualisation terms appears to take place in the transit from SB1 to SB2 ($p < 0.01$). Likewise, this cross-community comparison suggests that if the initial and the final stages are contrasted, the trend to conceptualise the perpetrator in both abstract and fictionalised ways is more significant among users in SB3 if compared to women contributing to the initial stage. If qualitative explorations of the data are here recalled, it is interesting to realise that survivors in SB3 end up resorting to less concrete entities when conceptualising the perpetrator is at stake (*monsters, vibe*). In contrast to what happens in SB1, the gradual conceptualisation of the perpetrator as a war entity may be cited as evidence of survivor's progressive empowerment throughout these online communities, which has been previously evidenced by some other discursive traits in previous analyses.

8.5 Concluding remarks

This final section sets out to garner the most relevant conclusions this chapter has reached after examining the most frequent figurative mechanisms in which female survivors represent themselves and male perpetrators of IPV as social actors in the online forum under scrutiny. Embedded within the ‘discourse dynamics framework’ for the investigation metaphor (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), this chapter has sought to complement findings reached by Chapters 6 and 7 by means of including a metaphor-led discourse analysis approach to investigate, and better comprehend, IPV-related discourse. More specifically, the powerful role that metaphor plays when conceptualising different realities has been considered here as an interesting perspective from which figurative representations of IPV survivors and perpetrators can contribute to shape these social actors’ collective identities in discourse. Thus, following a similar pattern than in previous chapters, the most remarkable findings will be gathered in the light of the three research questions at the kernel of this chapter. After that, challenges and limitations encountered in the research process will be discussed, and possible lines of future research will also be addressed.

As specified in Section 8.3 above, the first research question namely focuses on IPV female survivors’ self-representations and is worded as follows:

(RQ3.1) How are female survivors of IPV figuratively represented in their own digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

First of all, there are several discursive traits that can be said to characterise women’s figurative self-representation in the first online community at issue (SB1). As discussed above, the metaphorical expression SELF IS DUAL ENTITY is the most frequently used in SB1 and pervasively so in the remaining two communities. This dualism tends to be discursively instantiated by metonymical (and symbolic) oppositions (*brain* versus *heart*) in which the emotional part seems to justify many violent actions on the perpetrator’s side. Apart from this, metaphorical vehicles that accentuate these users’ low self-esteem are already found in this community, as evidenced by the presence of metaphorical expressions that rely on source domains such as FRAUD or DRAMA QUEEN, which will be more salient in this community than in the other two. Not less importantly, users in SB1 use a wide range of metaphorical

expressions that foreground conceptualisations of themselves as prisoners, although subtle differences can be spotted through a closer analysis of these cases.

The most frequent figurative self-representations in SB2 are not drastically different from those found in SB1. Despite the fact that curious divergences can be traced when exploring examples in depth, users in this community seem more eager to represent themselves by means of use fictionalised metaphoric references, which are seen to uphold the dichotomous conceptualisations of the self in many cases. This community is also interesting as far as metaphors concerning users' low self-esteem are concerned. As illustrated by a range of examples, it is unproblematic to find metaphors that evoke the process of reconstruction that female survivors need to experience in order to recover their own identities before the abusive relationship took place.

As a matter of fact, metaphors connected to survivors' dualism in identity terms adopt a more radical stance in SB3. This separation of one's identity in two easily-identified parts seems to be the outcome of the battle that users in SB3 conceptualise more saliently. As a result of this battle, as evidenced by many textual examples, metaphors in which survivors conceptualise themselves as liberated entities abound in this community, especially if the other two are contrasted. Furthermore, this process of liberation seems to bring about metaphorical expressions that highlight users' awareness of their worth, and images of themselves as broken entities are, while frequent, grounded in past versions of themselves.

Moving now to the second research question, it should be recalled that its main objective was to explore figurative representations that female survivors in this forum use to discursively represent IPV perpetrators, as its wording suggests:

(RQ3.2) How are male perpetrators figuratively represented in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with IPV?

One of the first interesting observations if figurative representations of both social actors are taken into account concerns the difference in terms of metaphor vehicles and their frequencies. Thus, male perpetrators of IPV in SB1 are metaphorically represented by resorting to several forces of nature. Apart from this, the very pervasive metaphorical pattern PERPETRATOR IS FIGURE OF AUTHORITY is also relevant

in this first community. Regardless of the mechanism being used, metaphorical accounts tend to make use of miscellaneous domains in which roles related to agentivity and de-agentivity are generally associated with the perpetrator and the survivor respectively. It is interesting to observe how these representations contrast with those employed by survivors to represent themselves, since images of low self-esteem and self-conceptualisations as prisoners are relevant in SB1.

In contrast to representations in SB1, many of the actions in which the perpetrator is figuratively engaged in SB2 seem to be rooted in the realms of confrontation, where war-related lexical items are particularly predominant. Thus, instantiations of the perpetrator as a war-related enemy also entail a more proactive stance among these survivors. This is somewhat suggested by textual evidence found in SB2, where users' conceptualisations of the abusive relationship as something that can be won or lost (like a battle) depending on the tactics one uses seem to construct these users at the other end of a conflicting situation. Nonetheless, it is curious to notice that metaphorical self-representations resorting to this war/battle domain are not very salient in SB2. To put it differently, this conflictive atmosphere in SB2 seems to be achieved by the figurative representations of the perpetrator as a war enemy and not by means of one's conceptualisations as such (which prevails in SB3). Therefore, it can be interpreted that users in SB2 are still struggling to see themselves as fighters (although they seem to be aware of the perpetrator as an enemy), and this crystallises in SB3. Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge the tendency to activate the perpetrator as an entity that cannot be easily conceptualised. As a matter of fact, it is possible to come across descriptions of the perpetrator as an omnipresent entity who can manage to control everything the survivor does (and thinks), even without being physically present. The fact that these two metaphor groupings co-exist in the same community may look quite contradictory, but it should be remembered that SB2 is precisely characterised by a more hybrid, transitory nature that also permeates the type of discourse found here. Apart from this, this can also be seen as the incipient tendency among users to engage in more abstract conceptualisations of the perpetrator, a pattern that materialises in SB3.

As previously anticipated, figurative representations of the perpetrator in SB3 are characterised by the consistent tendency to fictionalise the perpetrator in several ways. In contrast to abstract representations in SB2, perpetrators in SB3 are more

closely related to more intangible concepts which, odd though as it may be, are nonetheless associated with physical actions. Thus, the perpetrator is usually represented as a negative vibe that can even kill or occupy survivors' mental spaces (which are metaphorically emptied when the abuser is no longer part of their lives). This gradual shift towards the fictionalisation of the perpetrator can also be observed in the prominence that the metaphorical expressions of PERPETRATOR IS FICTIONAL CREATURE has in this third community, which precisely shows a significant divergence if SB1 and SB3 are contrasted. Furthermore, in consonance with results obtained by Chapter 7, this fictionalisation of the perpetrator is more frequently accomplished by means of discursive collectivisation.

Finally, the third research question concerned whether these figurative representations differed in use across the communities at issue. In other words, attention was paid to the degree of significance of the similarities and differences of the most frequent source domains as occurring in these three online communities, as its wording suggests:

(RQ3.3) To what extent do these figurative representations vary across the three online communities nested in the IPV forum under scrutiny?

