Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence

Deepthi Shriram Iyer

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2801-1767>

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Department of General Practice, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health
Sciences,
University of Melbourne

Abstract

Dating violence, or intimate partner violence, in young people's relationships is a serious, prevalent and important public health concern. It is estimated that approximately one in four Australian young women have experienced dating violence. Despite the well-known burdens of dating violence on Australian young women's health and well-being, little is known about how Australian young women perceive dating violence in their romantic relationships.

This qualitative study explored Australian young women's perceptions of dating, other romantic relationships, and dating violence. Social constructionist and feminist theoretical perspectives informed the study design. Young women aged 17 to 25 years, were recruited from a range of social and occupational backgrounds if they screened positive for dating violence. Individual narrative interviews were conducted with 35 young women, from across urban and rural Australia, who had predominantly had romantic relationships with young men. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone. The interviews were analysed using a thematic approach while ensuring that the young women's stories remained at the forefront of the analysis. This was followed by the application of social script theory with a feminist lens, as an explanatory framework, to better understand the young women's perceptions of romantic relationships and dating violence.

The young women shared stories of their experiences of romantic relationships which were predominantly with young men. Findings revealed that the young women had experienced a range of casual and committed romantic interactions. The young women discussed their experiences and perceptions of these relationships and their roles within them. The young women's perceptions of romantic relationships, particularly committed ones, were overwhelmingly gendered and scripted. These scripts were reminiscent of romantic fairy tale narratives, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, which the young women strived to live by. This perception influenced how they made sense of and recognised dating violence within these relationships and therefore how they responded. The young women struggled to leave their abusive relationships and exit was usually only possible if a crisis occurred or if the young man left the young woman. An exit model was formed which highlights these pathways and also the defining gendered roles of the young woman and young man. The young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence were in conflict with their perceptions of gender equality and feminist identities. While the young women in this study perceived themselves to be liberated individuals in the current wave of feminism, in contrast, their dating and

relationship scripts were informed by oppressive and patriarchal master narratives, such as romantic fairy tales.

This study contributes to a better understanding of dating and dating violence in the Australian context from the perspective of a typical Australian young woman living in the year 2015. The findings from this study are useful and important to inform policy and practice for the primary and secondary prevention of dating violence. Existing patriarchal social scripts should be challenged with feminist counterstories that empower young women and contribute to practical implications for promotion of gender equality.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- (i) this thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the preface;
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- (iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Preface

Third party copyright material

Citation information for third party copyright material	Location of item in thesis	Permission granted?
Investment Model. Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. <i>Personal Relationships</i> , 5(4), 357-387.	Figure 1, page 41	Yes
Turning points and trajectories in the process of leaving. Khaw, L., & Hardesty, J. L. (2007). Theorizing the Process of Leaving: Turning Points and Trajectories in the Stages of Change. <i>Family Relations</i> , 56(4), 413-425.	Figure 2, page 48	Yes
Psychosocial Readiness Model. Cluss, P. A., Chang, J. C., Hawker, L., Hudson Scholle, S., Dado, D., Buranosky, R., & Goldstrohm, S. (2006). The process of change for victims of intimate partner violence: Support for a Psychosocial Readiness Model. <i>Women's Health Issues</i> , 16(5), 262-274.	Figure 3, page 50	Yes

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- The Windermere Foundation doctoral scholarship.
- RACGP for awarding me the Charles Bridges-Webb Memorial award in 2013 to contribute to my research costs.

A guide to terminology used in this thesis

- ***Intimate partner***: In this thesis an intimate partner includes any type of romantic partner, regardless of the formality and duration of the relationship. Intimate partner therefore refers to a partner within a long term committed relationship or a partner within a casual sexual interaction. Other terms describing intimate partners in young people's relationships include boyfriend, girlfriend, ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, partner and ex-partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; World Health Organization., 2013).
- ***Link***: The name of the online tool developed by the project team led by the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne, ReachOut Australia and the YAWCRC (Sanci, Kauer, & Buhagiar, 2017). This site aims to improve young people's help-seeking behaviour for mental health problems. The *Link* intervention was tested with a randomised controlled trial. The online tool will be referred to as *Link* in *italics* whereas the randomised controlled trial will be referred to as 'the Link' project or trial.
- ***Violence***: In this study the terms violence, abuse, intimate partner violence and dating violence will be used interchangeably when referring to violence against young women by a young man. While these definitions have been developed and implemented by researchers and policy makers, individual perceptions of violence are very personal and inherently driven by one's own interpretation of the violence and the emotion attributed to the violence (Hume, 2007). Therefore, violence cannot be accurately characterised by a blanket definition. The meaning of violence varies with the profession that is studying it too and the context in which it is being studied. For example, in this case, men's violence against women is studied by multiple professions, such as medical practitioners, the criminal and justice system and the public health system, who each define violence according to their own profession's agendas and purposes of the respective research projects (Kilpatrick, 2004). Hume (2007), who comes from a fundamentally feminist standpoint, argues that the definition of violence is fluid and constructed on a case-by-case basis, and is emotionally driven based on the researcher's own social and political background and experiences.

- ***Young people:*** the terms ‘young people’, youth, adolescents, and ‘young adults’ will be used interchangeably. Youth is defined by the United Nations as a ‘period of transition from the dependence of childhood, to adulthood’s independence’ but the definition is a more fluid category than other fixed age-groups (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d). Literature cited in this thesis refers to studies where a variety of age ranges have been used to describe ‘adolescence’ and young people. This doctoral study included young women aged 16 to 25 years inclusive.
- ***Young and well cooperative research centre (YAWCRC):*** was an Australia-based international youth health research organisation established by ReachOut Australia (2011-2016). YAWCRC’s aim was to ‘explore the role of technology in young peoples’ lives and to determine how those technologies can be used to improve their mental health and well-being” (Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, 2013). The company wound up their activities in June 2016 due to lack of ongoing funding from government grants.
- ***Romantic relationship:*** In this study the term ‘romantic relationship’ will be used to refer to mutually acknowledged romantic interactions, encounters, experiences and relationships between two young people of any gender (Collins, 2003). These relationships would normally involve ‘expressions of affection and perhaps current or anticipated sexual behaviour’ (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). The definition of ‘romantic’ in this thesis, includes ‘displaying or expressing love, emotion, strong affection, etc.,’ as per Australia’s national Macquarie dictionary (Butler, 2018). However it is acknowledged that romantic love is a social construct that may be perceived in a variety of ways by different people and different couples, thus rendering it a complex topic of research (Pinto, 2017). Perceptions of romantic relationships were explored in depth during the interviews with the young women in this study.

Prologue

I feel personally invested in this research project because of my exposure to men's violence against women during different stages of my life. While living in the Middle East and visiting the Indian subcontinent during my childhood the power of structured patriarchy was a phenomenon that always left me feeling uncomfortable and perplexed. I witnessed discrimination and violence against women on the street and in homes and within families that I thought were meant to be safe havens. In my early teenage years, I moved to New Zealand, and therefore to a very different culture, which was much less patriarchal as a society. However, as I grew older and my peers and I were becoming involved in romantic relationships, I became a confidante to close female friends who were experiencing abuse and violence from their romantic male partners. This continued when I moved to Melbourne in my early twenties and befriended young women in the same age group as myself who experienced violence from their intimate male partners. I saw them struggle with feeling embarrassed, ashamed and misunderstood by the health and legal sectors who they presented to for help. No one seemed to understand what it was like to be like my friends, and therefore they did not receive the empathy or care that they needed. Further, I struggled to respond appropriately to presentations of intimate partner violence in young people's relationships, also known as dating violence, in my clinical work as a General Practitioner.

The regularity with which I witnessed intimate partner violence left me feeling perplexed and angry. I was perplexed because I could not understand why the abuse and violence that I witnessed was happening in the first place, and particularly when I realised that it was heavily gendered; men against women. I felt angry and frustrated because the older and younger women who experienced the violence were powerless against it and I felt powerless to do anything to help them. Kleinman (2007) asserts that injustice is 'felt first rather than understood' and so while I write this thesis I reflect on how I have noticed and 'felt' injustice for much longer than I have understood and named it. I realised that I identified as a feminist when I began to acknowledge that inequalities exist. I became aware of my own un-feminist world views and unconscious biases and then made the decision to consciously challenge beliefs and behaviours that reinforced domination and exploitation within the realm of structural societal patriarchy (Kleinman, 2007).

Therefore, when the opportunity arose for me to become involved in research concerning men's violence against women, I was drawn to it. I had the opportunity to undertake two years of

academic research during my General Practice Fellowship training, during which time I enrolled into a Master's degree and conducted a small qualitative study exploring dating violence among eight young women; some reported having experienced dating violence and some did not. Findings from these semi-structured interviews revealed that while the young women had a good grasp of textbook definitions of dating violence, there appeared to be gaps in their understanding of dating as well as dating violence. These findings contributed to the first research question of this doctoral thesis exploring Australian young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships. The young women were also able to clearly articulate barriers and facilitators to seeking help for dating violence, consistent with existing literature (Alleyne-Green, Fernandes, & Clark, 2015; Fry et al., 2014; Tarzia, Iyer, Thrower, & Hegarty, 2017; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2007), therefore it was decided that exploring help-seeking would not be a focus of the PhD study. When analysing the young women's interviews, I was intrigued by the way those who had experienced dating violence evaluated the abuse in their relationships. It was also interesting to note that the young women who had not experienced dating violence hypothesised that young women experiencing dating violence should simply decide to leave, without understanding the broader context of dating violence and the associated complexities. These findings begged for a larger, more in-depth investigation of Australian young women's perceptions of dating and violence within these relationships. This led to formation of the second research question focused on how Australian young women recognise and respond to abuse and violence in their relationships. The findings also highlighted that interviewing young women who had not experienced dating violence in their own relationships limited the quality of the data. Thus it was decided that only young women who screened positive for dating violence would be interviewed, in order to gather meaningful stories from them about their own, real experiences, rather than hypothetical situations.

In summary, personal and professional influences have led me to pursue this PhD on dating violence. The influence of growing up and living in countries with diverse views on gender and varying degrees of patriarchy has allowed me the opportunity to witness and experience very different ways of living, and this has led to my gradually developed feminist identity (Marine & Lewis, 2014). It is important for me to acknowledge this background from which I come, because it reminds me of why I was drawn to researching dating violence, a potential precursor to violence in the family home. While I have been fortunate enough to not have experienced intimate partner abuse and violence, I have been touched vicariously by the lives

of many women who have experienced abuse and violence from men in their intimate relationships. Some left their abusive partners while some stayed, but those stories will always be a significant part of my life and shape the person I am.

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passionate about making a difference and every page of this thesis was therefore written with them at the forefront of my mind. I can still recall every single telephone and face-to-face interview I had with the young women and these stories will stay with me and always shape my perspective and clinical practice.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine, in depth, how Australian young women perceive dating and dating violence. This chapter begins with the rationale for the research project, which includes a broad introduction to dating and dating violence. Dating and other types of romantic relationships that young people experience are described. This is then followed by some background on dating violence in Australia, including the prevalence and impacts on the health and well-being of young women. The thesis research questions and thesis structure are then outlined before the chapter concludes. The rationale behind undertaking this study will now be described.

Rationale

Dating violence, a form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in young people's relationships, is a prevalent and important public health problem in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). While dating and sexuality should be normal, expected and positive aspects of adolescent development (Collins, 2003; Meier & Allen, 2009; Tolman & McClelland, 2011), there is evidence that men's violence against young women is prevalent in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Dating violence is known to have several significant short and long term mental, physical and reproductive health impacts as well as social and behavioural impacts on young women (Bonomi, Anderson, Nemeth, Rivara, & Buettner, 2013; Copp, Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2016; Nahapetyan, Orpinas, Song, & Holland, 2014). There is also an economic burden associated with men's violence against women, which includes dating violence, and conservative estimates show that gendered IPV cost the Australian economy about \$22 billion for the year 2015-16 (KPMG Australia, 2016). Despite the social and health impacts of dating violence, Australian research has shown that public attitudes supportive of gendered violence against young women are rife (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015; Politoff et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2018), but there is little research exploring the issue from the perspective of the young women who experience this injustice.

Public health policies and interventions targeting dating violence need to be informed by feminist research that involves the young women who experience dating violence (Hesse-Biber, 2012), while understanding the broader societal contexts within which the young women live (Politoff et al., 2019). Therefore, exploration of Australian young women's perceptions of dating violence through gathering stories about their experiences is necessary. Further,

knowledge of how young women leave their dating violence relationships is also limited, particularly in the Australian context, and requires further exploration. While it is acknowledged that young women experience violence from male as well as female partners, there is overwhelming evidence that the majority of intimate partner violence among young people is perpetrated by young men against young women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Therefore, the focus of this exploratory study will be on young women's relationships with young men, regardless of their sexual identity.

This section presents the rationale for undertaking this qualitative study into exploring Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence and ends with the gaps in relation to this topic. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis aim, research questions and thesis structure.

What is dating?

'Dating' is an old term typically used to describe romantic relationships in adolescence and young adulthood. A dating partner is usually referred to as a boyfriend, girlfriend, intimate partner or other partner, sometimes an ex-partner, who one might be involved with in a romantic, but not necessarily sexual way and either co-habiting or not (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Ball et al., 2012). The definitions of dating and other romantic relationship types vary with different cultural and age groups too (Chung, 2007; Collins, 2003; Eaton, Rose, Interligi, Fernandez, & McHugh, 2016). Among young people, there is sometimes even a distinction between official and unofficial dating, where behaviours such as publicising the dating relationship on social media can be a sign that the relationship is 'official' and perhaps more serious (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012). In an Australian study involving an online discussion forum with twenty-eight young people and then twelve face-to-face interviews, technology use was found to be central to dating, as it forms the basis of day-to-day communication between young couples (Meenagh, 2015). Mobile phones and other media technologies are used to exchange romantic or sexual messages, monitor a young person before and during a relationship, initiate relationships, maintain communication, have fights and even to end relationships (Meenagh, 2015). Further, with the increased use of technology, 'sexting' has become a significant part of romantic and sexual interaction within heterosexual couples. Sexting involves the mutually consented sharing of sexual photographs and videos between the young man and woman, although the definition of sexting is not always entirely clear (Barrense-Dias, Berchtold, Surís, & Akre, 2017). A qualitative Australian study conducted

with fifteen to twenty year old young people revealed that young people feel pressured to participate in sexting, with young women in the study facing more pressure to send sexual images of themselves compared to the young men (Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2013). When sexting is not a mutually consented activity, it becomes part of the spectrum of technology-facilitated dating violence, which will be discussed within the later section on dating violence.

Another common, more modern term is ‘going out’ which is used interchangeably with ‘dating’, but interestingly, the duration of this type of relationship does not appear to be well-defined (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2012; Barter, McCarry, Berridge, & Evans, 2009; Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). The term dating remains complex and has no universal definition in the literature. Some contend it is too old-fashioned, limiting, and no longer relevant to describe intimate romantic relationships among today’s youth (Brown, Puster, Vazquez, Hunter, & Lescano, 2007), while others argue that dating is indeed a prevalent phenomenon amongst today’s youth (Eaton et al., 2016). Most importantly though, while the terms dating and dating violence have been used regularly in research, there has been little examination of how the young people themselves name and perceive their romantic and intimate relationships (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016; Wentland & Reissing, 2014). The Australian Personal Safety Survey (2016), which is Australia’s most detailed government-funded quantitative study on interpersonal violence, defines a boyfriend, girlfriend or ‘date’ as having ‘different levels of commitment and involvement that does not involve living together... (including) persons who have had one date only, regular dating with no sexual involvement, or a serious sexual or emotional relationship... excludes de facto relationships’.

Dating is a popular term in the United States and has evolved from other terminology. In the United States, the term ‘dating’ has been preceded by other terms such as ‘calling’ and ‘courtship’, which were described as the initial stages of a young man and a young woman getting to know each other during their search for a life partner (Bogle, 2008). Bogle (2008) asserts that it is difficult to know for certain what occurred during the early courtship periods in the last few centuries, as the knowledge we have is based on love letters and diary extracts from young women and men who lived in those times. ‘Calling’ was the term given to the initial romantic interactions between a young man and young woman in the early 1900’s, where the young man would be invited to the young woman’s home by her mother and the interaction would be overseen and controlled by the young woman’s mother in the presence of family (Bogle, 2008). Following a few meetings at the young woman’s home, the young man and the

young woman would spend time independently, away from family, with activities planned and executed by the young man; it was expected that these relationships would result in marriage (Bogle, 2008). In the American context, dating between a young man and woman became more commonplace in the 1920s and 1930s when young men and women moved away from homes into college residences on university campuses (Bogle, 2008). Less parental involvement meant more control of the romantic interaction by the couple's peers, the couple themselves and more so the male partner, resembling the more contemporary dating behaviours.

Dating has been described as a competitive process but also integral to a young person's sense of identity. The traditional American perception of dating was that it was a competitive process and non-committal in the early stages (Waller, 1937). Willard Waller, an American sociologist, wrote a detailed ethnographic review about the 'rating and dating complex' based on his observations of college life in the United States (Waller, 1937). Waller (1937) observed that young people would make efforts to appear attractive and desirable to the opposite sex. Young men were seen to be more desirable based on their wealth, behaviour, appearance, dancing skills and possession of a vehicle, while young women were judged on their dress sense, dancing skills, speaking skills and popularity with other young men. Peers were involved in setting up dates and it was acceptable to 'shop around' for a romantic partner in the first few months of starting college. However, it was also customary to expect that young people would settle into a 'steady' romantic relationship towards the end of their first year of college. Dating in its steady phase, was viewed as a form of courtship, which was usually focused on looking for a life-partner (Waller, 1937). The desirability of a partner being associated with high social status has additionally been demonstrated in a more recent study of 321 young women studying arts at a private American University (Kilanski & McClendon, 2017). Kilanski and McClendon (2017) also found that social status impacted on young people's selection of a dating partner or hook up partner within heterosexual romantic relationships. A desire for high social status only perpetuates the need to be involved in dating as it is perceived by young people to be a sign of popularity and allows them to fit in with others (Collins et al., 2009; Helm, Baker, Berlin, & Kimura, 2017). Chung (2007) described dating among South Australian young women as a sign of attractiveness and femininity, with many young women feeling pressured to be in dating relationships and inadequate if they were not.

The scripted and gendered nature of dating

Studies of heterosexual dating behaviours in the last few decades have described aspects of dating to be 'scripted' and gendered (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Eaton & Rose, 2012; Eaton et al.,

2016; Helm et al., 2017; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008; Rose & Frieze, 1993). The scripted nature of dating that has been identified in these studies refers to roles and events within the dating context being predictable and well-defined. Scripts in social situations such as dating are useful to reduce uncertainty about behaviours and events and people seek comfort in conforming to expected roles and actions within a specific context, just as an actor would follow the script of a play (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Stoica, 2015). Scripts can also apply to more long-term situations and relationships, where even life scripts have been described (Berne, 1973).

Roles within first date scripts have been described as being gendered, where young men tend to have more well-defined and active roles within heterosexual romantic relationships while young women adopt more passive roles (Eaton et al., 2016; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). A recent study conducted with Hispanic American University students concluded that the first dates between a young woman and young man were rigidly scripted (Eaton & Rose, 2012). Specific events culminated in the way the first date would start, progress and end. There were specific expectations of events and activities during the first date and the dating process, and the young men and young women were expected to be knowledgeable about this process and behave in ways that were consistent with these expectations. This study was built on by Eaton and colleagues (2016) who further investigated dating, hooking up and hanging out scripts among Hispanic and White college students and found that the first date script was the most structured when compared with other romantic scripts such as hooking up. This finding was consistent with older studies of first date scripts, suggesting that first dates have not changed much in several years (Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008; Rose & Frieze, 1993).

A few studies have described patterns or scripts in the way dating relationships progress with time. A recent study which examined thirty-five male and female high school students' perceptions of dating and dating violence in Hawaii found that the process of dating involved stages, which the authors labelled; getting in, being in, staying in and getting out (Helm et al., 2017). The study was based on a grounded theory analysis of focus group interviews and revealed that the young people had shared perceptions of dating, which was described to be a journey. This started from the pre-dating phase and progressed through the stages all the way until the end of the relationship (Helm et al., 2017), although these phases were not necessarily described as a script. A recently conducted mixed methods study explored the definition of dating among American middle and high school students (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016). The school students did not have a formal or structured view of dating but were focused on spending

quality time with each other as boyfriend and girlfriend and being faithful to each other (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016). Again, while there were no specific event or role scripts, the young people described a continuum of interactions that eventually led to dating, including talking, having a thing, hooking up, going with, and then dating (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016).

Other types of relationships

Over the years, the general depiction of dating in the academic literature has remained unchanged except for some speculation that perhaps dating is becoming more sexualised. It has been suggested that this trend could be due to the increase in young people's involvement in more casual romantic relationships in college, before the post-college plan of settling into a long term relationship (Bogle, 2008; Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007). Casual romantic encounters are those that occur outside of a committed relationship. Casual relationships that have been described in the literature include hanging out, one night stands, booty calls, fuck buddies, friends with benefits and hooking up (Bogle, 2011; Eaton et al., 2016; Jovanovic & Williams, 2018; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010; Wentland & Reissing, 2014). Most of these studies have been conducted among American college students hence the applicability of these studies to other populations of youth are limited.

Hooking up is one such phenomenon that has been explored mostly among American college students (Bogle, 2008; Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015; Owen et al., 2010; Rowley & Hertzog, 2016) and glorified in American films (Shelby, 2012). Hooking up is a short term, casual sexual interaction that has been described as occurring frequently amongst college students (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015), with suggestion that it may be on the rise (Bogle, 2008). However, there is also evidence that the prevalence of hooking up has not necessarily surpassed that of dating and other romantic relationships, particularly among female college students (Siebenbruner, 2013, 2015). Bogle (2008) studied the phenomenon of hooking up through individual interviews with 76 heterosexual American college students between 2001 and 2006. She found in her interviews with young men and women that, while hooking up was seen to be a purely casual romantic encounter for short term sexual gain, the actual definition of hooking up was open to interpretation among the cohort she studied. Some young people defined hooking up as only kissing while others said that hooking up included a full range of physical sexual activity, including having sexual intercourse that was almost always associated with alcohol and the college party culture (Bogle, 2008). Siebenbruner's (2013, 2015) recent studies among college students were in agreement.

A qualitative study conducted among thirty female college students about their experiences of hooking up, also found that hooking up was associated with alcohol use in college campus culture, where ‘anything goes’ (Lovejoy, 2015). College students emphasised the complexity of figuring out what hooking up involved and highlighted that experience taught them to recognise a hooking up encounter as a casual sexual interaction and to not expect any further romantic interactions or commitment (Lovejoy, 2015). Some of the young people involved in hooking up hang on to hope that a hooking up encounter might evolve into a more formal romantic commitment, with young women more likely to desire a formal commitment than young men (Bogle, 2008; Garcia et al., 2012; Lovejoy, 2015). Hooking up was also more common among mainstream ‘White’ college students when compared with students from other ethnic backgrounds (Eaton et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2010) which emphasises the social and cultural impact on young people’s romantic relationships.

Friends with benefits is another type of casual sexual relationship but has been described as one of the more ‘monogamous’ casual relationships in studies investigating casual sexual relationships. Friends with benefits usually involves a young man and woman being friends but mutually agreeing to becoming sexually involved with each other, but not committed (Jovanovic & Williams, 2018; Wentland & Reissing, 2014; Wentland & Reissing, 2011). Friends with benefits is the only casual sexual relationship where sex is not always involved, due to the pre-existing friendship. It is also the only type of casual sexual relationship that young people describe as having a small chance of developing into a committed relationship (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). This interaction has been described as often occurring with some secrecy and details of the relationship are usually kept away from the public domain, such as social media (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). Open communication is therefore very important in this situation to maintain the correct code of conduct, unlike in other casual sexual relationships where open communication rarely occurs, sometimes resulting in confusion and ambiguity about the relationship status (Lovejoy, 2015). In friends with benefits situations described by American college students, a young woman and young man are said to continue to meet and interact as regular friends would outside their sexual interactions, and when the sexual interactions come to an end, the friendship would continue. A recent American study (Jovanovic & Williams, 2018) explored perceptions of friends with benefits situations and the participants’ thoughts on female sexual agency in these situations. Focus group interviews with 71 young women and 35 young men from a large public university revealed that friends with benefits situations were associated with some degree of sexual empowerment for the women,

but contradictory to this, sexual double standards related to the young women's participation in casual relationships left them feeling disempowered. Thus, while the young women aimed for sexual agency and freedom they were constrained by the social constructs that restricted exploration of their sexualities and sexual identities (Jovanovic & Williams, 2018). Friends with benefits is an unusual and complex casual relationship because following cessation of the sexual relationship the non-sexual friendship is likely to continue. This is usually different to the fuck buddy situation where a young woman and young man who might know each other through common social circles meet regularly for casual sex (Wentland & Reissing, 2014; Wentland & Reissing, 2011). They are not pre-existing friends but may become friends through meeting regularly for sex. Following cessation of the sexual relationship, however, the friendship is unlikely to continue. Although as with most young people's relationships, young people do describe some blurring of definitions (Wentland & Reissing, 2011).

A one night stand has been described as usually being an isolated one-off sexual interaction where a young man and young woman, unknown to each other, would meet to have sex on one night and then most likely never meet again (Bogle, 2008). Unlike other types of casual sexual interactions where the young man and woman would have known each other as friends or acquaintances, the participants in this study agreed that young people involved in one-night stands would usually not have known each other prior. One night stands are similar to hook ups and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Eaton et al., 2016). If, following a one-night stand, a couple did end up meeting again in a similar context, it would perhaps be labelled a booty call.

A booty call has been described as the situation when a young person, usually a young man, rings or sends a text message to a designated young woman to engage in sexual activity in the middle of the night, often under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Bogle, 2008; Wentland & Reissing, 2014; Wentland & Reissing, 2011). There is usually no friendship between the couple involved in the booty call because it is mutually understood that the relationship is focused on the non-committal sexual interaction. None of the casual sexual interactions tend to have a clear start or end, and it was usually understood that the relationships were not formal enough to require a formal ending. Even in the situation of the couple sharing multiple casual sexual encounters it would be unlikely that the couple would pursue a committed relationship (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). The relationships might be understood to end if one party simply ceases responding to text messages from the other, therefore young people understand that it is not worth becoming too emotionally invested.

Studies of young people's romantic relationships highlight that casual sexual relationships and formal dating relationships tend to differ in terms of gender roles. Gender roles are present throughout most romantic relationship scripts but are perhaps much less well defined in casual sexual relationships (Bogle, 2008; Eaton et al., 2016; Wentland & Reissing, 2011). In casual sexual relationships the young man and woman are usually equally likely to initiate the sexual encounter and end it, apart from one night stands where young men are more likely to initiate the sexual encounter (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). Gender plays a greater role in the trajectory of the casual relationship and the repercussions of being in such relationships where young women are judged more harshly for being involved in casual sexual relationships (Bogle, 2008; Lovejoy, 2015; Wentland & Reissing, 2014). In some cases, especially when the young woman develops affectionate feelings for the young man hoping for a casual sexual relationship to evolve into a commitment, the young man usually has the power to make the decision about whether they become committed (Lovejoy, 2015). While the young woman is more likely than the young man to use a casual sexual relationship to 'test drive' the potential for a relationship with her casual partner, the young man does not tend to perceive casual relationships in this way and he will usually choose not to enter a commitment in these situations (Bogle, 2008; Lovejoy, 2015; Wentland & Reissing, 2014).

Young female college students were more likely to experience regret about hooking up than young men (Owen et al., 2010). The study of 832 American college students, did not reveal the reasons for this, as there was no question about whether the sexual interaction was consensual, but the authors speculated that perhaps the young women might have had mismatched expectations about the experience or perhaps even experienced more forceful or unwanted sexual encounters. The negative reactions were also associated with greater psychological distress. Lovejoy (2015) found in her qualitative study with young women that anxiety about the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy or contracting a sexually transmitted infection was a common occurrence among the young women who she interviewed. This would further perpetuate the negative emotions pertaining to emotional disappointment with the hooking up experience.

Definitions and meanings of various romantic relationships usually lack clarity among young people. Wentland and Reissing (2014; 2011) explored the definitions of different types of casual sexual relationships in a qualitative study, and then tested the terminology among a large group of students using a survey, with the aim of accurately defining the precise terminology that was lacking in the literature. The first study involved focus group interviews with twenty-

three people including young men, young women and sex educators (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). Nineteen young people, not necessarily experienced with casual sexual relationships, were recruited from an urban Eastern Canadian university campus, and four sex educators were recruited from various organisations involved in adolescent sex education. The focus groups discussed several different types of casual sexual relationships including booty calls, friends with benefits, fuck buddies and one-night stands. The terminology was then tested through conducting a survey among eight hundred and eighty-five young people with a mean age of twenty-five years (Wentland & Reissing, 2014). Participants were recruited from an Eastern Canadian university campus, social media and snowball sampling, and were required to correctly match casual sexual relationship terminology with their definitions. The survey findings confirmed that the majority of participants were able to correctly match the terminology with the definitions of one-night stand, booty call, fuck buddy and friends with benefits.

In summary, several types of casual and committed relationships exist, with many of the roles within these relationships being gendered and sometimes scripted (Eaton et al., 2016; Lovejoy, 2015; Wentland & Reissing, 2014). While several studies exploring casual and committed relationships among young people exist, most of these studies have been conducted in North America among college students. The generalisability of these findings to young people in Australia is therefore limited. This exploration and understanding of the terminology that Australian young women use to describe dating and other romantic relationships is necessary to better understand the abuse and violence that occurs within these relationships (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016; Wentland & Reissing, 2014). The following section introduces the topic of dating violence and the magnitude of the problem in Australia.

What is dating violence?

Intimate partner violence (IPV) within young people's relationships, excluding marriage or cohabitation, is usually known as dating violence (World Health Organization., 2013). An intimate partner is 'a person with whom one has a close personal relationship' and together they identify as a couple who share emotional connection, regular contact, regular physical and/or sexual interactions and familiarity with each other's lives (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015); although not all intimate relationships in young people's lives contain all of these elements (Bogle, 2008; Eaton et al., 2016). In Australia, the term 'dating violence' is not commonly used and is instead included within the definition of IPV or

‘domestic violence’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Cox, 2016; Sety, 2012). Elsewhere the term dating violence has been questioned as to whether or not it is the most appropriate term to describe IPV in young people’s relationships (Martin, Houston, Mmari, & Decker, 2012; Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008). However, consistent for the purpose of this thesis, dating violence will be the term used to refer to IPV in young people’s relationships.