Owing to this cross-community analysis, one of the most interesting findings reached in this chapter concerns the survivors' divergent use of metaphorical expressions to represent themselves and the abusive perpetrators. Thus, on the basis of comparing normalised frequencies and after applying several statistical measures of significance, it is possible to affirm a higher metaphorical density is gradually attained in 'Life after abuse' (SB3) for the purposes of both self and other-representation. Furthermore, and as indicated by the higher log-likelihood score, metaphorical representations for self-representation vary more significantly from SB1 to SB3 (LL=19.05) than when the same divergence is calculated for perpetrator-related metaphors (LL=15.32). Nonetheless, both pointers indicate that the degree of significance is high, so both social actors are activated in more metaphorical terms in SB3 than in SB1. This result echoed conclusions reached in Chapter 7, where a qualitative exploration of the data in the light of SARDDA served to prove that these forum users make a gradual use of non-pronominal mechanisms to activate the perpetrator (and themselves). The higher presence of lexical mechanisms to activate the perpetrator in discourse in SB3 also served to refute findings in Chapter 6, where

corpus-assisted techniques could lead to the impression that less discursive prominence was given to the perpetrator in the final community.

Focusing first on how figurative representations of users as IPV survivors differ across the communities, a very small degree of variance is observed in the most frequent vehicle term used for self-referential purposes. As showed in the corresponding section (8.4.2.3), the conceptualisation of oneself as a dual entity is pervasively used in the three communities (19.5% of all metaphorical expressions). After this, the second most frequent vehicle term (PRISONER) also appears in a rather uniform fashion, although different nuances can be identified if the same domain is contrasted in the three communities. The third most common way for forum users to activate themselves in all the corpus involves images of the self as a broken entity. However, as previously discussed, a qualitative exploration of this quantitative finding was needed to find out that representations of the self as broken entities are more usually placed in the past.

As far as significant divergences across communities is concerned, a strong significance is observed in the metaphorical expressions SELF IS LIBERATED ENTITY, which resembles the shift in conceptual terms that, at the same time, mirrors these users' change in psychological/emotional terms from SB1 to SB3. Statistical measures also suggest the significance of the figurative expression SELF IS WAR/BATTLE FIGHTER in SB3, which can be interpreted as another piece of evidence of the more empowered type of discourse survivors at this final stage manifest. This is very much in correlation with the type of metaphorical expressions used to instantiate the perpetrator in discourse, which are discussed in what follows.

Broadly speaking, one of the most interesting conclusions in this regard deals with the most consistent tendency to represent the perpetrator by means of the same metaphorical expression. As pointed out above, seeing the perpetrator as a figure of authority amounts to 25.4% of all the metaphorical references for the perpetrator. Despite the rather expected character of this, subtle differences are again observed if attention is paid to how this is done in each community. After this, the most frequent vehicle term used for these purposes is that conceptualising the perpetrator as a war enemy (14.8%). Given the correspondent salience of this source domain for self-referential purposes, it is unproblematic to claim that users in the Survivors' Forum

conceptualise the abusive relationship as a battle in which several elements (including a part of themselves) can be won or lost depending on, for example, the tactics at work. Despite its less uniform distribution, representing the perpetrator as a force of nature, a fictional character or a spiritual/non-corporeal entity is also pervasive across the three communities.

Turning now to the degree of significance observed in the divergent representation of the perpetrators across the three communities, the most significant shift concerns the metaphorical expression PERPETRATOR IS WAR ENEMY and it takes place from SB1 to SB2 (DIVORCE IS WAR). This is especially interesting because, as discussed before, survivors' own conceptualising shift as war/battle fighters happens from SB2 to SB3. This may suggest that survivors' awareness of IPV as a conflictive scenario starts from the intermediate stage and consolidates in the final stage, whereas the perpetrator is more clearly seen as a war enemy even in SB2. Finally, this cross-community analysis suggests that if the initial and the final stages are contrasted, the trend to conceptualise the perpetrator in both abstract and fictionalised ways is more significant among users in SB3 if compared to SB1, which is mostly instantiated by means of non-corporeal entities or fictionalised characters.

Despite the thought-provoking character of these findings, it is important to take into account that total instances behind these metaphorical expressions are sometimes too scarce, which stands as one of the most important limitations of this chapter. Thus, regardless of the fact that the previous analyses are based on a corpus of *circa* 130,000 words, the distribution of some vehicle terms is still limited. This is triggered by the methodological decision of trying to respect users' semantic nuances when identifying metaphor vehicles, which resulted in a plethora of source domains that complicated a more systematic handling of them. One possible way to sort this out, especially when considering vehicle terms for self-representation purposes, might be the outline of more overarching vehicle groups to deal with possible mappings more systematically. Likewise, as also identified in the previous chapter, one of the most beneficial practices when coding chunks of discourse is related to peer-coding. A further reliability check could be introduced by means of this *praxis*, especially when the high degree of subjectivity involved in metaphor identification is concerned.

When trying to consider possible lines for future research, one of the most forthcoming projects will investigate the way in which these users figuratively conceptualise the abusive relationship they are experiencing. As the instances analysed in this chapter suggest, metaphorical characterisations of an IPV relationship enrich the findings in this thesis by providing more grounded, discourse-driven evidence of how women suffering from IPV conceptualise the reality they are in. In broader terms, the exploration of online contexts through the lenses of Critical Metaphor Studies is very likely to offer insightful findings on how traditionally offline communicative topics are thought and talked about. Additionally, as scholars from the fields of psychology are encouraging (Tay, 2013; Tay & Jordan, 2015; Tay, 2017), it would be interesting to investigate the role that the vehicle terms identified in this chapter can contribute to a better treatment of female survivors of IPV in face-to-face psychotherapy, since the adoption of metaphors of this sort may facilitate professionals' communicative skills with women in need of assistance.

8.6 Summary

In a nutshell, this chapter has set out to investigate the most salient figurative representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV in an online environment. To this end, the theoretical foundations upon which this chapter is built have been brought to the fore, mostly relying on Cameron and Maslen's 'discourse dynamics framework' (2010) to frame this research. Once the multiple methodological considerations were discussed, the greatest part of this chapter has focused on the different figurative representations found in the corpus under scrutiny. In a similar fashion to the previous chapters, this chapter has first dealt with metaphors used for self-referential purposes, providing qualitative explorations of the data in the light of their quantitative significance. A similar procedure was followed to discuss figurative representations of male perpetrators of IPV. Broadly speaking, this chapter has sought to complement chapter seven in order to provide a better understanding of less literal mechanisms used to activate these two major social actors in these women's digitally-recounted experiences with this type of violence.

CHAPTER 9 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

This final chapter is divided into two sections. Firstly, the major findings of this research are summarised in the light of the different research questions guiding this study. Additionally, the main implications of the thesis are also identified and discussed in this first section. Secondly, the most salient limitations of this research are outlined. This section also suggests future directions for research along the overarching topics of this thesis are suggested.

9.1 Summary and implications of the findings

The first part of this thesis consisted of the main theoretical foundations upon which this research is built. Although this part was mostly intended to discuss the main concepts informing this study, some of them were also problematised and several theoretical contributions were introduced in the development of these chapters.