IPV is a gendered phenomenon with the violence usually being perpetrated by a male towards his female partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Garcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2017) in the United States defines dating violence as including physical, sexual, psychological aggression and stalking. Physical abuse involves hurting or attempting to hurt a partner e.g. hitting or kicking; sexual abuse involves forcing or attempting to force a partner to do sexual things without their consent; psychological aggression includes exerting control over the partner and using verbal or non-verbal communication to intentionally cause harm to the partner; stalking includes repeated and unwanted contact resulting in fear or concern for personal safety (Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). These definitions are consistent with Australian and WHO definitions of IPV behaviours which also include controlling behaviours such as restricting access to information and assistance (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). Technology facilitated dating violence is a growing problem that is increasingly becoming recognised as a significant form of abuse that can occur even when a young couple are not physically with each other (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). Technology facilitated dating violence includes the use of digital media to ‘monitor, control, threaten, harass, pressure, or coerce a dating partner’ (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2017).

The estimated prevalence of dating violence in Australia

The prevalence of dating violence is known to be challenging to determine. This is because dating violence is under-recognised and under-reported (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Helms, Sullivan, Corona, & Taylor, 2013; Towler, Eivers, & Frey, 2017), and there is a lack of consistency in defining and measuring it (Exner-Cortens, Gill, & Eckenrode, 2016a). Several scales to measure dating violence exist, and these have all been developed within diverse populations and contexts, but the applicability of these scales to Australia, is unknown. The Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS), later revised to become the CTS2, is the most widely used scale to measure dating violence, and includes physical, verbal, psychological and sexual types of abuse and violence and some measures of injury (Straus, 1979; Straus, Hamby,

Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The CTS2 has been criticised for excluding emotional abuse, technological abuse, stalking and other human factors such as fear of abuse. In Australia, the Composite Abuse Scale (CAS) was developed and validated to measure IPV among a diverse sample of women, aged sixteen years and over, presenting to Australian general practice (Hegarty, Bush, & Sheehan, 2005). Previous scales measuring partner violence had been criticised for being simple checklists of violent acts, therefore the CAS built on this and included an upset score which measured how the respondents felt as a result of the acts of abuse they experienced. However, while the CAS has been used successfully to measure IPV in women aged 16 to 50 years, it has not been used to measure dating violence and also excludes technology facilitated abuse (Hegarty et al., 2013). Other scales to measure dating violence such as the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI) (Fernandez-Gonzalez, Wekerle, & Goldstein, 2012; D. Wolfe et al., 2001) and Violence in Adolescents' Dating Relationships Inventory (VADRI) (Aizpitarte et al., 2017) have been developed and validated in the last few years but not tested in Australia at the time of writing this thesis. In response to the recent surge of internet usage and technology facilitated communication, specific scales focusing on technology facilitated abuse alone have also been developed and reviewed (Brown & Hegarty, 2018). Several other scales to measure dating violence also exist and are discussed elsewhere (Exner-Cortens et al., 2016a; Exner-Cortens, Gill, & Eckenrode, 2016b). Acknowledging the existence of multiple scales is necessary to highlight the wide variety of ways in which dating violence is measured, hence yielding varying prevalence measures that are not easily comparable.

In accordance with this, precise dating violence prevalence figures for young people under the age of twenty-five years are not readily available in Australia. Therefore, the *estimated* prevalence of dating violence is presented instead. The estimated prevalence of dating violence in Australia is based on the latest findings of the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The PSS is conducted approximately every four years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), funded by the Australian federal government. The estimated prevalence of dating violence victimisation among Australian young women is about 1 in 4 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), but this is likely to be an underestimate if under-recognition and under-reporting of dating violence are taken into account (Barter et al., 2017; Chung, 2007; Mitchell, Patrick, Heywood, Blackman, & Pitts, 2014; Towler et al., 2017; Webster, 2016). The reasons for under-recognition and under-reporting of dating violence are multifactorial and discussed further in Chapter 2. Detailed analysis of the 2016 Australian

Personal Safety Survey by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), revealed that 1 in 3 Australian women aged over 15 years have experienced physical or sexual violence and/or emotional abuse by an intimate partner (Webster, 2016). The most recent PSS data revealed that IPV victimisation is highest among young women aged 18 to 24 years compared to older age groups (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) which is consistent with other studies (Ahmadabadi et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2017). This was confirmed in a recent Australian longitudinal study of 1265 young people who were studied at age 21 years and then at age 30 years, which found increased violence victimisation among the cohort when they were younger (Ahmadabadi et al., 2018).

The gendered nature of dating violence

Dating violence is a gender based public health issue (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Taft, Hegarty, & Flood, 2001; World Health Organization, 2013). While some studies on dating violence have shown mixed victimisation rates among young men and women in heterosexual romantic relationships across the world (Niolon et al., 2015; Straus, 2004; Straus & Gozjolko, 2014), there is international evidence that young women are at higher risk of victimisation compared to young men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2008; World Health Organization, 2013).

Several studies conducted in the last several years contribute to evidence that young women are more likely to experience dating violence and also suffer more devastating consequences of dating violence when compared to young men (Jennings et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay, López-González, Carrasco, & Amor, 2017; Zweig et al., 2013). A recent and comprehensive systematic review of 169 dating violence studies looking at IPV among 15 to 30 year old young people revealed that young women were more likely to be victims of dating violence when compared to young men (Jennings et al., 2017). A quantitative study including 3745 young people from ten schools across the north-eastern states of the United States revealed that young women reported experiencing more technology facilitated dating violence, and in particular sexual forms of technology-facilitated dating violence, when compared to the young men (Zweig et al., 2013). Another recent cross-sectional study on technology facilitated abuse conducted among 703 White American, heterosexual high school students from Southeast Michigan, revealed that young women suffered more negative experiences and more serious consequences as a result of technology facilitated dating violence, when compared to young men (Reed et al., 2017). A recent systematic review of dating violence prevalence studies highlighted that young women are also at higher risk of experiencing psychological and

sexual violence when compared to young men (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). Women, including young women, are more likely to sustain injuries from assault within intimate relationships when compared to men (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Straus, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Further, women are also more likely to be murdered by their intimate partners than men, in Australia and abroad (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network., 2018; Mouzos, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Quantitative studies which claim that IPV within young people's relationships is gender neutral mostly originate from the United States and minimise the magnitude of dating violence (Reed, Raj, Miller, & Silverman, 2010). The quantitative studies which measure acts of abuse and violence using checklists alone do not explain the gendered nature of violence perpetration and the resulting impacts; they fail to acknowledge human factors, such as the emotional and psychological aspects of the abuse and violence (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Reed et al., 2010). Contextual factors are also important, such as the victim's individual perception of the abusive experience, feeling afraid or intimidated, the perpetrator's intent to cause harm, frequency, coercion, control over the victim, consequences of the abuse and violence, and a need to conform to patriarchal social structures (Carter, 2015; Morse, 1995; Ozaki & Otis, 2016; Perry & Fromuth, 2005; Taft et al., 2001; White & Koss, 1991). These factors go beyond the numbers that may suggest heterosexual dating violence is experienced equally by young men and young women. Grouping individuals by sex alone is inadequate as gender goes beyond the label of being male and female; it defines our identities, attitudes, societal roles and interactions (Anderson, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

The health and social impacts of dating violence

Dating violence is associated with numerous adverse health and social outcomes. Dating violence is known for its negative impacts on the individual and the community, including: poor physical and mental health; risk-taking behaviour; poor perception of overall health; and a significant economic burden on society (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Biebl, DiLalla, Davis, Lynch, & Shinn, 2011; Bonomi et al., 2013; Champion et al., 2004; Coker, McKeown, & Sanderson, 2000; Doom, Mason, Suglia, & Clark, 2017; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012; KPMG Australia, 2016; Lum On, Ayre, Webster, & Moon, 2016; State Government of Victoria, 2004; Webster, 2016). Men's IPV against women has been found to contribute more to the disease burden in Australian women aged 18 to 44 years than other risk factors including hypercholesterolaemia, smoking and substance use (Webster, 2016). Further, data recently published from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH), which

followed three age cohorts of adult women from three generations over sixteen years, found that IPV impacted negatively on physical and mental health across this time period (Loxton, Dolja-Gore, Anderson, & Townsend, 2017). An Australian systematic review of 43 studies, aiming to assess Australia's health burden attributable to IPV against women aged 15 years and older, has also shown strong associations between IPV and poorer health outcomes among women, such as depression, termination of pregnancy and suicide (Lum On et al., 2016). Another Australian study examined the relationship between psychological abuse and social and emotional well-being among sixty-seven 17 to 22 year old university students in Queensland (Gallaty & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2008). Psychological abuse correlated with higher depressive symptoms, lower emotional well-being and more interpersonal problems (Gallaty & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2008).

Dating violence victimisation is associated with increased risk-taking behaviour. Several studies, mainly conducted in the United States have shown significant associations between dating violence and risk-taking behaviours including alcohol abuse, illicit substance use, tobacco smoking and risky sexual behaviour (Alleyne, Coleman-Cowger, Crown, Gibbons, & Vines, 2011; Champion et al., 2004; Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brener, & Noonan, 2007; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012; Martin, Clark, Lynch, Kupper, & Cilenti, 1999; Rivera-Rivera, Allen-Leigh, Rodríguez-Ortega, Chávez-Ayala, & Lazcano-Ponce, 2007; Roberts & Klein, 2003; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, Lorelei, & Hathaway, 2001). Risky sexual behaviour included measures of number of sexual partners, use of contraception, contraction of sexually transmitted infections, alcohol or substance use associated with sexual activity, and age at first sexual experience (Alleyne et al., 2011; Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, & Rothman, 2013). Most studies examining the relationship between dating violence and risk-taking behaviour have been cross-sectional designs; therefore, the direction of the relationship between dating violence and mental illness and risk-taking behaviour is unclear, with suggestions that it may be a vicious cycle (Champion et al., 2004).

In recognition of this gap, a small number of longitudinal studies have been carried out, studying the relationship between dating violence and long-term health outcomes. There is evidence that a young person is more likely to undertake risk-taking behaviours and experience mental illness if there is a history of violence victimisation (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Nahapetyan et al., 2014; Roberts, Klein, & Fisher, 2003). There is a direct association between adolescent dating violence and adverse mental health outcomes such as psychological distress, poor self-esteem, loss of identity, deliberate self-harm, disordered eating behaviours and

suicidal ideation (Banyard & Charlotte, 2008; Barter & Stanley, 2016; Biebl et al., 2011; Bonomi et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2009; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Foshee, Benefield, Ennett, Bauman, & Suchindran, 2004; Hancock, Keast, & Ellis, 2017; Towns & Scott, 2013). This complicates the already well-known relationship between risk-taking behaviour and mental illness (Currie et al., 2005; Lawrence, Mitrou, Sawyer, & Zubrick, 2010; McCloughen, Foster, Marabong, Miu, & Fethney, 2015).

Intimate partner violence, including dating violence, is associated with a significant burden on the physical, sexual and reproductive health of women (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012) leading to increased health service utilisation (Bonomi, Anderson, & Rivara, 2009). Most studies exploring the association between IPV and the physical health impacts, have included young women as well as older ones. For example, a cross-sectional study revealed that IPV was associated with an increased risk of physical health issues among 18 to 65 year old women, including, but not limited to, chronic pain, disability impacting work attendance, gastrointestinal problems, migraines and various urogenital infections (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000). An Australian cohort of 18 to 23 year old young women from the ALSWH also showed a strong association between IPV and adverse reproductive events including pregnancy, miscarriage and termination of pregnancy (Taft & Watson, 2007). The mental and physical consequences of unwanted pregnancies pose further concerns for young victims and survivors. A small-scale, Canadian qualitative study conducted among young women, which is described in further detail later in this literature review, revealed that young women reported greater mental distress, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections as a result of experiencing dating violence (Ismail, Berman, & Ward-Griffin, 2007). Another recent longitudinal study which included 13 to 29 year old young people showed associations between dating violence and lower self-reported physical health ratings (Copp et al., 2016). However, the authors concluded that further study exploring the relationship between dating violence among young people and its impact on physical health is needed.

At the very end of the spectrum, dating violence has resulted in homicide (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network., 2018; Azziz-Baumgartner, McKeown, Melvin, Dang, & Reed, 2011; Campbell, Glass, Sharps, Laughon, & Bloom, 2007; Lum On et al., 2016). At the time of writing this thesis there were no studies published on the relationship specifically between homicide and dating violence in Australia. Within the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP), twenty-three percent of homicides were attributed to intimate partner homicides in the years 2002-03 and 2011-12, with the majority being female victims

(Bryant & Cussen, 2015). A more recent report, including 16 to 78 year old women, was published by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network on intimate partner homicides in Australia during the period 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2014 (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network., 2018). Just over 1 in 5 of the female victims of intimate partner homicide in this report were girlfriends or former girlfriends of the perpetrator. This report revealed that 79.6% of all intimate partner homicides during the reporting period resulted from a male killing a current or former female intimate partner, with most cases being associated with a history of the male perpetrating IPV against the woman.

In addition to the associations with poor health and loss of life, dating violence has also been shown to have long-term consequences for future relationships. Longitudinal studies of dating violence have shown that dating violence victimisation increases the risk of IPV in future relationships (Ahmadabadi et al., 2018; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Mueller, Jouriles, McDonald, & Rosenfield, 2013; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003; Spriggs, Halpern, & Martin, 2009). One study (O'Leary et al., 1989) suggests that men can be three times more likely to continue perpetrating violence after marriage if violence had been occurring during the premarital courtship period. Additionally, it is known that IPV in the family violence context can have serious impacts on the well-being of young children and thus IPV can become an intergenerational problem (Campo, 2015).

The complicated comorbidities of dating violence victimisation, risk-taking behaviours, mental health problems, loss of life and then the persistence of abuse and violence into future intimate and family relationships pose significant challenges for young women and as they grow older. The added estimated burden of men's violence against women on Australia's economy (KPMG Australia, 2016) highlights the public health importance of addressing dating violence in young people's relationships.

Public appraisal of dating violence

Dating violence is a prevalent and important public health concern with numerous health and social impacts. However despite these burdens, there is varied understanding and awareness of dating violence by young women and the general public in Australia (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015; Politoff et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2018). An Australian study exploring over three thousand young people's attitudes towards men's violence against women revealed that most participants were unable to articulate what a healthy and respectful relationship encompassed (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). Trust and communication were described

as key markers of healthy relationships but the broader aspect of gender equality was not discussed (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). One in six participants believed that young women needed to be controlled by young men and over a quarter normalised verbal harassment and sexual coercion by males (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). The latest National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), which surveyed 1761 young Australians aged 16 to 24 years, has shown that Australian young people are knowledgeable about key issues concerning men's violence against women and support gender equality in theory (Politoff et al., 2019). Encouragingly it has also been demonstrated that there has been an improvement in attitudes of all Australians concerning gender equality and men's violence against women between the years 2013 and 2017 (Politoff et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2018). However, young people were unaware that violence against women is usually gendered, perpetrated by men towards women (Politoff et al., 2019). Young people surveyed were also less likely to hold attitudes supportive of gender equality within relationships and households but supported gender equality in the workplace and public contexts (Politoff et al., 2019). Worryingly, a significant percentage of young people also believed that women exaggerated claims of violence to gain advantage in custody battles, demonstrated limited knowledge of consent, and believed that controlling behaviours within relationships are normal (Politoff et al., 2019). Despite most young people acknowledging that young women suffer greater consequences of violence, a quarter of the young people surveyed had attitudes that excused violence perpetrated by young men against young women (Politoff et al., 2019).

In summary, dating violence is a prevalent public health problem experienced mostly by young women. There are significant associations between dating violence and adverse health outcomes, yet public appraisal of dating violence is unhelpful and ill-informed. While we know that young women experience dating violence, we know little about the young women's own experiences and perceptions of dating violence. Further research is needed to understand how dating violence is perceived by young women in Australia who have themselves experienced dating violence. This depth exploration is needed in order to improve public health awareness of the problem and better inform prevention programmes that make sense to young women. Additionally, in order to understand dating violence, it is first necessary to accurately understand what 'dating' is within the context in which it is being studied (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016; Wentland & Reissing, 2014).

Thesis aim and research questions

Thus, the aim of this thesis was to understand dating and dating violence in Australia from the perspective of a sub-group of Australian young women, who had experienced some form of dating violence in their own relationships. The research questions that I sought to address were:

1. How do Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships?
2. How do Australian young women recognise and respond to their dating violence relationships?

The research questions are addressed in each chapter aligning with each stage of the research process. The chapters are outlined below.

Thesis structure

This section presents the structure of this thesis. Each chapter heading is presented with a summary of the chapter contents. This first chapter introduced the thesis and the topic of research and the second chapter presents a critical review of the scholarly literature relevant to the research questions. The findings are then presented over the subsequent two chapters. The findings are then synthesised with the scholarly literature in the discussion chapter which ends with the study implications and conclusion.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This first chapter introduced my personal and professional background and journey that led me to undertake this PhD on dating violence. This is followed by an introduction to the topic of dating violence and the rationale for conducting this study. The prevalence of dating violence, its health impacts and public appraisal of dating violence are discussed, outlining why further exploration and input from young women who had experienced dating violence was required. This leads into the thesis aim and research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter presents a critical narrative review of the scholarly literature relevant to the thesis research questions. The chapter begins with an introduction to narrative literature reviews and discussion around why a critical narrative review was best suited to review the literature relevant to the research questions. The literature review examines what is known about dating and other types of romantic interactions among young women, what is known about how young women make sense of dating violence and how they leave their abusive relationships.

Chapter 3: Research design

This chapter outlines the research design used to explore the research questions. First, the theoretical perspectives informing the design and conduct of this thesis are presented, i.e. social constructionism and feminism. How these perspectives informed the narrative research methodology are then discussed. Next, the ethical considerations, participant sampling and recruitment, data collection and data analysis approach are presented. The methods of data analysis are discussed in detail, including the thematic analysis using a narrative approach and application of social script theory through a feminist lens, as an explanatory framework to interpret the findings.

Chapter 4: Australian young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships

This is the first findings chapter and is devoted to the findings related to the first research question exploring the young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships. This chapter presents the Australian young women's perceptions of casual and committed relationships, predominantly with young men. Young women's perceptions of casual and committed types of relationships, including dating and long-term relationships are introduced. This is followed by presentation of the dating script and then the dating to relationship script, which were developed using data from this study. Using social script theory with a feminist lens, the gendered nature of dating is discussed, setting the scene to make sense of the young women's perceptions of abuse and violence in such relationships.

Chapter 5: Australian young women's recognition of and response to dating violence relationships

This chapter presents findings from the narrative interviews relating to the second research question exploring the Australian young women's recognition of and response to dating violence relationships. Using a feminist lens, the young women's perceptions of dating violence are discussed, including how the young women's roles and identities shaped their views of abuse and violence. This is followed by a discussion of how the young women's dating violence relationships ended.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter brings together the findings from the narrative interviews with the thirty-five Australian young women who participated in this study. Findings related to the research questions are summarised and the overarching research question, *how Australian young women*

perceive dating and dating violence is discussed. This chapter summarises the dating script and how existing social scripts define young women's identities and roles within their romantic relationships with young men. The overarching influence of powerful master narratives that inform patriarchal social scripts are discussed as establishing and reinforcing men's violence against women. This then leads to a summary of how the Australian young women from this study made sense of dating violence and how their dating violence relationships ended. The dating violence exit model is presented, which outlines the major pathways that led to the end of the dating violence relationships for the young women, while highlighting the powerful underpinning gendered roles.

Next, the research project's challenges, limitations, strengths and implications are discussed. Implications for primary prevention are discussed, including the role of feminist counterstories in challenging our overarching patriarchal societal structures and social scripts that govern the way young women think, act, and adopt identities and roles within romantic relationships with young men. Finally, recommendations for future research are made before the thesis conclusion.

Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the topic of dating violence and its enormous burden on the health and well-being of Australian young women. The rationale for undertaking this study was outlined, and then the thesis aims, research questions and outline of the thesis structure were presented.

We know that dating violence is a serious, important and growing public health concern across Australia and the world (Bonomi et al., 2013; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; State Government of Victoria, 2004). It is associated with adverse health outcomes and social development, loss of life and an increased risk of experiencing abuse in future relationships (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network., 2018; Azziz-Baumgartner et al., 2011; Doom et al., 2017; Mueller et al., 2013; O'Leary et al., 1989; Smith et al., 2003; Spriggs et al., 2009; Stöckl et al., 2013). Dating violence is a gendered problem where young women are at greater risk of experiencing abuse and violence in their intimate relationships compared to older women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Young women experience more serious physical and psychological injuries resulting from dating violence when compared to young men (Reed et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). In the United States, research into dating violence dates back several decades and some European studies have also been undertaken in this space (Barter et al., 2017; Bowen et al., 2013). There has been increasing research on adult

IPV in Australia and abroad (Hegarty et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2005), however research on dating violence, particularly in Australia, lags behind. In particular, there is a need for qualitative research involving Australian young women who have experienced dating violence (Hooker, Theobald, Anderson, Billet, & Baron, 2017), as young women bear the brunt of this social and health problem.

The long-term effects of dating violence, including poor health, chronic disease, mortality, risk of IPV in future relationships and repercussions on young children's health as a result of family violence are further reasons why understanding and addressing IPV among young people is so important. While we know that men's violence against women disproportionately affects Australian young women and we know that Australian young people's attitudes are supportive of violence (Webster et al., 2018), we know little about the young women's perceptions of dating, how they perceive dating violence and then how they finally end such relationships. To examine young women's perceptions of dating violence, we must first understand their perceptions of dating. We need to understand the terminology that young women use to describe and understand dating and other romantic relationships, and whether they use the term dating at all, prior to investigating how the young women make sense of dating violence (Rowley & Hertzog, 2016; Wentland & Reissing, 2014).

This study addressed this gap by investigating perceptions of dating and dating violence among a sample of Australian young women using a qualitative research design. This study is also a response to the World Health Organization's (WHO) call for further research to understand and address IPV, which is a preventable problem (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that older women and men are increasingly becoming involved in dating (Brown & Shinohara, 2013; Watson & Stelle, 2011), however, for the purpose of remaining succinct and accounting for gender and age differences, this thesis will focus on young women's dating relationships. The literature review in the next chapter will describe and critique existing qualitative studies conducted among young women, exploring their views and experiences of dating and dating violence.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

The introduction presented the context and rationale for exploring Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. The gaps in knowledge related to qualitative research into dating violence in Australia were highlighted. The thesis aim, research questions and an outline of the thesis structure were then presented. This chapter presents a critique of qualitative studies from Australia and overseas, examining young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. The chapter begins with a description of the critical narrative literature review approach. The findings of this review are then presented, including what is currently known about dating and dating violence from the perspective of young women, and what is known about how young women interpret and then make decisions about staying in or leaving their abusive relationships. As there was very limited qualitative literature available on young women's decisions to stay in or leave dating violence relationships, theoretical models explaining how adult women and young women leave abusive relationships were examined and presented instead. The chapter ends with a summary highlighting the gaps in knowledge concerning Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. It is important to acknowledge that dating and dating violence research has been predominantly conducted among mainstream 'college' students in North America, therefore the generalisability of some of these studies to young people in Australia is limited.

Narrative literature review

A critical narrative literature review was undertaken to establish the existing qualitative studies exploring young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. A narrative literature review is a 'scholarly summary' which aims to identify and summarise previous studies with interpretation and critique, thus deepening understanding of the research question and highlighting key areas of research that have not yet been addressed (Ferrari, 2015; Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018). A narrative review was best suited to this thesis due to the broad nature of the research questions that are not consistent with the traditional, empirical category of structured research questions that test precise hypotheses (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The research focus that a narrative literature review addresses is not as precise and narrow as a research question addressed by a traditional systematic literature review (Ferrari, 2015; Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Nevertheless, narrative literature reviews must be conducted using a systematic process (Ferrari, 2015). Narrative literature reviews allow the freedom to integrate studies with diverse designs and methodologies, and criteria for inclusion of studies is not rigid;

therefore qualitative, quantitative and theoretical literature pertaining to this topic of research can be included (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005; Ferrari, 2015; Whitemore & Knafl, 2005). The purpose of narrative literature reviews is to provide a deeper understanding of a complex situation through ‘multi-level interpretation using creativity and judgement’ which a systematic review does not allow for (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Additionally, presentation of the narrative literature review allows the author to be reflexive and include ‘commentary and higher levels of abstraction’ that perhaps other methods of literature reviewing do not offer (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005). The literature concerning dating and dating violence is methodologically diverse and covers a range of topics and contexts, including the phenomenon of dating and dating violence, health associations with dating violence and models of decision-making concerning dating violence, therefore a narrative literature review was the most appropriate method to bring these studies together.

The characteristic of narrative reviews being less formal and less prescriptive compared to systematic reviews, also poses a challenge as there is limited guidance available on how to do it well (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Ferrari, 2015; Torraco, 2016). Narrative reviews do not need to transform the data to fit with other studies for interpretive purposes, and there is no need to utilise any complex mathematical analysis (Greenhalgh et al., 2018; Mays, Pope, & Popay, 2005), thus information from narrative literature reviews can be collated and presented creatively. However, narrative reviews are required to be conducted in a systematic way to remain structured and reduce bias, and analysis should facilitate meaningful discussion and conclusions (Ferrari, 2015). For this thesis, a critical narrative literature review was conducted in four stages (Greenhalgh et al., 2018; Saunders & Rojon, 2011) to address the thesis research questions. The research questions are:

1. How do Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships?
2. How do Australian young women recognise and respond to their dating violence relationships?

First, the research questions were split into major search topics to focus the literature search (Table 1). Second, relevant databases were searched with search terms relating to the research topics. Thirdly, the relevant literature was recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The final step involved a qualitative synthesis of the literature which is presented in this chapter. The process of remaining critical throughout the literature review was guided by Saunders’ and Ronjon’s (2011) checklist and guidelines. Thus, the literature review that has been conducted

and presented here includes the most relevant and significant research on the topic, discussion and evaluation of the research with relevance to the Australian context where possible, while contextualising the aims and objectives of this study. The literature search was completed on 31st December 2017 and a final search for new publications was undertaken in November 2018. All sources have been accounted for and referenced in the required format.

Topics	Dating	Dating violence	Young people	Recognition	Response
Search terms	dating*, 'romantic, relationship'	'dating violence', 'intimate partner violence', 'intimate partner abuse', 'domestic violence'	'young people', adolescen*, youth*, teen*	recognise or recognition, appraisal, perception	respond*, exit, leaving

Table 1: Literature search terms

The first stage involved the outline of search terms relevant to the research topic. The search topics were focused on identifying literature related to Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence, with a specific focus on recognition and leaving abusive relationships. The major topic headings were 'dating', 'dating violence', 'young people', 'recognition' and 'response'. Search terms were kept broad to avoid missing potentially relevant articles and are listed in Table 1.

The second stage involved searching the scholarly databases for literature. Details of the databases searched and inclusion and exclusion criteria are not required to be strictly described in narrative literature reviews, however, including detail regarding the databases searched and the subject headings used is useful, so that the search may be replicated in future (Ferrari, 2015; Torracco, 2016). The search terms were entered into the 'all fields' search sections of the academic database search tools and not limited to title or subject searches for this literature review. The academic databases that were searched were Web of Science, MEDLINE, Psycinfo, CINAHL and the University of Melbourne Discovery database. The search engines

Google and Google Scholar were also searched for completeness following the academic database literature search. The decision to search these databases was based on consultation with my supervisors and a librarian at the University of Melbourne who was experienced with systematic literature review searches. The literature search focused on identifying only qualitative studies exploring young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. Mixed method studies were excluded. Inclusion criteria included English language articles and publication dates from the year 2000 onwards. The search resulted in a total of 12214 records with 405 titles shortlisted. After screening abstracts and excluding duplicates, fifteen articles were included in the literature review. A further five articles were sourced through searching google scholar and article references. Therefore, in total twenty studies were included in the literature review. Studies were excluded if they discussed dating or dating violence in a context that was not directly relevant to the research questions, such as studies focused on same-sex relationships, mental illness or very niche geographical populations. Studies not published in English were also excluded.

The third stage involved systematically entering the studies into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. For each study on the spreadsheet, notes were taken under the sub-headings of paper aims, population studied, study methods, themes and conclusions with other notes relevant to the thesis research questions. The final stage involved the collation of the qualitative synthesis of these studies undertaken in Microsoft Excel, which is presented in this chapter under the broad themes of dating, young women's recognition of dating violence and then decisions to stay or leave abusive dating relationships. The literature review ends with an outline of the gaps pertaining to our knowledge of Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence.

Young women's perceptions of dating

Australian and international literature was reviewed to identify qualitative studies exploring young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. More specifically, the literature review sought to gather information pertaining to the research questions exploring how Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships and how they recognise and respond to dating violence relationships. Analysis of the twenty articles identified four major themes related to young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence particularly in their relationships with young men, including: dating rules, gendered

dating behaviours, the importance of dating, and finally the normalisation and minimisation of dating violence behaviours.

Dating rules

Dating was described to be a common experience for young women with certain rules to abide by. A few of the studies alluded to dating 'scripts' or stages of progression within the relationship as well as specific characteristics and activities that comprised dating (Debnam, Howard, Garza, & Green, 2017; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009; Toscano, 2007, 2014). The first step of dating is usually likened to a 'love at first sight' type of attraction to the young man which would draw the young women to them, and finding a 'popular guy' was perceived to be highly desirable (Jackson, 2001; Toscano, 2007, 2014). If he was also interested in the young woman, it was expected that the young man would initiate going out on a date or spending more time together (Volpe, Morales-Aleman, & Teitelman, 2014). The young women would thus take on the more passive role traditionally attributed to femininity and wait for the romance to unfold through the traditional male pursuit (Jackson, 2001; Volpe et al., 2014).