Thus, Chapter 2 aimed to present a detailed account of IPV as a public health issue in most contemporary societies that generates social relationships dominated by power imbalances. On the one hand, this chapter sought to contextualise this kind of violence from a macro-sociological perspective by explaining key factors in order to understand its possible causes, dynamics, typologies or consequences. One of the main objectives of this chapter was to raise awareness of the importance of continuing research, from different areas of expertise, on the many contexts in which IPV can be manifested. On the other hand, this chapter also reviewed existing literature concerned with the investigation of IPV. Apart from briefly addressing studies carried out in disciplines in which more direct intervention prevails (such as health, psychological, social and even legal sciences), attention was also paid to the increasing number of researchers from discourse-related disciplines who are actively joining this endeavour. It was precisely through this review of literature that a research niche was identified. Despite the more frequent tendency to investigate recontextualised discourse practices around IPV (through different media, for instance), less emphasis has been put so far on exploring the discourse used *by* key social actors in relationships ruled by power imbalances, like those with IPV certainly entails. Overall, then, this chapter tried to justify the need to inspect IPV from an integrative, holistic approach in which the multi-faceted character of this sort of

violence is accounted for. To this end, this chapter also suggested terminological alternatives that institutions working towards the improvement of IPV could take into account.

Chapter 3, also embedded within the theoretical part of this thesis, offered a global view of the practice context in which the discourse analysed in this research is framed. As pinpointed several times throughout this dissertation, this chapter was motivated by the drastic transformations that technologies are provoking in the ways we communicative nowadays. Therefore, the chapter addressed a plethora of issues that characterise online discourse and digitally-mediated communication. This was done partly because the type of language this research focuses on is, to a great extent, a consequence of the multiple affordances and contextual factors that characterise online forums like the one explored in this thesis. Issues concerning the process of curating the self in the offline-online divide were also discussed here, especially because the transference of identity traits to digital scenarios are heavily influenced by discourse. Quite relatedly, the chapter also considered the role of many affordances of digitally-mediated communication in the construction of online collective identities. This was examined to comprehend why Internet forums are becoming relevant discursive communities where social practices which were until recently confined to private spheres, such as those linked to one's health or intimate relationships, are becoming more public.

Chapter 4 took a more theoretical turn in order to outline notions more connected with the view on discursive approximation that prevails in this research. For these purposes, the presentation and discussion of core concepts such as *discourse* and the view of it as social practice were brought to the fore. In the endeavour to justify the suitability of investigating a phenomenon such as IPV from a CDS perspective, this chapter also offered an exploration of central tenets upon which CDS is built. For instance, discussions around notions such as *critique* or power sought to provide further evidence of the interconnectedness between language and social phenomena forged in power imbalances. Likewise, after having offered a general overview of the different approaches from which critical discourse analyses can be carried out, the chapter explained the main tenets of the socio-cognitive approach to discourse. Emphasis was placed on notions such as the socio-cognitive representations (SCRs), which are at the kernel of this study.

Once the main theoretical underpinnings of this thesis were explained and discussed, Chapter 5 was mostly devoted to providing details about the general methodological decisions adopted during the different stages of this research. On the one hand, this chapter was concerned with the process of data selection and collection. To this end, the chapter provided an in-depth *socio-netological* exploration of the primary source of data and the online participants integrating it. Additionally, the chapter also paid careful attention to one of the most important concerns around this study: making sure research procedures complied with good research practices in ethical terms. Therefore, a considerable section in this chapter addressed the many ongoing ethical considerations at the heart of Internet-related studies. Interestingly, the engagement with the ethical part of this study prompted the formulation of a research protocol based on the online site under scrutiny and the many issues considered when treating sensitive data like these with due respect.

The second part of this dissertation addressed the three main specific objectives identified at the outset of this research from three empirical perspectives. The main findings and the most salient implications for this research are summarised in what follows.

Chapter 6 took a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach by making use of the text analysis software tool LIWC. In short, this chapter sought to test the hypothesis that discursive divergences were likely to be found between the three communities in the VIOL_CORPUS, which would be regarded as a sign of the distinctive character in ideological and/or emotional terms of these IPV-related communities.

This expectation was confirmed by paying attention to scores provided by LIWC categories within 'language variables'. Thus, a higher score in analytical style was found in SB1 ('Is it abuse?') in contrast to SB3 ('Life after abuse'), which may be indicative of a shift from more narrative, personal discourse to more hierarchical and logical discursive patterns (Pennebaker et al., 2014). Likewise, women writing in SB3 engaged in more authentic discourse than users in SB1. Lower scores in 'authenticity' are usually indicative of more guarded, distanced forms of discourse (Newman et al., 2003; Peslak, 2018). One of the most remarkable discursive differences was observed if the category 'tone' was considered. According to the

LIWC score for this category, survivors writing in SB3 showed more positive forms of discourse than those in SB1. By comparing these scores to those obtained in the NON_VIOL corpus, the overtly negative discursive tone of the three online communities in the VIOL_CORPUS became even more noticeable.

Additionally, based on preliminary observations, it was hypothesised that users contributing to SB1 would show more pessimistic traces in their discourse than users writing in SB3. This original expectation was also confirmed by looking at the categories within 'emotionality'. Therefore, SB3 shows a significant increase as far as the discursive inclusion of positive emotions is concerned ($p < 0.047$). Evidence of this shift in discursive/emotional terms was also suggested by the fact that the opposite tendency was identified when negative emotions were at issue. If different negative emotions are contrasted, (lexical) sadness seemed to be more uniformly present across the three communities within the VIOL_CORPUS. Conversely, 'anger' was significantly more expressed in SB1 than in SB3 (a divergence which was significant at $p < 0.041$). It was also interesting to find out that LIWC-provided scores from analysing the micro-level of discourse seemed to correlate findings in the macro-sociological level. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 2, 'anger' is the most prevailing feeling (and not 'fear' or 'shock', for instance) recognised among women facing physical violence (FRA, 2014).

Likewise, it was expected that women posting in SB1 would put more discursive emphasis on the perpetrator as a social actor than those contributing to SB3, which was seen as an indicator of the decreasing prominence of the perpetrator in these women's lives after abuse. LIWC's scores obtained in the many categories devoted to the exploration of pronouns were employed for these purposes. In contrast to a more uniform, non-significant distribution of other types of pronouns (such as 'I' or 'we'), a significant divergence was found in the way the third person pronoun 'he' was used across the three communities. Thus, a gradual decrease was observed from SB1 to SB3, which was interpreted as evidence proving that female survivors gave less discursive salience to the perpetrator in SB3 than in SB1. On the contrary, the use of the pronoun 'they' was used increasingly from SB1 to SB3. Although this difference was not significant, this was taken as a possible indicator of the discursive shift in which the perpetrator was activated across these online communities, moving from individualisation to collectivisation. In addition, it was considered interesting to

sketch out discursive patterns around the use of pronouns that had not been initially contemplated. For instance, users in SB1 made more use of both personal and impersonal pronouns than users in the other two communities ($p < 0.001$). Findings in these two categories offered a twofold interpretation, which needs to be further investigated. On the one hand, this may be explained by the need among users at initial stages within an abusive relationship to express themselves in more abstract ways, relying on the discursive vagueness granted by pronouns. On the other hand, this could also be understood by taking the referential function of pronouns into account. Thus, users in SB1 wrote their posts based on commonly shared knowledge which was unambiguous for the readership they had in mind. Lastly, the fact that posts in SB1 are lengthier in words than posts in SB2 or SB3 may have triggered an overuse of pronouns in their referential function.

Moving now to the main findings and implications of Chapter 7, it is noteworthy to recall that its main objective was to explore the socio-cognitive representations (SCRs) of both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV instantiated discursively as social actors. The role of SCRs in the construction of online collective identities was given particular prominence. To this end, this chapter also delved into the so-called 'Social Actor Representation in Digital Discourses of Abuse' (SARDDA) a feature-based analytical model that builds on van Leeuwen's Social Actors Approach (2008). In fact, the *ad hoc* design of this analytical framework and its systematic application to analyse the data was seen as one of the most considerable contributions of this empirical chapter.