Communication between the young man and young woman would commence electronically and then initial dates might occur within a group or double date context before moving into single dates (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009; Toscano, 2007). As the dating relationship would progress, constant contact would be expected, particularly over text messaging, and control would be insidiously established over the young woman (Toscano, 2014). The young women in Toscano's (2007) study went on to describe the full circle of dating in the context of friendship groups, including re-introduction of the couple into the group with the labels of boyfriend and girlfriend. Young women in Toscana's (2007) study described the challenging task of balancing the couple identity with their own individual roles within the group. If the couple broke up they would need to re-enter the group again as single individuals and this would mean re-building their individual identities within the peer group (Toscano, 2007).

Dating activities include sharing activities such as going to the shopping centre, attending classes, watching movies and eating out together (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Young women's perceptions of qualities of a good dating relationship were investigated by Hays et al (2009) in their study of seven young women's artwork and photography. Young women discussed the importance of physical closeness, giving and receiving gifts, sacrifice, treating the dating partner as a family member, nurturance, commitment and romance (Hays et al., 2009). However, the African-American young women in Debnam's (2017) study highlighted

that the characteristics of dating are not linear and tend to vary depending on whether the relationship occurs in high school or later in life, with friendship always being an integral part of the dating relationship. Dating in high school is normally temporary and casual whereas post high school, dating involves searching for a long-term partner where the relationship might result in marriage (Debnam et al., 2017). However, romance is overwhelmingly viewed by most young women as central to their feminine identities, an important part of transition into young adulthood and to maintain status within their peer groups (Chung, 2007; Noel, Ogle, Maisto, & Jackson, 2016).

Sex is a contentious aspect of dating where young women perceive themselves and young men to have varying degrees of interest and desire (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). The Thai young women in Thongpriwan's (2009) study viewed premarital sexual activity as taboo, although contrastingly it was perceived that young men needed sex for a relationship to be successful. The American young women in Toscano's (2007) study expressed no such taboos but agreed that sex was an expectation, particularly among young men who were older, and explained how emotional and physical intimacy both increased as the relationship progressed into the single dates setting. While physical closeness was often a positive experience, sexual pressure from young men was accepted as a normal expectation within dating relationships regardless of young women's own levels of discomfort (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017). The minimisation and normalisation of harmful dating behaviours are discussed in later sections. The gendered aspects of dating behaviours are discussed next.

Dating is gendered

The rules by which young women abide within dating relationships are gendered and there is social pressure to conform to these gendered ideals (Chung, 2007; Luft, Jenkins, & Cameron, 2012; Noel et al., 2016). Young men tend to adopt more dominant roles within heterosexual dating relationships while young women adopt more passive roles, in keeping with traditional patriarchal social structures (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Banister, Jakubec, & Stein, 2003; Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Noel et al., 2016; Ragavan, Syed-Swift, Elwy, Fikre, & Bair-Merritt, 2018). Young women provided examples of endorsing heterosexual norms informed by patriarchal social structures including prioritising the relationship, taking a more submissive role within the relationship, being sexual gatekeepers of the relationship and taking key responsibility for the relationship's well-being (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007; Jackson, 2001; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017; Luft et al., 2012), and this was not different to young women who identified with non-Western

cultures (Haglund, Belknap, & Garcia, 2012; Ragavan et al., 2018; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009).

The young women in the qualitative studies were found to prioritise their relationships with young men over their other relationships and activities (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007). Young women's female friends would become secondary to the relationship, resulting in becoming distant from these friends and spending less time with them; although on the flipside, some of the young women would become involved in abusive relationships to fill the void of social isolation (Jackson, 2001). In the absence of family and friends, the male partner was prioritised and often became the young woman's primary source of social support (Ismail et al., 2007). The young women viewed personal sacrifice to benefit the young men as an important part of being in a heterosexual relationship, which resulted in the young women compromising their own well-being (Luft et al., 2012). However, adopting passive roles and isolation from family and friends was not necessarily a happy choice for young women, as sometimes adopting a passive role enabled young women to simply appease their boyfriends and prevent escalation of violence in a dating violence relationship (Wiklund, Malmgren-Olsson, Bengs, & Ohman, 2010).

Young women's roles as sexual gatekeepers of the relationship was common across several qualitative studies conducted across the world (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Banister et al., 2003; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017; Luft et al., 2012). For example, one American constructivist study of adolescent girls found that young women expected young men to pursue young women and to initiate a relationship, although it was not necessarily acceptable for young women to pursue young men for a relationship (Volpe et al., 2014). A clear power imbalance usually exists in favour of the males, and young women tend to give in, particularly to sexual pressure, in order to maintain a relationship with a boyfriend who they had fear of losing (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Banister et al., 2003; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). A Canadian study of young women attending University revealed that the young women faced pressure to view sex positively and gave in to sexual pressure even if they felt annoyed by it and recognised the coercion (Jeffrey & Barata, 2017). Persistent sexual pressure from young men resulted in the young women feeling guilty about not being as interested in sex, blaming themselves for the sexual coercion and then giving in to keep the male partner happy (Banister et al., 2003; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017). This was exacerbated by the loss of 'sexual pride' resulting from the persistent oppression and humiliation that young women endured (Wiklund et al., 2010). Young women from non-Western cultural backgrounds were similar as is evident

from a content analysis of individual interviews conducted with twenty-four teenage girls in Thailand, which found that the young women perceived it to be normal that sex would be a requirement of being in a relationship with young men and were thus afraid of declining sex in case the young men no longer saw value in the relationship (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Further, the young Thai women had clear cut views on what was expected behaviour of a good and bad girl but expressed no such expectations of young men (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Similarly, an American study of South-Asian origin young women revealed that young women were judged harshly by community members for being involved in dating relationships as dating is stigmatised, whereas this was not necessarily the case with young men (Ragavan et al., 2018).

Responsibilities within dating relationships were also gendered. It was common for the young men to be the protectors of young women to 'keep them safe' and for the young women to take responsibility for the well-being of the relationship and the couple's reputation (Banister et al., 2003; Chung, 2007; Haglund et al., 2012). This responsibility continued when abuse and violence occurred in the relationship and young women would usually take the blame for not looking after the relationship (Baker, 2003). Abuse and violence was covered up in order to project a positive and happy image of the relationship to society and peers (Chung, 2007; Haglund et al., 2012). A grounded theory study of twenty-eight Euro-Canadian women investigating their management of sacrifice and conflict revealed that young women would take responsibility for several aspects of the relationship in addition to being gatekeepers of sexual activity within the relationship (Luft et al., 2012). The young women also perceived themselves as needing to make the greater sacrifices in the relationship in order to live up to gendered expectations. This behaviour continued when abuse and violence occurred, where the young women would sacrifice their own well-being to keep the young man happy (Banister et al., 2003; Luft et al., 2012). Young men were afforded the freedom to control young women's appearance and clothing, and these sorts of behaviours were rationalised as being displays of true love (Chung, 2007). Further, when control escalated and violent behaviours became apparent, young women were reluctant to hold the young men accountable (Jackson, 2001). Young women instead held themselves responsible for this behaviour in their roles as relationship caretakers (Chung, 2007; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017), or sometimes blamed '*karma*' (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009), the law of cause and effect. Although the young women in Thongpriwan's (2009) study attempt to project a dissociation from taking direct

responsibility for the abuse by choosing to blame *karma*, it nevertheless suggests that the young women perceived themselves as *deserving* the dating violence as a result of their past deeds.

Dating is important to young women

Dating has been described by young women to be a significant feature of their feminine heterosexual identity and necessary to remain relevant within their peer group (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007). Dating is reinforced through media portrayals and in popular culture (Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Toscano, 2014). Having experience with dating is perceived to be extremely important to young women, perhaps more than it is to young men, particularly to maintain conversations with peers in a group (Chung, 2007). Thus, young women experience immense peer pressure to be in heterosexual romantic relationships, which is perceived to be a marker of heterosexual femininity and a transition into adulthood (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007). Young women perceive it to be desirable to be dating a popular young man and showcase the perfect romance to their peers (Toscano, 2014), as dating is associated with a glorified status within peer groups (Noel et al., 2016). Young women in Chung's (2007) study felt inadequate and even socially excluded if they were not involved in a romantic relationship, while a young woman in a Canadian study described feeling so much pressure to be romantically involved that she moved from one abusive relationship to another while searching for the perfect fairy tale relationship with a young man (Ismail et al., 2007). Young women interviewed in Toscano's (2014) study reminded themselves of 'better times' when citing reasons for staying in abusive dating relationships. The importance of succumbing to peer pressure, rather than experiencing healthy relationships, is reinforced by popular culture such as the media where romantic relationships are glamorised and depicted to be a vital part of coming of age and being socially sought after (Ismail et al., 2007; Toscano, 2014).

Maintaining a good reputation within the peer group was an important aspect of dating because young women judged each other harshly (Baker, 2003). Although young women worked so hard to fit in with their peers, female friends were least sympathetic and most unhelpful when their peers found themselves in abusive relationships; many blamed the young woman for the violence or expressed astonishment at the young women's choice of staying in abusive relationships (Baker, 2003). This only exacerbates the blame that young women place on themselves when a relationship does not proceed as it should, such as in the case of dating violence (Chung, 2007; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017). Societal and peer pressure to conform to heterosexual dating norms only reinforces young women's commitment to romantic ideals, sometimes giving them no choice but to pretend that the relationship is rosy.

While personal identity and reputation were important, the young women often found their social and sexual identities entwined within a ‘couple identity’ with the young man who they were dating (Chung, 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Toscano, 2007). While there might be positive aspects to this, the downside demonstrated in Chung’s (2007) study was that young women faced significant pressure to build and maintain a good reputation as a couple amongst their peers, while this responsibility was not generally taken on by the young men. Protecting the couple reputation included minimising and normalising unacceptable behaviours including abuse and violence (Luft et al., 2012). Minimising and hiding abuse from her peers and the public was also found in an older study among young women in Queensland (Baker, 2003). If the young woman’s loyalty was questioned at any point, then her reputation would become compromised and she might be labelled a ‘slut’ and risk losing her boyfriend, as the young man would then distance himself to maintain his own reputation with his peers (Chung, 2007).

Dating is so central to young women’s lives that young women are willing to challenge cultural norms, form relationships in secrecy from their parents and risk personal adversity to keep up with the social pressure of having a boyfriend (Haglund et al., 2012; Ragavan et al., 2018; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Rather than choosing to challenge their parents openly and having a conversation about dating, young women choose to become secretly involved in dating to keep up with heteronormative dating practices while also avoiding conflict with their parents (Haglund et al., 2012). This also meant that young women from non-Western cultural backgrounds had little guidance and support from their parents about dating, which becomes problematic when abuse and violence occurs in the relationship and the young women have only their friends to rely on for support (Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Young women who experienced dating violence also suffered negative physical and emotional health outcomes; yet due to the insidious nature of the dating violence, the health problems did not detract them from persisting with their dating violence relationships (Banister et al., 2003; Ismail et al., 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). The young women described experiencing unwanted pregnancies, substance abuse, mental illness including suicidality, physical injuries and sexually transmitted infections. However, the shame and fear of being judged led to secrecy and tolerance of the relationship even if the young women had drawn the association between the abuse and the negative health impacts (Ismail et al., 2007). The fear of not being believed or understood and the glamorisation of dating violence in the media caused the young women to second guess themselves and wonder if they were imagining the negative impacts of the

dating violence (Ismail et al., 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). This was of course compounded by the sheer social need to remain in romantic relationships.

Dating signifies young women's commitment to a romantic narrative (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2005; Hays et al., 2009; Jackson, 2001; Toscano, 2007) and is perpetuated by popular culture that governs how young women should live their youth (Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012). Love is perceived to be central to young women's lives and young women believe that they should make sacrifices and endure difficulties in the name of love (Baker, 2003). Great value is thus placed on the longevity of dating relationships (Haglund et al., 2012; Luft et al., 2012; Toscano, 2007). One school of thought suggests that young women's behaviours in romantic relationships are largely linked to fairy tale narratives which are fed to them from childhood and then reinforced through music videos, magazines and other media outlets in young adulthood (Ismail et al., 2007; Jackson, 2001). Jackson (2001) conducted a qualitative study in which she interviewed twenty-three young women in New Zealand. She analysed her interviews using a feminist poststructuralist narrative analysis and found that the young women in her study did indeed conform to the fairy tale ideal; they found their handsome prince during times of distress and expected to be rescued from their misery through this magical romantic encounter and live happily ever after with the prince (Jackson, 2001). It is then no surprise that young people's commitment to the romantic narrative leads to normalisation and minimisation of violence in these relationships.

Young women's perceptions of dating violence

Dating violence is normalised, minimised and perpetuated

When young men perpetrated violence within these gendered dating relationships, these behaviours were minimised and normalised by young women. Due to the gendered roles adopted by young people, the young men's control over young women within heterosexual relationships was interpreted to be a normal sign of love and so dating violence was often difficult for young women to recognise (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007; Toscano, 2014). Young women often tend to recognise dating violence only after the relationship ends (Jackson, 2001). The romantic narrative was central to the lives of the young women. For example, the young women in Baker's (2003) study believed that anything could be endured in the name of love. Possessive behaviours of checking on the young woman's whereabouts were perceived to be signs of caring (Ismail et al., 2007), and control of what the young women wore was perceived by young women to be for their 'own good' (Chung, 2007).

The young women in Toscano's (2014) phenomenological study of abusive relationships described 'techno vigilance', where the young women were expected to constantly remain in touch with their boyfriends via text message and this method of control was accepted and expected in dating relationships by young women. Controlling behaviours were normalised and rationalised as displays of love, although the control was also reinforced by angry outbursts, sexual pressure and rendering the young women to feel responsible for the young men's well-being (Toscano, 2014). Thus, the young women found breaking up to be difficult and stayed with their male partners due to fear of the repercussions of leaving, obligation to care for the boyfriend and feeling inappropriately responsible for his well-being (Toscano, 2014).

Young women and society had double standards when approaching dating violence, where young men were forgiven but young women were judged harshly for making wrong relationships decisions (Baker, 2003, 2008; Chung, 2005, 2007; Ragavan et al., 2018). When the abuse and violence would begin within a dating relationship, young women were readily forgiving of the behaviour (Jackson, 2001). Young women in Jackson's (2001) study perceived dating violence to occur because their poor prince had had a hard life and so the young women would tolerate the abuse, perhaps hoping that they would be able to transform the 'beast' with their beauty. This is similar to an Australian study of high school girls which revealed that the girls excused and explained young men's use of violence as resulting from stress or mental illness (Baker, 2003). The young women overwhelmingly focused on other young women's responses and responsibilities towards the violence rather than the young men's perpetration of abuse and violence, reinforcing that young women judged each other harshly. Frustration and astonishment were expressed about young women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships and staying was viewed as a sign of weakness. In contrast, the young women expressed a lack of control over male violence against women but also suggested that dating violence could be 'provoked' by young women (Baker, 2003). Young women were more willing to tolerate abuse than to tolerate infidelity, with general agreement that infidelity crossed the line of love and thus must not be tolerated (Chung, 2007; Toscano, 2014). Further, dating violence was not perceived to be a significant issue by others in society, thus perpetuating the normalisation and minimisation of dating violence. The Swedish girls in Wiklund's (2010) study, for example, found that society was either supportive or backstabbed them, but often refused to validate their claims of dating violence, thus resulting in an over-

reliance on close female friends for support, and slowing down the pathway to recovery from the trauma.

Young women who had experienced dating violence perceived their health and well-being to be significantly impacted in a negative way (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Banister et al., 2003; Ismail et al., 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). For example, a young woman in Wiklund's (2010) study who had experienced severe sexual dating violence from a boyfriend described her body as a 'rape scene', which impacted on her long term mental health in the way of severe depression, hyperarousal and a negative perception of life and her relationships. Most young women who had experienced dating violence described experiencing significant psychological distress while in their dating relationships with young men (Banister & Jakubee, 2004), which was exacerbated by substance use (Banister et al., 2003; Noel et al., 2016). Symptoms of depression, anxiety, disordered eating and post-traumatic stress were described amongst feelings of worthlessness, poor perception of physical health and a feeling of distrust towards the world (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Ismail et al., 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). Reproductive ill health including unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections were also negative consequences of dating violence relationships experienced by young women (Ismail et al., 2007). However, even the knowledge of health effects and substance abuse did not overcome young women's desire to remain in the dating violence relationship due to the strong influence of societal norms underpinned by patriarchal social structures (Banister et al., 2003).

Young women viewed dating violence to be a personal social issue and ignored the effect of patriarchal societal structures as drivers of dating violence (Baker, 2003, 2008; Chung, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). This is contradictory to young women expressing a general and pervasive fear of male violence against women, within and outside of heterosexual dating relationships, including the fear of rape at parties and so on (Baker, 2003). Baker (2003) suggests that despite the young women speaking of male intimate partner violence against women, they failed to acknowledge or discuss the systematic, gendered nature of intimate partner violence within heterosexual relationships. This is consistent with other studies exploring dating violence with young women (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007). Further, young women perceive the experience of violence through a liberal lens, as an individualistic choice and agency, which places them at risk of being judged. Baker (2003) argues that based on her study, young women struggle to express and acknowledge their experiences of 'discrimination and injustice' in their battles with dating violence amongst the wave of post-feminist success stories, particularly in

the media, that emphasise female agency and power over males. A further study by Baker (2008) a few years later only confirmed these findings, that society and popular culture lead us to falsely believe that women in Australia have the freedom to choose their circumstances and way of life, when in reality this is merely a new method of subordination and regulation of women. A narrative study conducted among Swedish adolescent girls found similarly, that young women saw themselves as living in a country that took pride in being progressive in terms of gender equality and hence the young women perceived themselves to be independent individuals who needed to fight the battle of dating violence on their own (Wiklund et al., 2010). The journey to recovery from the abuse and violence was not straightforward, but achieving separation and moving on was associated with pride (Wiklund et al., 2010). A study of American young women found that the young women not only resisted being portrayed as passive victims but described their experiences of dating violence as catalysts for personal growth, thus perceiving their potentially disempowering situation to be an empowering one instead (Amar & Alexy, 2005). Young women believed that abuse and violence occurred in relationships due to their own failure to stand up for themselves in this post-feminist era of female empowerment (Baker, 2003; Haglund et al., 2012; Luft et al., 2012). And, overwhelmingly, young women who experienced dating violence resisted being portrayed as passive victims without agency (Jackson, 2001; Wiklund et al., 2010). Thus, taking some responsibility for the dating violence within the relationship was perhaps necessary to protect their own identities and allow personal growth.

Studies focused on diverse cultural groups have shown positive and negative influences of culture on dating violence (Haglund et al., 2012; Ragavan et al., 2018; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Haglund's (2012) focus group study of teenaged Mexican-American girls revealed that the Mexican culture was viewed by the young women as being more traditional and patriarchal compared to the Western culture. Young women behaved in their dating relationships the way adult Mexican women would, where patriarchal norms were upheld and young women were expected to stay with the same young man through adversity in the name of culture (Haglund et al., 2012). The young women's parents prioritised education and disapproved of dating and thus discussing problems with parents was not an option, leaving young women to navigate dating violence on their own (Haglund et al., 2012). The young women of South Asian background in Ragavan's (2018) study conducted in the United States and Thai young women in Thongpriwan's (2009) study conducted in Bangkok were in agreement. Young women in these studies reported having dated secretly because dating was

not approved by parents due to stigmatisation of dating within the community and judging young women who were involved in dating relationships (Ragavan et al., 2018; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). Thus, these young women who identified as bicultural or from non-Western cultural backgrounds often discussed relationship problems with their friends rather than their parents, which posed a problem during times of trouble within these relationships (Haglund et al., 2012; Ragavan et al., 2018; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009). However, biculturalism was also seen to be supportive and protective for the young women and needs to be nurtured (Haglund et al., 2012).

In conclusion, qualitative studies of young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence suggest that dating is gendered and possibly structured. Dating is central to young women's identities and to remain relevant within their peer groups. The young women prioritised their relationships over their health, well-being and cultural norms and often endured dating violence in secrecy due to fear of being judged or dismissed if they spoke to others. Dating violence behaviours were normalised and minimised by young women and their peers. Young women mostly viewed dating violence as an individualistic choice while remaining oblivious to traditional patriarchal social structures that impact on the social construction of harmful gendered norms. The young women were trapped in their relationships due to social pressure to live a fairy tale life and hence leaving dating violence relationships was not always straightforward. The next section builds on this by exploring literature examining what we know about how young women leave their dating violence relationships.

How young women leave dating violence relationships

The previous section discussed current knowledge about young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. We know that young women are married to romantic narratives that are constrained by patriarchal social structures (Chung, 2007; Jackson, 2001). Dating is very important to young women and this is perpetuated by social and peer pressure to be involved in dating relationships, even when dating violence occurs (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012). Thus, young women struggle to leave their dating violence relationships.

Qualitative research exploring how young women leave dating violence relationships was difficult to identify. There was only one study identified that was technically qualitative, which explored how young women left dating violence relationships (Edwards et al., 2012), but this study was a content analysis of a written short answer survey. Therefore, this review includes a comparison of existing models which might help to explain how young women exit dating

violence relationships. Models explaining how older women exit IPV relationships are also included as there are some similarities in the models that explain how older women and younger women leave (Edwards et al., 2012; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). When in a dating violence relationship, a young woman could respond by leaving the relationship or staying in the abusive relationship. There is a growing body of research exploring young women's help-seeking behaviours for dating violence (Cho & Huang, 2017; Fry et al., 2014; Tarzia et al., 2017), which can occur either when a young woman decides to stay in or leave a dating violence relationship; therefore the focus of this thesis was on the young women's perceptions regarding staying in or leaving their dating violence relationships. This section of the literature review identified the following theories that explain this stay or leave behaviour in young people's abusive dating relationships: the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980), the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & Di Clemente, 1982), turning points (Chang et al., 2010; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007), the Psychosocial Readiness Model (Cluss et al., 2006), Choice and Lamke's (1999) structural model of leaving abusive relationships, and the impact of self-appraisals on dating violence (Katz, Street, & Arias, 1997). The major models of relationship decision making have been summarised in Table 2 and are discussed further on.

Name of exit model and relevant studies	Summary of the model	Relevance to young people
Investment Model (Edwards, Gidycz, & Murphy, 2011, 2015; Katz, Kuffel, & Brown, 2006; Rhatigan & Street, 2005; Rusbult, 1980)	Validated and popular model to predict relationship commitment. Satisfaction, investment and quality of alternatives predict a young person's commitment to the relationship. Tested in abusive relationships also; psychological and sexual abuse were correlated with increased investment into a relationship. Has been compared with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tested widely among young people experiencing dating violence. Not tested in Australia. • Tested in the United States and other countries. Found to be applicable to populations abroad.
Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Edwards, Gidycz, et al., 2015)	One's intention to action a specific behaviour (such as, in this case, exiting an abusive relationship) is determined by their attitude to the behaviour, subjective norms and their perceived behavioural control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One study (Edwards, Gidycz, et al., 2015) showed TPB to be a better model to explain relationship termination compared to the Investment Model among young people. • Not tested in Australian population.
Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM) (Edwards et al., 2012; Khaw & Hardesty, 2015; Prochaska & Di Clemente, 1982; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013)	Behaviour change occurs in 5 stages: the precontemplation stage, contemplation stage, preparation, action and maintenance. Focused on behaviours occurring in discrete stages. Problems include ambiguity of stages and the final outcome of the stages of change. The concept of boundary ambiguity has been suggested to impact on movement through the stages of change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies mostly included adult women with children living in North America. • Only one study examined TTM applicability in dating violence and found it to be an appropriate model to explain young people's decision making in abusive relationships (Edwards et al., 2012).
Turning points (Chang et al., 2010; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007; Patzel, 2001; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013; Rosen & Stith, 1995)	Originally described within the theoretical framework of the TTM. A turning point is defined as a critical event or realisation that encourages positive movement through a stage of change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful concept to understand change in abusive relationships. Turning points were described as events or situations that pushed women through to the next stage of change. • Has been tested among young women.
Psychosocial Readiness Model (Cluss et al., 2006)	Built on the foundations of the TTM to reflect the fluidity of moving between change and status quo. Acknowledges that exiting an abusive relationship is not a linear process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not tested among young people • Useful model to describe adult women's exit.
Choice and Lamke's (1999) Structural model	<p>Combination of the Investment Model, the theory of helplessness, theory of psychological entrapment and theory of reasoned action. Predicting exit from an abusive relationship requires two questions to be answered: 1) Will I be better off? And 2) Can I do it?</p> <p>To leave a relationship a young woman needs to believe that she will be better off without the relationship and thus she will want to leave and believe that she can leave successfully.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tested among young people in the United States.

Table 2: Summary of theories explaining abusive relationship termination

The Investment Model and other related theories

The Investment Model (Figure 1) describes factors that influence the decision to exit dating relationships among young people (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The Investment Model was originally described and tested in college students' heterosexual romantic relationships (not necessarily abusive ones) to explain stay-leave decision making and was later applied to abusive dating relationships (Edwards, Gidycz, et al., 2015; Katz et al., 2006; Rhatigan & Street, 2005; Truman-Schram, Cann, Calhoun, & Vanwallendael, 2000). The model stems from interdependence theory, a social exchange theory, which explains young people's commitment to interpersonal relationships and links individual motivations to their behaviour and interpersonal interaction (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008).

The Investment Model has demonstrated reliability and validity in predicting relationship commitment and the decision to stay or leave (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998). It determines commitment to a relationship by assessing relationship satisfaction, investment into the relationship and quality of alternatives to remaining in the relationship. Rusbult's (1980) Investment Model proposes that one's decision to stay or not stay in a relationship depends on the individual's perception of their commitment to the relationship which in turn is affected by how much they have intrinsically and extrinsically invested into the relationship and how satisfied they are with the relationship. Intrinsic investments might include emotional investment or time invested in the relationship, for example. External investments might include sharing assets together or sharing common friendships. Satisfaction with the relationship includes everything that keeps a young person feeling positive about the relationship they are in and is based on the young person's perception of rewards outweighing costs of being in the relationship.

The Investment Model suggests that as satisfaction in a relationship increases, the costs of being in the relationship are seen to decrease (Rusbult, 1980). The quality of alternative scenarios to being in the relationship is also assessed using a reward versus cost perspective and is inversely related to remaining in the relationship. In other words, as per the Investment Model, a young woman would leave a romantic relationship if she sees better value in the quality of alternative scenarios to being in the relationship. Alternative scenarios might include the prospect of finding another partner or being single, for example. Commitment is distinctly different to satisfaction and is a net result of the outcomes of the relationship investments, satisfaction and value of rewards, and quality of alternatives. Therefore when likened to a mathematical equation, the Investment Model would look like this: Commitment = Satisfaction

– Alternatives + Investments (Rhatigan & Street, 2005). The value of costs of being in the relationship does not necessarily impact on relationship commitment (Rusbult, 1980).

Figure 1: Investment model, (Rusbult et al., 1998)

Although Rusbult's (1980) Investment Model was not originally created to explain how young women leave abusive dating relationships, several studies have attempted to explore the model's relevance in this context (Edwards et al., 2011; Edwards, Gidycz, et al., 2015; Katz et al., 2006; Rhatigan & Street, 2005; Truman-Schram et al., 2000). Most of the studies exploring stay or leave decision-making screened for abuse and violence using the revised conflict tactic scale (CTS2) (Straus et al., 1996). Almost all of these studies were conducted in the United States among White college students enrolled in psychology courses and therefore it is unclear whether or not findings from these studies would be applicable to the typical Australian young woman. Comprehensive measures of emotional abuse, stalking and technology-mediated abuse have not been screened for when recruiting college students using the CTS2 and similar screening questionnaires, and therefore some types of abuse and violence may not have been accounted for in these studies.

While the Investment Model is overwhelmingly supported and validated in predicting relationship commitment and relationship exit in abusive dating relationships, findings from these studies are somewhat conflicting. Truman-Schram et al. (2000) studied young women continuing in abusive dating relationships compared with young women who had left their abusive relationship. The study of seventy-eight college students confirmed that the Investment Model was indeed applicable to young women in abusive dating relationships. However while relationship satisfaction was found to play a possible role in a young woman's decision to exit

their romantic relationship, commitment was not a significant influencing factor (Truman-Schram et al., 2000). There was no comparison with non-victimised young women. This is in contrast with Rhatigan and Street's (2005) study of 309 college women in dating relationships which found that physical violence negatively impacted on relationship satisfaction as well as commitment thus increasing a young woman's desire to leave. The quality of alternatives also had a significant weighting on making the decision to leave an abusive relationship. However, in contrast with what might be expected, psychological abuse made a young woman feel more invested in their relationship, and the authors postulate that this could be because they have had to invest more effort into managing disagreements with their partner (Rhatigan & Street, 2005). Rhatigan and Street (2005) concluded that victimised and non-victimised women take the same factors into consideration when considering exiting a relationship, which is a cost versus benefit analysis of the relationship. A study by Katz et al. (2006) exploring young women's exit from sexually coercive dating relationships also supported applicability of the Investment Model, though a slightly modified version (Lund, 1985). The authors found that sexual coercion resulted in a young woman feeling more invested in their relationship, but interestingly they found no significant impact on relationship satisfaction, commitment or relationship maintenance. Edwards et al (2011) studied 323 young women's decisions to exit an abusive relationship using the Investment Model as a 'guiding theoretical paradigm'. Using a prospective methodology, participants were followed up by a survey conducted at the beginning and end of a 10-week period. Though it was a short timeframe of follow up, results showed that eighty-eight percent of the young women stayed in the abusive relationship at the end of the time period. The applicability of the Investment Model in the young women's decision making to exit was supported yet again, and similar to Rhatigan's (2005) study, relationship satisfaction was the most predictive variable for the young women's decision to stay or leave the abusive relationship. Other additional variables also significantly influenced the college women's decisions to exit or not, including history of childhood abuse, psychological distress, avoidance coping and self-esteem.