A central hypothesis in Chapter 7 was that SCRs of the two main social actors in IPV would show relevant discursive divergences across the three communities within the Survivors' Forum. Taking into account RQ2.2 and RQ2.3, and partly influenced by the results obtained in the text-analysis using LIWC, it was expected that less discursive prominence would be given to perpetrators in SB3.

Based on the analysis of SARDDA features and on the identification of social across the three communities, interesting insights were obtained. In fact, the expectation that initially assumed a lesser discursive presence of the perpetrator in SB3 had to be rejected. As a matter of fact, it was observed that textual representations of both female survivors and male perpetrators became even more salient in SB3.

Therefore, this suggested that lower LIWC scores for the pronoun 'he' in SB3 could not be directly associated with the assumption that male perpetrators received less discursive attention in SB3. Thus, the increase of textual representations for both social actors in SB3 could be interpreted as a shift in the way social actors are discursively represented, which is discussed in what follows.

Another expectation in Chapter 7 assumed that the discursive representation of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV would be more discursively instantiated by means of collectivisation in SB3. In this case, the cross-community comparisons carried out in this chapter were used to validate this hypothesis, since both female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV were more frequently collectivised in SB3, especially if compared to SB1. It was possible to confirm, therefore, that a tendency to represent perpetrators through plurality gained prominence in SB3. In short, this was thought to signal at the process of collectivised identity representation that seemed to reach its summit in SB3. What is more, a close textual analysis of this community reveals that the enhancement of in-group collective identity is frequently achieved via more direct references addressed at the readers of any post, which seemed to play a key role in this overall positive emotional tone that characterises the discourse of this community.

As far as categorisation was concerned, it was expected that female users of this forum would use more functionalised representations (emphasis on representing someone on the basis of what s/he *does*) of the perpetrators when contributing to 'Life after abuse' (SB3). A cross-community comparison along these lines served to reveal that IPV perpetrators were more commonly represented by means of functionalisations (what they do) at the final stage. This was thought to reveal a tendency to de-emphasise the mechanisms that evoke their features as human beings (*man, person*). In contrast, survivors' self-representations in SB3 backgrounded their role either in professional terms (*the main breadwinner*) or as members of an abusive relationship (*the victim*) and foregrounded terms that fall within the realm of what they are (*ladies, women*). This could have interesting implications as far as gendered identities are concerned, since terms using classified identifications in which gender is discursively marked (*ladies, women*) are significantly more used by women in SB3 than classified identification that evoke less marked connotations (*person*). Again, several interpretations were discussed in this

regard. On the one hand, this tendency could point out to a more strengthened gendered identity perceived by women after undergoing abusive experiences. On the other hand, the trend to represent themselves as collectivised entities in SB3 may also help to explain this. As a matter of fact, the use of 'ladies' as a vocative also outstands in SB3 if compared to SB1.

Last but not least, the application of SARDDA shed interesting light on the type of evaluative remarks used for self-representation purposes. In fact, the highly significant ($p < 0.01$) increase of representations of women as survivors in neutral terms was observed in SB3 if compared to SB1, which was linked to the effect caused by the feeling of belonging to this online community. As similar research has suggested (Coulson, 2005; Lee & Lin, 2016), self-help online communities can cause a general improvement in users' quality of life (offline), reduction of stress levels, fortified decision making and improved self-determination. In contrast, users contributing to SB2 engage in very non-neutral representations of themselves (91.5% of them are heavily marked by their negative nuance). These findings at the micro-level seemed to mirror conclusions reached at more macro/sociological levels. As claimed by Owens (1993), a tendency towards self-deprecation tends to be indicative of the negative part of one's self-esteem, which in most cases crystallises in discourse that belittles one's worth and disregards one's moral worth or virtues.

Overall, then, Chapter 7 offered an analysis of socio-cognitive representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV as social actors and managed to connect findings at the micro-level with both the meso-level (in the light of the online forum as the context in which discourse is produced) and the macro-level. By doing so, this chapter tried to build bridges between these textual representations and the many implications they may have on a more psycho-sociological level.

Finally, Chapter 8 embodied the third empirical exploration of the corpus at issue. More specifically, this chapter aimed to explore the socio-cognitive representations of both survivors and perpetrators in this online forum from a more abstract perspective. Therefore, attention was paid to discursive representations that were accomplished by means of figurative mechanisms. It was thought that the inclusion of metaphor as an analytical tool could yield interesting insights to better comprehend

IPV survivors, especially considering the potential that metaphor has to conceptualise complex realities.

The main hypothesis in this chapter was that the different ideological, psychological and emotional characterisations of the three online communities under scrutiny would bring about a conceptual shift when women in this online forum represent themselves and their perpetrators discursively.

To start with, it was found that a higher metaphorical density was more salient in SB3 for the purposes of both self and other-representation. Furthermore, metaphorical expressions for self-representation varied more significantly from SB1 to SB3 than when the same divergence was calculated for perpetrator-related metaphors. Thus, both social actors were activated in more metaphorical terms in SB3 than in SB1. This result echoed conclusions reached in Chapter 7, where a qualitative exploration of the data in the light of SARDDA served to prove that these forum users make a gradual use of non-pronominal mechanisms to activate the perpetrator (and themselves). The higher presence of lexical mechanisms to activate the perpetrator in discourse in SB3 also served to refute again one of the hypotheses in Chapter 6, where corpus-assisted techniques could lead to the impression that less discursive prominence was given to the perpetrator in the final community.

If figurative self-representations are considered first, this third empirical analysis revealed that the self-conceptualisation as a dual entity was pervasively used in the three communities. More specifically, this dualism was linguistically realised in most cases as symbolic metonymies, in which women's *hearts* and *brains* were frequently used to represent survivors' internal confrontation when trying to find out how to proceed. The second most frequent vehicle term (PRISONER) also appeared in a rather uniform fashion, although different nuances could be identified if the same domain was contrasted in the three communities. As far as the divergences across communities were concerned, a strong significance was observed in the metaphorical expression SELF IS LIBERATED ENTITY, which resembled the shift in conceptual terms reflecting these users' change in psychological/emotional terms from SB1 to SB3. Statistical measures also suggested a significant change in the figurative expression SELF IS WAR/BATTLE FIGHTER in the final stage, which was

interpreted as another piece of evidence of the more empowered type of discourse manifested by survivors at this final stage.

In turn, it was interesting to find out that the most frequently used metaphorical expression when representing the perpetrator involved seeing him as a FIGURE OF AUTHORITY, which amounted to 25.4% of all the metaphorical references for the perpetrator. This salient conceptualisation gains greater prominence if we take into account that the most frequent metaphorical expression for self-referential purposes was SELF IS PRISONER. If these findings are combined, then, it is possible to claim that survivors in this online forum conceptualise IPV relationships as a trap from which it is difficult to escape. Furthermore, it is curious to find out that this conceptualisation has been used by sociological research in IPV. For instance, work by key figures in the field (Stark, 2009) extensively investigates different mechanisms through which men *entrap* women in personal life, which becomes a central argument to understand the crucial role that coercive control plays in IPV relationships (see Chapter 2).