While it appears that the Investment Model has been developed and mostly applied and tested in the United States, a few studies have tested the model abroad. Rodrigues and Lopes (2013) formed a shorter Investment Model scale and tested it among women in Portugal. While this Portuguese version of the Investment Model was found to have good psychometric properties, the model was tested among a very wide range of heterosexual women aged 17 to 55 years, in a variety of romantic relationship types, therefore its applicability to dating relationships among

young women is unclear. Another study in Turkey applied the Investment Model to 390 young women in dating relationships attending universities in Ankara (Toplu-Demirtas, Hatipoğlu-Sümer, & White, 2013). The Model was found to be a good fit for predicting exiting dating relationships. Relationship satisfaction was impacted by physical, psychological and overall dating violence victimisation but unaffected by sexual victimisation alone, which interestingly appears to be consistent with Katz et al.'s (2006) findings.

The psychological entrapment model is reminiscent of the Investment Model and suggests that when one is in a situation such as abusive relationship, where they have invested a lot of time and effort, one tends to feel trapped in the situation (Strube, 1988). This is a vicious cycle in that further investment goes into bettering the situation and then the individual chooses to stay in the situation in order to make the most of their investment so that it is not wasted. A situation such as a romantic relationship is also considered a 'valuable' investment, where emotional investment and time are highly valued, thus it perhaps takes 'less effort' to remain in the abusive relationship than to make any changes. This value-laden goal added to the reduced effort needed to remain in the relationship increases the risk of psychological entrapment (Strube, 1988). Another example is a study by Katz et al. (2012) which combined the Investment Model and the psychological entrapment model to attempt to explain ninety-eight women's commitment to their abusive partners. This study also concluded that women in abusive relationships would sacrifice more after experiencing violence, and this effect was worse for those women in relationships of longer duration (Katz et al., 2012). However, the sample of young women who had experienced violence was limited in size and only physical abuse was screened for using the CTS2, thus it is likely that many young women in abusive relationships would have been excluded.

Choice and Lamke (1999) combined the Investment Model and three additional theories of relationship exit based on a review by Strube (1988), to form a comprehensive model describing decision making in romantic relationships. The additional theories included in the model were the theory of learned helplessness, theory of psychological entrapment and theory of reasoned action. Choice and Lamke (1999) conducted a survey on 126 young men and women from a large southern university in the United States, who had experienced violence in a heterosexual relationship, with the violence screened for using the original CTS (Straus, 1979). Based on the survey results, they concluded that predicting exit from an abusive relationship requires two questions to be answered: 1) Will I be better off? And 2) Can I do it?

The model predicted that a woman might successfully exit an abusive relationship if she had the desire to leave *and* ‘believed’ that she could leave successfully (Choice & Lamke, 1999).

The Investment Model and the other related theories have been criticised for not including violence as a factor within the model itself. Thus, Copp and colleagues (2015) examined how relationship break up was related to specific relationship dynamics, perceived alternatives and social support in violent and non-violent dating relationships. Data from seven hundred young people was analysed and findings revealed that IPV, including greater frequency of experiencing violence, did not factor in the young people’s decisions to leave their dating relationships (Copp et al., 2015). Interestingly reporting high levels of ‘passionate love’ was associated with relationship termination, although the couple could still get back together. Other relationship dynamics, perceived alternatives and the influence of significant others also predicted whether or not a young person ended their dating relationship. Edwards et al (2015) built on this work by then going on to compare the Investment Model with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) in predicting young women’s decisions to exit abusive dating relationships.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour

The TPB asserts that one’s intention to action a specific behaviour (such as, in this case, exiting an abusive relationship) is determined by their attitude to the behaviour, subjective norms and their perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Only one study was identified that studied the role of the TPB in leaving dating violence relationships. Edwards (2015) found in their sample of 169 college women that, while the Investment Model and the TPB were appropriate models to describe decision making to exit abusive dating relationships, the TPB was the better model. Greater frequency of IPV behaviours correlated with a positive attitude to leaving the abusive relationship and also increased external pressure from social sources to leave the relationship (Edwards, Gidycz, et al., 2015). The TPB has also been applied elsewhere to describe young women’s help seeking via mobile phones (Tarzia et al., 2017), but larger studies focused on testing the role of TPB in explaining how young women stay or leave dating violence are necessary.

The Transtheoretical Model of change

The Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM) is a popular theoretical model explaining behavioural change in humans and is regularly used to explain addiction behaviours (Prochaska & Di Clemente, 1982). Over the years, the TTM has been applied to explain women’s safety-

seeking behaviours in abusive relationships (Chang et al., 2006; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). The TTM posits that behavioural change occurs in stages; the precontemplation stage, contemplation stage, preparation, action and maintenance. These stages describe the processes involved from before a woman recognises the violence (pre-contemplation), through to recognising the violence (pre-contemplation or contemplation) and considering change (contemplation), preparing to leave (preparation), then leaving (action) and remaining out of the abusive relationship (maintenance) (Chang et al., 2006; Prochaska & Di Clemente, 1982; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). A critical review of research from the years 1990 to 2013 exploring the applicability of the TTM to women's safety-seeking behaviour was published with the aim of providing practical guidance for clinicians (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). The TTM provides a method of understanding women's readiness and ability to change within their abusive relationships, although Reisenhofer and Taft (2013) highlight three major challenges with the TTM in this context: 1) ambiguity about the final outcome of achievement; 2) identifying women's behaviours across the stages of change; and 3) identifying healthcare interventions that would assist women in moving through these stages of change. More recently, components of a comprehensive health system approach to violence against women have been described and illustrated, which includes the TTM and turning points within this framework, and how health care providers could respond in practice to women experiencing IPV at various time points (García-Moreno, Hegarty, et al., 2015). Health professionals' roles within the TTM would be to provide the appropriate psychosocial support, coordinate referrals and enhance safety planning in order to enable women to move through the stages of the TTM, depending on her readiness to change (García-Moreno, Hegarty, et al., 2015). Although there has been further exploration of the applicability of TTM within adult women's safety-seeking behaviours (Khaw & Hardesty, 2015; Murray, Crowe, & Flasch, 2015), there has been limited exploration of the role of the TTM in young people's dating violence relationships. One study explored the role of the TTM in explaining how young women make decisions to stay or leave their abusive relationships (Edwards et al., 2012) and another study described use of the TTM framework to inform an online evidence-based intervention targeting teen dating violence, which demonstrated evidence of reduced peer violence victimisation and perpetration at one-year follow up (Levesque, Johnson, & Prochaska, 2017).

A qualitative exploratory study conducted by Edwards et al (2012) supported the Investment Model and the TTM as models to explain young women's decisions to leave abusive dating relationships. The study recruited 123 female college students who screened positive for dating

violence (Edwards et al., 2012). Content analysis of open-ended questions revealed that most of the study participants minimised and normalised abusive behaviours. The majority of the young women, eighty-six percent, chose to stay in their abusive relationships with no consideration of leaving. Some of the young women reported ambivalence about the relationship but stayed in the interim and a few of the young women exited the relationship, either because of the dating violence or for other unrelated reasons. These young women appeared to fit into different stages of the TTM, with the ultimate objective being to leave the abusive relationship. The young women who chose to stay in their abusive relationships were more committed to their relationships, and described relationship satisfaction, high investment into the relationship and poor quality of alternatives, thus fitting the Investment Model. The study was limited by the small number of young women who left their abusive relationships compared to those who stayed.

Although the TTM has been shown to be a useful model to explain women's decisions to stay in or leave their abusive relationships, the TTM has also been criticised for being too linear (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007; Patzel, 2001). Chang (2006)'s qualitative semi-structured interviews with twenty women with a history of current or past experience of IPV were analysed using the TTM. They found that the women's experiences of abuse correlated with the TTM but in a non-linear fashion that was better illustrated through a complex mapping method that overcame the sequential behaviour stages of the traditional TTM. Chang (2006) also found that there was regular 'leapfrogging' or skipping of stages, mostly the preparation stage, depending on the woman's level of motivation to change. Internal and external influencing factors were also found to be more important than the stages themselves and turning points pushed the women along a stage of change with less likelihood of moving backwards (2006). The lack of fluidity offered by the TTM was examined and built upon by the Psychosocial Readiness Model (Cluss et al., 2006) which is described in more detail further on. Relationship statuses are also fraught with ambiguity and thus it is often not possible for adult women or young women to clearly fit into a specific stage of change (Cluss et al., 2006). Further, the concept of 'boundary ambiguity' has been identified and must be considered when women think about leaving their abusive relationships (Khaw & Hardesty, 2015). Khaw and Hardesty (2015) suggest that boundary ambiguity, where there may be uncertainty about who actually belongs to a particular family unit or system could be a particular challenge for women considering leaving their abusive relationships. Based on their grounded theory study of twenty-five mothers, the need for boundary ambiguity to be incorporated into the TTM was illustrated (Khaw & Hardesty, 2015).

The interactions between the mothers in the study and their partners highlighted the boundary ambiguity and its influence on the non-linear and fluid journey towards ending an abusive relationship. While Khaw's (2015) study included young women from the age of 21 years, the demographic of motherhood is not representative of the typical Australian young woman that this thesis is concerned with.

Turning points

Turning points were originally described within the theoretical framework of the TTM. A turning point is defined as a critical event or realisation that encourages positive movement through a stage of change (Chang et al., 2010; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). The same researchers from the University of Pittsburgh who explored the relevance of TTM in explaining women's behaviours in abusive relationships also explored the role of critical turning points among adult women in abusive relationships (Chang et al., 2010). They found that events and situations acted as catalysts to push women to drive change within their abusive relationships. The turning points were identified through qualitative analyses of data from seven focus groups and twenty individual interviews and included: protecting others from the abuse or the perpetrator; increasing abuse severity; increasing awareness of alternatives or recognising availability of support and resources; fatigue or recognition that the abuser was not going to change; and partner infidelity (Chang et al., 2010). The theory of critical turning points has been described as enablers to leaving abusive relationships in previous smaller studies conducted among adult women too (Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Patzel, 2001). A critical literature review, which deemed the TTM appropriate to be used by clinicians to assess where women are in their process of change when in abusive relationships, also included turning points to help them in their journey towards safety and well-being (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013).

Turning points and trajectories of leaving were also studied by Khaw and Hardesty (2007) who built on previous work (Chang et al., 2006; Chang et al., 2010), through conducting a secondary data analysis of interviews with nineteen mothers who had left their abusive partners. This study identified multiple turning points across the stages of change and three trajectories of leaving and the model is illustrated in Figure 2. Each turning point heavily featured the role of the woman's children. The women used cognitive and behavioural processes to create trajectories that were linear and non-linear, sequential and non-sequential, and thus the model realistically illustrates the complexity of decision making and taking action when adult women consider leaving an abusive relationship (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). The diverse trajectories of leaving might be due to the fact that some women struggle to move from the earlier cognitive

processes of leaving to the later behavioural stages of change due to various internal and external barriers (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Action can be overwhelming for women who are torn between protecting their children from the violence and keeping the children connected with their fathers, thus at this point they may experience ambivalence to create change (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007; Patzel, 2001). Some women skipped the preparation stage altogether and quickly moved from contemplation to action, thus illustrating the ‘leapfrogging’ phenomenon that not all women need to move through every stage of change to achieve safety (Chang et al., 2006). However, the applicability of this model to young women is unclear as the study was conducted only among mothers.

Figure 2: Turning points and trajectories in the process of leaving (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007)

Turning points have been identified as significant enablers for change in several other studies of young and adult women in abusive relationships (Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Patzel, 2001; Rosen & Stith, 1995). Turning points and ‘the last straw’ described crisis situations that were powerful in influencing young women in Rosen and Stith’s (1995) study to make decisions to leave their abusive dating relationships. Data from semi-structured interviews were analysed using a grounded theory approach and revealed seven themes which contributed to what the authors call a ‘disentanglement process’. Turning points included major life events such as pregnancy or significant interactions with their partners. Last straw events were similar to turning points, but last straw events occurred following multiple, less critical events which accumulated until the last straw. Other enablers to leaving abusive relationships included seeds of doubt, reappraisals, objective reflections, self-reclaiming actions and paradigmatic shifts,

which were internal processes that helped the young women inch towards a decision to leave (Rosen & Stith, 1995). Patzel's (2001) exploratory study of women purposively sampled from a Midwestern city in the United States also identified several steps towards leaving abusive relationships and agreed that this process is non-linear and that the steps might be repeated multiple times before a woman successfully exits the abusive relationship. The steps included turning points, realisation, reframing, agency and self-efficacy. The authors concluded that interventions focused on reframing cognitive processes to encourage women to move towards relationship exit would be most beneficial. In their qualitative interviews with adult women, staff and volunteers at women's shelters in Sweden, Enander and colleagues (2008) identified three stages involved in the leaving process, including 'breaking up', 'becoming free' and 'understanding'. This process was influenced by the traumatic bond between the woman and perpetrator and resistance from the women against the abuser and the abusive behaviours. Turning points was a recurrent theme throughout the study that helped the women perceive the abuse differently and therefore enabled the leaving process (Enander & Holmberg, 2008).

The Psychosocial Readiness Model

The Psychosocial Readiness Model (PRM) was borne out of the constraints of the TTM to explain how women make decisions to leave their abusive relationships. Cluss et al. (2006) from the University of Pittsburgh explored the fit of the TTM to explain adult women's safety-seeking behaviours in abusive relationships, which included relationship termination. As described earlier, in this particular context the TTM was not seen to be the perfect fit as none of the women fit into one particular stage of the TTM continuum at any given point in time, nor moved in a linear manner through the stages of change. The stage of 'action' was particularly difficult to identify as action could encompass a range of different behaviours. The authors proposed that there was always a dynamic interaction of internal and external factors that influenced a continuum of readiness to change, where there was readiness to take action on one end and adamant status quo on the other end of the continuum (Cluss et al., 2006). From this, the PRM was formed (Figure 3).

The advantage with the PRM is that it takes into account any change that a woman actions, regardless of whether or not she exits the abusive relationship. 'Awareness' (of the abuse), 'self-efficacy' and 'perceived support' are the three parameters that predict readiness to change in this model, and each parameter can move up and down the continuum, independent of each other and are influenced by positive and negative external factors (Cluss et al., 2006). All three internal factors need to be aligned appropriately though, with positive external factors being

more powerful than negative external factors in order for a woman to move towards change, or exit an abusive relationship. While it is not evident in the diagram, the authors duly acknowledge that because the problem of IPV is caused by the perpetrator, all actions by the woman are taken within this context of a possible action or reaction from the perpetrator. The applicability of the PRM has not been explored specifically among young women's relationships, but has been used in Australia as the theoretical framework to inform development of interventions for women aged 16 to 50 years with a history of IPV (Hegarty et al., 2013; Tarzia et al., 2016).

Figure 3: Psychosocial readiness model (Cluss et al., 2006)

In conclusion, there exist several theoretical models that could be used to better understand how young women decide to stay in or leave their abusive dating relationships. The Investment Model is validated and currently the most popular model that has been used to describe young people's decisions to leave dating relationships, including abusive ones (Rhatigan & Street, 2005; Rusbult, 1980). The Investment Model is not an all-inclusive model and it is clear that several theories and factors other than violence need to be taken into consideration when attempting to understand how young women make decisions about staying in or leaving an abusive dating relationship (Choice & Lamke, 1999; Copp et al., 2015). The TTM and PRM are good models to explain how adult women, particularly mothers leave their abusive relationships (Chang et al., 2006; Cluss et al., 2006), but these models require further exploration among young women. The TTM and turning points within this framework have been used to illustrate a health systems response and identify how health professionals could respond at each stage of the TTM for women experiencing violence (García-Moreno, Hegarty, et al., 2015). Turning points have been described in several studies with adult women (Chang

et al., 2010; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007) and briefly in a study with young women (Rosen & Stith, 1995), and may have some relevance to Australian young women's perceptions of leaving dating violence relationships.