After this, conceptualising the perpetrator as a WAR ENEMY was another frequent vehicle term. Given the correspondent salience of this source domain for self-referential purposes, it was unproblematic to affirm that users in the Survivors' Forum conceptualise the abusive relationship as a battle in which several elements (including a part of themselves) can be won or lost depending on, for example, the tactics at work. Despite its less uniform distribution, representing the perpetrator as A FORCE OF NATURE, A FICTIONAL CHARACTER OR A SPIRITUAL/NON-CORPOREAL ENTITY was also pervasive across the three communities. Once statistical measurements were contrasted, the most significant shift concerned PERPETRATOR IS WAR ENEMY. Additionally, this cross-community comparison suggested that if the initial and the final stages were contrasted, the trend to conceptualise the perpetrator in both abstract and fictionalised ways was more significant among users in SB3 if compared to SB1. This was mostly instantiated by means of non-corporeal entities (*a negative vibe*) or fictionalised characters (*monsters*). This process of abstraction that the conceptualisation of the perpetrator seems to undergo in SB3 may have an interesting interpretation if the higher presence of the metaphorical mapping SELF IS LIBERATED ENTITY in SB3 is borne in mind. This process of liberation may also bring about a process of non-corporealisation/fictionalisation towards the perpetrator, in which both his presence and agentivity are de-emphasised. This linguistic

representation of the perpetrator in more abstract ways may also explain why software tools such as LIWC benefit from more qualitative explorations of the data.

Broadly speaking, then, Chapter 8 was devoted to the exploration of socio-cognitive representations of female survivors and male perpetrators of IPV in their figurative instantiations in the online forum under investigation. Unlike the previous empirical analyses managed to accomplish, it was harder to establish specific connections between results at the micro-level of discourse and related research at the meso/macro level. It is true, though, that examining metaphorical representations in online contexts of IPV is yet a rather unmapped territory. The limitations and possible future lines of research that can be identified from the empirical contributions of this thesis are discussed in the next section.

9.2 Limitations and related further research

This section briefly outlines the most remarkable limitations encountered at the many stages of this research process. In addition, possible ways to address these limitations are in most cases discussed in the light of potential lines of future research that studies along these lines may wish to follow.

Although most of the limitations are associated with the empirical part of this thesis, it is worth mentioning some of the most noticeable obstacles encountered in more theoretical parts of this research.

Partly influenced by the problem-oriented nature of many studies motivated by CDS, critical discourse analysts are expected to be aware of the social phenomenon they intend to scrutinise from a linguistic perspective. As discussed in Chapter 4, CDS researchers tend to be involved in an epistemological and methodological eclecticism that is not always easy to handle. More specifically, one of the main limitations that I had to overcome at very initial stages of this project was precisely connected to a lack of expertise in the field of violence and IPV. I tried to mitigate this shortcoming by undergoing specific training and reading extensive research connected to this social phenomenon, which eventually crystallised in a rather dense theoretical chapter (Chapter 2). Thus, this chapter was intended to fill the many

theoretical gaps that had to be addressed in order to deal with this worrying social issue in a more suitable way.

Likewise, another limitation less grounded in empirical approaches is related to the context of discourse practice investigated for this dissertation. In fact, according to Locher (2014), one of the main limitations concerning research on digital contexts is connected to the rapidly changing scenarios they entail. As mentioned in Chapter 3, new online communities were added to the Survivor's Forum as this research progressed, including communities which prioritised posts with a positive content. Fortunately, these changes took place once the corpus had been collected.

Moving now to the three empirical chapters, the application of LIWC for the purposes of Chapter 6 posed some limitations. As previously discussed, scores provided by LIWC (across the many categories it contains) were seen as a good starting point to obtain a general discursive picture of the discourse at issue. Despite this, however, a reference point from which comparative conclusions could be reached was necessary, an issue which was solved by collecting a comparable control corpus with which the scores from the experimental corpus could be contrasted. Future versions of this software tool could perhaps combine users' submitted data with any established reference corpus and generate an intra-corpora analysis based on the many language variables and semantic categories LIWC can provide. Still, as suggested in this chapter, comparative research might require a very specific type of reference corpus to establish more accurate contrasts. Quite relatedly, one of the most important shortcomings of this tool is that actual excerpts of analysed data were not available for users to check how the coding procedure had been carried out. Still, this was sorted by applying the same tool to two different corpora equal in size.

Despite the usefulness of LIWC scores to build bridges between the micro and the macro levels of discourse, results deriving from quantitative explorations need to be treated with due precaution. As stated by main developers of LIWC itself, "the study of word use as a reflection of psychological state is in its early stages" (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010: 30). As already mentioned, claims about the salience of male perpetrators of IPV on the basis of pronoun usage triggered misleading interpretations, which were modified by subsequent qualitative analyses. Together with context, software tools are still not well-equipped with mechanisms to deal with

figurative language or ironic and sarcastic references. Consequently, studies aiming at providing a holist view of a discursive phenomenon should always leave room for qualitative examinations, which can usually account for many of the drawbacks already mentioned.

Chapter 7 also presents limitations at the methodological level. These are connected to the application of SARDDA, the feature-based tool designed to specifically analyse the data this research examines. Although this framework proved to be useful for the main research objectives, some of its features would benefit from further refinement. Thus, forthcoming applications of SARDDA would need to provide a more fine-grained specification for features that were more vaguely defined in this case (as in the category [NON_CAT], for instance). Likewise, the application of SARDDA by relying on double coding will surely be beneficial for reliability purposes. Once these caveats are considered, however, it would be interesting to test whether SARDDA is suitable for the analysis of similar contexts.

When thinking of possible future studies connected to Chapter 7, it would be interesting to explore socio-cognitive representations of key social actors in different types of abusive relationships. In fact, it would be possible to engage in a contrastive study to investigate how male victims of IPV discursively represent female perpetrators and try to establish similarities and divergences. Likewise, it would be equally interesting to study IPV in same-sex relationships in order to keep shedding light into both victims' and perpetrators' understandings of this type of violence. Furthermore, it would be curious to explore if the different types of relationships might be linked to different socio-cognitive representations at the micro-level of discourse.

As far as the limitations for Chapter 8 are concerned, one important shortcoming is linked to how metaphorical expressions were handled from a quantitative perspective. Thus, regardless of the fact that the previous analyses are based on a corpus of circa 130,000 words, the distribution of some vehicle terms is still limited. This was prompted by the methodological decision to respect users' semantic nuances when identifying metaphor vehicles as much as possible, which resulted in a wide range of source domains which could have been grouped more systematically. One possible way to sort this out, especially when considering vehicle terms for self-representation purposes, might be the outline of more overarching

vehicle groups to deal with possible mappings more systematically, perhaps on the basis of levels of schematicity (Clausner & Croft, 1997). Likewise, as also identified in the previous chapter, one of the most beneficial practices when coding chunks of discourse is related to peer-coding. A further reliability check could be introduced by means of this praxis, especially when the high degree of subjectivity involved in metaphor identification is concerned.

If possible directions for future research are contemplated, an interesting project will be to investigate the way in which these online users figuratively conceptualise the abusive relationship they are experiencing. In fact, as some instances analysed in this chapter suggest, the exploration of metaphorical characterisations of an IPV relationship will surely enrich the findings provided in this thesis by adding more grounded, discourse-driven evidence of how women suffering from IPV conceptualise the reality they are in. Broadly speaking, examining online contexts through the lenses of Critical Metaphor Studies is very likely to offer insightful findings on how traditionally offline communicative topics are thought about and talked about. In fact, as suggested by scholars from the fields of psychology (Tay, 2013; Tay & Jordan, 2015; Tay, 2017), it would be interesting to assess the role that the vehicle terms identified in this chapter can contribute to a better treatment of female survivors of IPV in face-to-face psychotherapy. For instance, as already explored in health-related scenarios (Semino et al., 2015), future studies along these lines may inspect how the adoption of metaphorical expressions identified in Chapter 8 may help professionals from health and social sciences to better understand the how survivors of IPV conceptualise and talk about the situation they are in.

Broadly speaking, I believe that research seeking to contribute to the improvement of either groups or individuals who are intentionally oppressed by any arbitrary reason should always be encouraged. Although multidisciplinary research efforts are always necessary, this thesis is motivated by the desire to provide empirically-based insights into female survivors of IPV and their discourse in order to better comprehend their own realities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Institutional responses addressing Intimate Partner Violence. A summary

DATE/YEAR	INSTITUTIONAL ACTION	MAIN IMPLICATIONS
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "<u>All</u> human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Art. 1) • It reassures the principle of no-distinction (regardless of race, colour, sex, language...) (Art. 2)
1979	United Nations Convention - Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ⁶²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Discrimination against women shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex" (Art. 1) • Members will have to adopt "the measures required for the elimination of such discrimination in all its forms and manifestations"
1993	United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women ⁶³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions of gender violence are provided • It includes its typologies and its possible manifestations • It defends women's rights to be protected in the light of Human Rights and fundamental freedom in all possible contexts (political, economic, cultural, civil, etc.) • It encourages to condemn and eliminate gender violence in any form
1994	Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women ⁶⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed by the Organization of American States (OAS), it meant a very positive contribution to prevent, sanction and eradicate any form of violence against women. • It triggered legal transformations around VAW and IPV in most countries in the area
1996	World Health Assembly - WHA49.25 ⁶⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence is for the first time identified as a worldwide public health problem • It encouraged members to assess violence and its consequences in their territories and a general action plan was prompted in order to adopt a more quantified stance against violence prevention
1997	Council of Europe: Final Declaration of the Second Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe affirm "their determination to combat violence against

62 Full text: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

63 Full text: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

64 Full text: <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-61.html>

65 Full text:

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/resources/publications/en/WHA4925_eng.pdf

	and Action Plan (Strasbourg) ⁶⁶	women and all forms of sexual exploitation of women"
2003	World Health Assembly - WHA56.2467	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It urged state members to implement the WHO's World Report on Violence and Health (Krug et al. 2002) and to apply both conclusions and recommendations to improve measures in favour of violence prevention and intervention • It advocated "providing support for the improvement of services for survivors of violence" and similar measures to adopt a public health response to the prevention and control of violence
2011	The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) ⁶⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It constitutes the first convention to combat VAW and gender violence put forward by the Council of Europe to try to equal legal measures around this issue across Europe. • It recognises the "structural nature of violence against women as gender-based violence and [...] (as one of the) crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men". • It also recognises that IPV affects women disproportionately, but include men as potential victims of it. • It promotes international co-operation with a view to eradicate the problem (Art. 1) • It fosters research (Art. 11), awareness-raising (Art. 13), education (Art. 14), training of professionals (Art. 15) and preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Art. 16) around IPV • Interestingly, it establishes a specific monitoring mechanism ("GREVIO") to "ensure effective implementation of its provisions by the Parties" (Art. 66)

66 Full text: <https://goo.gl/6H4uYX>

67 Full text: http://apps.who.int/gb/archive/pdf_files/WHA56/ea5624.pdf

68 Full text: <https://goo.gl/tJbCyT>

APPENDIX 2

The Belmont Report of Ethical Research

The Belmont Report identifies three basic principles of ethical research: **beneficence, respect, and justice** (United States National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978;). By engaging with *beneficence*, research should maximise benefits while minimises possible harms to participants and society. Judging from the complexity of dealing with face-to-face interviews with volunteer women who shared their experiences with IPV, collecting data from a medium that did not involve a process of 're-victimisation' of women when retelling their past stories was considered more appropriate. This was also in line with granting *respect* towards female survivors, since as discussed later on, risks were very unlikely to occur given the affordances of the online medium from which data was eventually gathered. As for *justice*, this study does not exploit or ignore one group to benefit another. Rather, and especially if the holistic approach adopted in this research is taken into account, this study aims at making use of discourse-driven evidence in the process of better comprehending IPV as a social phenomenon.

APPENDIX 3

LIWC | Full account of output variables

A full account of output variables available in LIWC is shown below. LIWC users obtain a score (%) for all the variables below after submitting the text under inspection. This is reproduced from Pennebaker et al. (2015).

Category	Abbrev	Examples	Category	Abbrev	Examples
Word count	WC	-	Friends	friend	buddy, neighbor
Summary Language Variables			Female references	female	girl, her, mom
Analytical thinking	Analytic	-	Male references	male	boy, his, dad
Clout	Clout	-	Cognitive processes	cogproc	cause, know, ough
Authentic	Authentic	-	Insight	insight	think, know
Emotional tone	Tone	-	Causation	cause	because, effect
Words/sentence	WPS	-	Discrepancy	discrep	should, would
Words > 6 letters	Sixltr	-	Tentative	tentat	maybe, perhaps
Dictionary words	Dic	-	Certainty	certain	always, never
Linguistic Dimensions			Differentiation	diffèr	hasn't, but, else
Total function words	funct	it, to, no, very	Perceptual processes	percept	look, heard, feeling
Total pronouns	pronoun	I, them, itself	See	see	view, saw, seen
Personal pronouns	ppron	I, them, her	Hear	hear	listen, hearing
1st pers singular	i	I, me, mine	Feel	feel	feels, touch
1st pers plural	we	we, us, our	Biological processes	bio	eat, blood, pain
2nd person	you	you, your, thou	Body	body	cheek, hands, spit
3rd pers singular	shehe	she, her, him	Health	health	clinic, flu, pill
3rd pers plural	they	they, their, they'd	Sexual	sexual	horny, love, incest
Impersonal pronouns	ipron	it, it's, those	Ingestion	ingest	dish, eat, pizza
Articles	article	a, an, the	Drives	drives	
Prepositions	prep	to, with, above	Affiliation	affiliation	ally, friend, social
Auxiliary verbs	auxverb	am, will, have	Achievement	achieve	win, success, better
Common Adverbs	adverb	very, really	Power	power	superior, bully
Conjunctions	conj	and, but, whereas	Reward	reward	take, prize, benefit
Negations	negate	no, not, never	Risk	risk	danger, doubt
Other Grammar			Time orientations	TimeOrient	
Common verbs	verb	eat, come, carry	Past focus	focuspast	ago, did, talked
Common adjectives	adj	free, happy, long	Present focus	focuspresent	today, is, now
Comparisons	compare	greater, best, after	Future focus	focusfuture	may, will, soon
Interrogatives	interrog	how, when, what	Relativity	relativ	area, bend, exit
Numbers	number	second, thousand	Motion	motion	arrive, car, go
Quantifiers	quant	few, many, much	Space	space	down, in, thin
Psychological Processes			Time	time	end, until, season
Affective processes	affect	happy, cried	Personal concerns		
Positive emotion	posemo	love, nice, sweet	Work	work	job, majors, xerox
Negative emotion	negemo	hurt, ugly, nasty	Leisure	leisure	cook, chat, movie
Anxiety	anx	worried, fearful	Home	home	kitchen, landlord
Anger	anger	hate, kill, annoyed	Money	money	audit, cash, owe
Sadness	sad	crying, grief, sad	Religion	relig	altar, church
Social processes	social	mate, talk, they	Death	death	bury, coffin, kill
Family	family	daughter, dad, aunt	Informal language	informal	
			Swear words	swear	fuck, damn, shit
			Netspeak	netspeak	btw, lol, thx
			Assent	assent	agree, OK, yes
			Nonfluencies	nonflu	er, hm, umm
			Fillers	filler	I mean, you know

APPENDIX 4

Keyness analysis by AntConc (Anthony, 2011)

One of the useful tools AntConc offers users is the “Keyword list”, which shows the words that are unusually frequent (or infrequent) in a given corpus in comparison with words in a reference corpus. Broadly speaking, this is done in order to grasp a global understanding of the lexical differences between both corpora (Gabrielatos & Marchi, 2012). Although the inclusion of this keyness analysis was contemplated at first, this was eventually disregarded to add more consistency to Chapter 6 and just focus on LIWC. Still, as illustrated below, this was also considered to understand the different discursive nature of both the VIOL_CORPUS and the NONVIOL_CORPUS. Keywords below are sorted on the basis of their log-likelihood score. Notice that this figure should be higher than 3.84 in order to show statistical significance. In general, despite some difficulty identified items (‘xd’, for instance), a quick glance at this list of words may suffice to understand which are the words that are particularly salient in the VIOL_CORPUS. For instance, notice the relevance that third-person masculine pronouns (*he, him*) are remarkably salient in posts within the IPV-related forum. Similarly, lexical items connected to abuse (*abuse, abusive, abuser, abused*) are also unusually frequent in the VIOL_CORPUS, which is somehow expected.

Keyword Types: 39		Keyword Tokens: 33206		Search Hits: 0
Rank	Freq	Keyness	Effect	Keyword
1	2161	+ 1737.61	0.0173	xd
2	4018	+ 862.65	0.0319	he
3	1752	+ 414.69	0.014	him
4	2967	+ 389.7	0.0236	me
5	258	+ 206.79	0.0021	moderator
6	255	+ 178.34	0.0021	removed
7	207	+ 165.9	0.0017	xc
8	170	+ 107.01	0.0014	abuse
9	971	+ 93.6	0.0078	his
10	147	+ 84.9	0.0012	ex
11	104	+ 83.34	0.0008	emoji
12	103	+ 82.54	0.0008	abusive
13	126	+ 69.59	0.001	detail
14	163	+ 63.75	0.0013	contact
15	12687	+ 56.09	0.0955	i
16	697	+ 46.87	0.0056	feel
17	2141	+ 41.8	0.0171	was
18	211	+ 40.56	0.0017	house
19	140	+ 40.02	0.0011	relationship
20	45	+ 36.06	0.0004	emotionally
21	213	+ 35.61	0.0017	leave
22	101	+ 33.38	0.0008	move
23	607	+ 32.13	0.0049	by
24	528	+ 31.5	0.0043	because
25	39	+ 31.25	0.0003	abuser
26	38	+ 30.45	0.0003	controlling
27	103	+ 29.96	0.0008	police
28	323	+ 29.67	0.0026	again
29	190	+ 27.12	0.0015	left
30	41	+ 25.62	0.0003	abused
31	40	+ 24.86	0.0003	physical
32	462	+ 24.84	0.0037	things
33	83	+ 23.03	0.0007	sad
34	248	+ 23.01	0.002	life
35	75	+ 22.84	0.0006	hurt
36	227	+ 22.48	0.0018	tell
37	95	+ 21.74	0.0008	face
38	76	+ 21.24	0.0006	hit
39	394	+ 21.05	0.0032	told

APPENDIX 5

Full account of LIWC categories and statistical measures

As mentioned in the main text, scores (in %) are obtained for the many categories provided by LIWC once a compilation of texts is submitted. When trying to provide these percentages with statistical significance, professional advice suggested that a LIWC score had to be associated with each message integrating the corpus as a whole. Once this was painstakingly achieved, it was possible to provide this analysis with further validity in discursive terms. The table below shows the different statistical tests that were carried out. Levels of statistical significance are measure by means of the p-value and are coloured in green. As can be easily noticed, LIWC categories referring to cognitive processes (insight, discrepancy; tentativeness or perception) suggest high degrees of statistical significance. Future explorations of the data will explore how these scores are instantiated in discourse from a qualitative perspective.

Variables	Mean			Standard deviation (SD)			Levene		Anova & Welch		Scheffe & Games-Howel		
	SB1	SB2	SB3	SB1	SB2	SB3	F	p	F	p	1 vs. 2	2 vs. 3	1 vs. 3
Analytic	19,90	22,57	23,76	14,00	17,44	18,04	2,90	0,06	1,46	0,23			
Authentic	58,14	68,08	73,37	28,37	25,74	27,08	1,01	0,36	9,29	0,00	1<2 (0,023)	2=3 (0,180)	1<3 (<0,001)
Tone	15,03	20,88	29,17	22,87	24,73	33,08	23,56	0,00	8,36	0,00	1=2 (0,154)	2<3 (0,021)	1<3 (<0,001)
WPS	30,69	24,98	28,73	41,20	22,63	44,43	1,91	0,15	0,80	0,45			
pronoun	23,09	21,88	21,13	3,01	3,69	4,40	5,81	0,00	9,19	0,00	1>2 (0,017)	2=3 (0,185)	1>3 (<0,001)
ppron	17,25	16,40	15,36	2,77	3,66	3,80	2,06	0,13	8,89	0,00	1=2 (0,202)	2>3 (0,025)	1>3 (<0,001)
I	9,63	10,17	10,01	2,60	2,81	3,45	4,56	0,01	1,14	0,32			
we	0,75	0,69	0,51	0,82	1,00	0,84	1,40	0,25	2,77	0,06			
you	0,59	0,41	0,71	1,16	0,89	1,61	6,95	0,00	2,65	0,07			
he	5,80	4,72	3,50	2,65	3,04	2,86	1,97	0,14	19,79	0,00	1>2 (0,021)	2>3 (<0,001)	1>3 (<0,001)
they	0,48	0,40	0,62	0,69	0,76	1,00	7,61	0,00	2,76	0,07			
ipron	5,82	5,46	5,75	2,22	2,26	2,71	1,54	0,22	0,90	0,41			
posemo	2,21	2,39	2,79	1,68	1,61	2,16	6,91	0,00	3,22	0,04	1=2 (0,689)	2=3 (0,121)	1<3 (0,047)
negemo	4,08	3,60	3,63	1,96	2,08	2,50	2,39	0,09	1,47	0,23			
anx	0,75	0,97	0,86	0,86	1,15	1,15	2,67	0,07	1,19	0,30			
anger	1,49	1,04	1,08	1,45	0,91	1,34	2,47	0,09	4,21	0,02	1>2 (0,023)	2=3 (0,947)	1>3 (0,041)
sad	0,75	0,82	0,71	0,68	1,03	0,93	2,58	0,08	0,55	0,58			
social	14,45	12,15	11,24	4,15	4,61	5,34	4,45	0,01	14,74	0,00	1>2 (<0,001)	2=3 (0,196)	1>3 (<0,001)
family	0,76	0,75	0,72	0,99	0,91	0,87	0,07	0,94	0,08	0,92			
friend	0,44	0,43	0,56	0,65	0,64	0,98	3,04	0,05	1,12	0,33			
male	6,06	4,74	3,45	2,69	3,06	2,77	2,02	0,13	25,14	0,00	1>2 (0,003)	2>3 (<0,001)	1>3 (<0,001)
insight	2,50	2,95	3,27	1,47	1,61	1,98	5,17	0,01	6,32	0,00	1=2 (0,072)	2=3 (0,212)	1<3 (0,001)
discrep	2,03	2,25	1,75	1,25	1,51	1,45	0,94	0,39	5,53	0,00	1=2 (0,503)	2>3 (0,004)	1=3 (0,336)
tentat	3,19	2,60	3,01	2,59	1,56	1,96	1,40	0,25	3,18	0,04	1>2 (0,084)	2=3 (0,139)	1=3 (0,800)
percept	3,16	2,66	2,61	1,67	1,78	1,77	0,35	0,71	3,04	0,05	1=2 (0,103)	2=3 (0,976)	1>3 (0,064)
sexual	0,23	0,07	0,10	0,58	0,22	0,38	12,06	0,00	3,31	0,04	1>2 (0,042)	2=3 (0,505)	1=3 (0,173)
affiliation	2,43	2,12	2,22	1,60	1,65	1,84	1,72	0,18	0,90	0,41			
achieve	0,95	1,22	1,19	0,74	1,03	1,34	4,80	0,01	3,39	0,04			
power	2,26	2,22	2,45	1,35	1,45	1,42	2,45	0,09	1,34	0,26			
reward	1,05	1,53	1,37	0,68	1,29	1,12	9,75	0,00	8,69	0,00	1<2 (<0,001)	2=3 (0,410)	1<3 (0,011)
risk	1,01	0,79	0,70	0,90	0,85	0,82	0,41	0,66	3,87	0,02	1=2 (0,156)	2=3 (0,598)	1>3 (0,022)
focuspresent	12,16	14,62	13,02	4,04	4,27	4,51	0,02	0,98	10,74	0,00	1<2 (<0,001)	2>3 (0,002)	1=3 (0,328)
focusfuture	1,21	1,72	1,35	0,97	1,32	1,39	4,28	0,01	6,57	0,00	1<2 (0,002)	2>3 (0,027)	1=3 (0,615)
motion	2,43	3,04	2,29	1,35	1,70	1,43	1,82	0,16	11,47	0,00	1<2 (0,012)	2>3 (<0,001)	1=3 (0,771)
work	0,90	1,22	1,05	0,90	1,17	1,16	2,33	0,10	2,43	0,09			
leisure	0,48	0,43	0,65	0,54	0,71	0,85	9,28	0,00	3,68	0,03	1=2 (0,803)	2<3 (0,023)	1=3 (0,129)
home	0,56	0,81	0,62	0,65	1,10	0,89	4,39	0,01	2,79	0,06			
money	0,34	0,52	0,57	0,60	1,08	1,20	4,24	0,02	2,84	0,06			

APPENDIX 6

SARDDA quantitative analysis of female survivors of IPV

Quantitative overview of socio-cognitive representations of female survivors of IPV as discursively instantiated social actors. Data presented in raw numbers (N), normalised frequencies (ptw) and percentages (%).

SARDDA features	SB1 (46,733 words)			SB2 (40,324 words)			SB3 (42,866 words)		
	SB1 (N)	SB1 (ptw)	%	SB2 (N)	SB2 (ptw)	%	SB3 (N)	SB3 (ptw)	%
1_NEU	59	12.62	40.97	47	11.66	36.43	90	21.00	48.65
1_NON_NEU	85	18.19	59.03	82	20.34	63.57	95	22.16	51.35
TOTAL (1)	144	30.81	100	129	31.99	100	185	43.16	100
2_ATTR	98	20.97	68.06	68	16.86	52.71	93	21.70	50.27
2_GE_REF	20	4.28	13.89	36	8.93	27.91	66	15.40	35.68
2_SP_REF	26	5.56	18.06	25	6.20	19.38	26	6.07	14.05
TOTAL (2)	144	30.81	100	129	31.99	100	185	43.16	100
4_CLA_ID	38	8.13	26.39	28	6.94	21.71	55	12.83	29.73
4_FUNC	23	4.92	15.97	5	1.24	3.88	19	4.43	10.27
4_REL_ID	18	3.85	12.50	5	1.24	3.88	15	3.50	8.11
4_NON_CAT	65	13.91	45.14	91	22.57	70.54	96	22.40	51.89
TOTAL (4)	144	30.81	100	129	31.99	100	185	43.16	100
5_COLL	15	3.21	10.42	32	7.94	24.81	59	13.76	31.89
5_IND	129	27.60	89.58	97	24.06	75.19	126	29.39	68.11
TOTAL (5)	144	30.81	100	129	31.99	100	185	43.16	100
6+_POS_S	0	0.00	0.00	1	0.25	0.78	0	0.00	0.00
6+_POS_O	4	0.86	2.78	1	0.25	0.78	2	0.47	1.08
6_-POS	140	29.96	97.22	127	31.49	98.45	183	42.69	98.92
TOTAL (6)	144	30.81	100	129	31.99	100	185	43.16	100
TOTAL REFERENCES TO SELF	144	30.81	100	129	31.99	100	185	43.16	100

APPENDIX 7

SARDDA quantitative analysis of male perpetrators of IPV

Quantitative overview of socio-cognitive representations of male perpetrators of IPV as discursively instantiated social actors. Data presented in raw numbers (N), normalised frequencies (ptw) and percentages (%).

SARDDA features	SB1 (46.733 words)			SB2 (40.324 words)			SB3 (42.866 words)		
	SB1 (N)	SB1 (ptw)	%	SB2 (N)	SB2 (ptw)	%	SB3 (N)	SB3 (ptw)	%
1_NEU	137	29.32	64.32	144	35.71	76.60	178	41.52	73.86
1_NON_NEU	76	16.26	35.68	44	10.91	23.40	63	14.70	26.14
TOTAL (1)	213	45.58	100	188	46.62	100	241	56.22	100
2_ATTR	57	12.20	26.76	22	5.46	11.70	31	7.23	12.86
2_GE_REF	18	3.85	8.45	20	4.96	10.64	38	8.86	15.77
2_SP_REF	138	29.53	64.79	146	36.21	77.66	172	40.13	71.37
TOTAL (2)	213	45.58	100	188	46.62	100	241	56.22	100
4_CLA_ID	41	8.77	19.25	27	6.70	14.36	40	9.33	16.60
4_FUNC	23	4.92	10.80	26	6.45	13.83	38	8.86	15.77
4_REL_ID	103	22.04	48.36	109	27.03	57.98	123	28.69	51.04
4_NON_CAT	46	9.84	21.60	26	6.45	13.83	40	9.33	16.60
TOTAL (4)	213	45.58	100	188	46.62	100	241	56.22	100
5_COLL	13	2.78	6.10	19	4.71	10.11	53	12.36	21.99
5_IND	200	42.80	93.90	169	41.91	89.89	188	43.86	78.01
TOTAL (5)	213	45.58	100	188	46.62	100	241	56.22	100
6_POS_S	92	19.69	43.19	93	23.06	49.47	80	18.66	33.20
6_POS_O	1	0.21	0.47	19	4.71	10.11	27	6.30	11.20
6_POS	120	25.68	56.34	76	18.85	40.43	134	31.26	55.60
TOTAL (6)	213	45.58	100	188	46.62	100	241	56.22	100
TOTAL REFERENCES TO PERP	213	45.58	100	188	46.62	100	241	56.22	100