Chapter Summary

This literature review sought to examine existing knowledge concerning young women's perceptions of dating, dating violence and leaving dating violence relationships. The research questions were:

1. How do Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships?
2. How do Australian young women recognise and respond to their dating violence relationships?

Qualitative studies from across the world were examined to understand the knowledge that exists about dating and romantic relationships from young women's perspectives. The studies found consistent evidence that young women, with and without a personal history of dating violence, feel immense pressure to be involved in romantic relationships with young men at the risk of their own well-being (Chung, 2007; Noel et al., 2016). They perceived their roles and behaviours in relationships to be strongly gendered and were trapped within socially constructed rules that they were unaware of (Baker, 2003). This pressure comes from peers and is reinforced by socio-cultural norms that are portrayed in the media and popular culture including fairy tales (Ismail et al., 2007; Jackson, 2001). There is a need for young women to feel relevant within their peer groups and dating is perceived by young women to be central to their identities as young adults. Dating relationships with young men are often prioritised, and other commitments, relationships and the young woman's own needs become secondary. This pressure to be romantically involved is so great that young women minimise and normalise dating violence behaviours from their male partners and project a happy couple image to their friends, with the aim of living happily ever after (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007; Toscano, 2007).

Thus, leaving dating violence relationships is challenging for young women. It is perpetuated by difficulties young women have in recognising dating violence due to societal influences and feeling the pressure to portray an image of being in a happy relationship and living happily ever after (Chung, 2007; Haglund et al., 2012; Jackson, 2001). Qualitative research exploring young women's decisions to stay in or leave abusive dating relationships is lacking in Australia

and abroad. However, several theories of decision making about romantic relationships exist, with the most popular being the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980), the TTM (Chang et al., 2006), and Turning Points (Chang et al., 2010), but none have been explored among Australian young women in dating violence relationships. Studies in the Australian context are needed to explore how young women make sense of abuse in their romantic relationships and how they decide to respond.

This qualitative study proposes to address some of these gaps in qualitative dating violence research in Australia by starting the conversation with local young women who have experienced dating violence in their own relationships. While some of the qualitative studies in this critical narrative literature review were Australian, the majority were conducted abroad. Further, while research focused on young women's perspectives of the gendered behaviours and events surrounding dating and dating violence (Chung, 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Volpe et al., 2014), there was limited in depth exploration of how dating is perceived (Hays et al., 2009), what it actually involves and how it compares to other types of romantic relationships experienced by young people. There is some evidence that dating involves rules to be followed in the dating process (Debnam et al., 2017; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009; Toscano, 2014), but this requires further exploration too, particularly in the Australian context. It is necessary to understand how Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships so that we may better understand the context within which dating violence occurs. The gaps include limited knowledge about how Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships and limited knowledge about Australian young women's perceptions of dating violence, including their recognition and appraisal of dating violence. Finally, very little is known about how Australian young women leave their dating violence relationships. The next chapter outlines the methodology and methods used to address the research questions.

CHAPTER 3: Research Design

The thesis thus far has introduced the health and social burden of dating violence in Australia and summarised current knowledge pertaining to young women's views of and experiences with dating and dating violence. The findings from the literature review have highlighted the importance of dating in young women's lives and the gendered nature of dating relationships. The gendered roles within dating relationships and social pressure to become involved in dating result in the young women normalising and minimising dating violence within their romantic relationships. The literature review findings ended with presenting an argument for conducting qualitative research among Australian young women who have experienced dating violence, to better understand dating and dating violence. This chapter is concerned with a description of the research design and methods that were used to address the two thesis research questions, which are reiterated here:

1. How do Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships?
2. How do Australian young women recognise and respond to dating violence relationships?

This chapter will outline the qualitative research design of this research project including the theoretical frameworks of knowledge informing the methods, ethical considerations, sampling, recruitment, data collection and data analysis.

Theoretical perspective informing the methods

This was a qualitative study design informed by the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism to explore Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. This section will discuss social constructionism and feminism, the relevance of these theoretical perspectives to dating and dating violence and how they have informed the study's narrative approach to examining the research questions through young women's stories.

Theoretical perspective is an important aspect of philosophical grounding. This is because a researcher's philosophical world views, or paradigms, inevitably govern the research questions, the research design and conduct, and how the findings are ultimately presented (Patton, 2015). Theoretical perspectives are normally described according to the terms 'ontology' and epistemology'. Ontology is 'the study of being' and contributes to our

understanding of the ‘nature of existence’ and the structure of physical and social reality (Carter & Little, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is the particular ‘way of understanding what it means to know’, to make sense of this structure of reality (Crotty, 1998), and is thus a ‘justification of knowledge’ (Carter & Little, 2007). Epistemology is evident in the research project’s aims, research questions and study design, including the participant-researcher interaction, the research analysis and presentation (Carter & Little, 2007). In a broad sense, epistemology informs the way the researcher and participant interact and how the researcher conceptualises the participant within the study; it informs the way that data quality is demonstrated; it informs the researcher’s voice and how the research is presented; and finally it is axiological and thus carries ethical value (Carter & Little, 2007). Together, ontology and epistemology inform theoretical perspectives and therefore they cannot be separately defined in most instances. Further, the nature of qualitative research is such that it ‘cannot be neatly pigeon-holed and reduced to a simple and prescriptive set of principles’ (Mason, 2002). Therefore, in this thesis, the ontology and epistemology are considered together as a ‘theoretical perspective’, or in other words, a ‘philosophical stance’ informing the research design and conduct (Crotty, 1998).

The theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism were relevant to inform the design and conduct of this thesis. Social constructionism is the overarching theoretical perspective shaping this thesis and acknowledges that reality is constructed via social and cultural meaning-making to form a meaningful reality of everything we know (Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998). We already know that dating is a socially constructed phenomenon entrenched within oppressive, patriarchal social norms and expectations that allow abuse and violence to occur insidiously (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2005, 2007; Eaton et al., 2016; Towns & Scott, 2013). However, there is limited research exploring Australian young women’s social constructs of romantic relationships and the terminology that contemporary Australian young women use to make meaningful sense of their relationships (Chung, 2005, 2007). Therefore, it makes sense that the theoretical perspective of social constructionism informs the exploration of how Australian young women make sense of their romantic relationships and the abuse and violence, within their social contexts.

An important social construct that is central to this thesis is that of ‘patriarchy’ which has, over time, shaped societal roles adopted by individuals based on their gender (Lennon, 2004). Patriarchal values shape our ways of living and inform societal structures that support male dominance and power, whilst equating masculinity with violence, and these values are

understood to drive gender-based violence against women (García-Moreno, Zimmerman, et al., 2015; Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015; Shorey et al., 2008), including dating violence. Hence the theoretical perspective of feminism, which gives voice to women and challenges traditional patriarchal social norms, is naturally the other overarching theoretical perspective that has shaped the design and conduct of this research project. The following sections describe the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism in further detail and how they have informed the design of this thesis.

Social constructionism

This thesis was informed by a social constructionist theoretical perspective. Social constructionism acknowledges that everything we know is socially constructed through a shared meaning-making process that is influenced by society, culture and other influences (Crotty, 1998). The meanings attributed to things in this world are ‘historically and culturally specific’ and knowledge is rarely a result of natural discovery (Burr, 2015). Therefore the theoretical perspective of social constructionism is critical of the knowledge that we take for granted and insists that we challenge our assumption that our current ways of thinking and seeing the world are objective and unbiased (Burr, 2015).

Dating and dating violence are socially constructed phenomena that fall into this category of knowledge, where the meanings associated with dating are culturally constructed through a variety of external influences including media, family and peers (Chung, 2007; Debnam et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012). Dating is a social construct which describes a range of romantic and sexual behaviours and roles shared between two people, particularly amongst young people (Chung, 2005, 2007; Eaton et al., 2016), though there has not been any examination in the last decade of how Australian young women construct and perceive their intimate relationships. Dating violence is a term used to describe IPV in young people’s romantic and sexual relationships but exploration of contemporary young women’s perceptions of dating violence and how their perceptions impact on their recognition and response to dating violence is needed. As dating violence is a commonly accepted public health and social problem that is normalised and minimised by young women and the general public (Baker, 2003; Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015; Ismail et al., 2007; Politoff et al., 2019; Webster et al., 2018), it is important to better understand dating violence and challenge how this problem is perceived and approached. The social constructionist theoretical perspective, which is critical of established knowledge, was thus fitting to inform the exploration of young women’s perceptions of dating and dating violence.

Similar to social constructionism is the theoretical perspective of constructivism and it is important to acknowledge the distinction between the two because the definitions and applications are somewhat blurred and often used interchangeably. Social constructionism and constructivism are similar because they share the same ontology and epistemology (Patton, 2015). The ontological philosophy is that of relativity where it is acknowledged that all knowledge is relatively defined based on one's perspective, which is influenced by one's own experiences and upbringing. The epistemological philosophy of constructionism and constructivism is that of subjectivity, which acknowledges that reality is how the world is perceived by each individual and is not made up of one simple objective truth; two people therefore differ in how they perceive and interpret the same world or the same experience (Patton, 2015). Acknowledging the shared philosophical underpinnings of social constructionism and constructivism, the social constructionist philosophy that has informed this thesis includes theoretical knowledge derived from constructionist and constructivist researchers.

Despite the similarities, the key difference between constructivism and social constructionism is in the way that meaning is constructed. Constructivism is defined as 'the meaning-making activity of the individual mind' (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism values and respects the unique experiences of each individual and each person's way of making sense of the world, thus forming one's own perspective and knowledge (Patton, 2015). Constructivism rejects the impact of social influence in the knowledge-creation process. This contrasts with social constructionism, where knowledge is said to be collectively and socially generated, specific to one's cultural and economic influences (Burr, 2015). Knowledge, including one's perspective of reality and emotions, is heavily influenced by a shared culture that is not necessarily unique to an individual (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2015). Social constructionism, unlike constructivism, places emphasis on the powerful role of culture in shaping our views of reality and therefore recognises that our views and the meanings we attribute to things may be quite rigid. This cultural influence can be liberating as well as limiting all at once, therefore social constructionists deem it necessary to question our perspectives and the meanings we attribute to things around us in order to challenge what is thought to be objective and unbiased knowledge (Burr, 2015). Thus, while social constructionism encourages us to challenge conventional social constructs and what is considered objective knowledge, constructivism rejects this critical spirit (Crotty, 1998). This study was approached with the acknowledgement that there is existing knowledge on intimate partner relationships, the roles that young men and

young women play in these relationships and then the abuse and violence that occurs within these contexts (Banister et al., 2003; Chung, 2007; Noel et al., 2016). Young people's intimate romantic relationships are known to have socially-derived meanings attributed to them via the influence of popular culture, for example (Ismail et al., 2007; Jackson, 2001; Luft et al., 2012), and these must be better understood and perhaps, challenged; thus, social constructionism rather than constructivism was an appropriate theoretical perspective to inform this thesis.

The social constructionist perspective purports that knowledge is meaningfully constructed by human beings, based on their own interpretations, which are heavily shaped by their unique experiences and their social and cultural contexts (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Mason, 2002; Patton, 2015). Burr (2015) adds that this knowledge is relative to our history and culture but also limited by one's economic background, thus knowledge evolves with time as the surrounding situation evolves. Burr (2015) uses the example of how perceptions of the expected roles and behaviours of children have changed over centuries as evidenced by their portrayal in fiction.

Social constructionism impacts qualitative research by exploring various experiences and definitions and thus respecting 'the idea of multiple realities' to aid in raising people's consciousness without striving for a universal definition (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008; Patton, 2015). Thus 'truth' and 'fact' are relative to social environments, and knowledge is created based on the interdependency between individuals and their situations (Lincoln & Guba, 2013); therefore, research findings must be interpreted carefully within their cultural and social limits and context (Burr, 2015). The social constructionist epistemology acknowledges that meaning is not inherent within objects, knowledge is 'created' rather than discovered, and is person and context specific (Crotty, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). As Crotty (1998) describes, the 'social' in 'social constructionism' has nothing to do with the type of object; the object could be either natural (e.g. a tree) or social (e.g. societal roles). The 'social' in social constructionism refers to the 'mode' of engaging with that object and generating meaning that is attributed to the object. Using Crotty's (1998) example, a 'chair' is known as a chair and used as a chair is traditionally used because of the meaning attributed to it, and this is learnt by one's upbringing, while influenced and limited by one's own cultural and social backgrounds (Burr, 2015). Our subjective experiences that inform our lives shape our roles and identities and we then describe and label these using language (Burr, 2015). Of great relevance to this thesis and in line with the theoretical paradigm of feminism, gender, too, is a social construct (Burr, 2015). We are taught that men and women are labelled as such with culturally defined masculine and feminine

roles which are assumed to be natural qualities of gender that are taken for granted (Burr, 2015). Within the dating context, dating ‘scripts’ exist, as described in the introduction, where the progression of dating relationships is defined and constructed by society and heterosexual dating behaviours and roles are informed by gender (Eaton et al., 2016; Helm et al., 2017; Thongpriwan & McElmurry, 2009; Volpe et al., 2014). The qualities and scripts associated with dating are influenced by the media and other cultural influences of the time and thus the social meaning attributed to dating has evolved over the years (Bogle, 2008; Waller, 1937). Young men and young women follow rigid socially expected roles and behaviours where young men generally adopt more dominant roles within the relationship and young women adopt more passive roles (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Chung, 2007; Noel et al., 2016; Volpe et al., 2014). These rigidly gendered roles are portrayed in the media and reinforced by peers (Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012) and thus accepted as ‘natural’ behaviours by young people.

Social constructionism suggests that the understanding of reality is not an objective process. Reality, or the truth, is individually and subjectively constructed and presented relative to the person, the time and the context in which the knowledge is constructed (Patton, 2015). The knowledge that is constructed within a research interview setting might be different to the knowledge constructed in a casual café setting, depending on the relationship between the people who are co-constructing the knowledge (Patton, 2015). Knowledge and identities are created based on subjective experiences which are intertwined with larger scale concepts, images and metaphors which we internalise, become emotionally invested in, and adopt as our own. These concepts help us to construct our identities of who we are in relation to the world and our roles, actions and morals are borne out of these (Burr, 2015). It is perhaps not even possible to completely understand an individual’s world, or even fully understand an object, as only part of this reality may be conveyed through traditional means, such as language. Part of this reality may be ‘tacit’ and may not be accessible via utilising traditional research methods, although qualitative research methods do attempt to uncover tacit knowledge by studying what is presented beyond and beneath the spoken or written word (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Social constructionism acknowledges that human beings are limited by this precise, culturally-defined knowledge. We tend to become trapped and engrossed in specific ways of seeing, thinking and feeling because of layers of interpretation that we become engulfed in, and accustomed to from birth, and then we continue to transmit these same meanings and knowledge to others without thinking to question or challenge them (Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998).

Generalisations of knowledge are believed to be a collection of shared, social constructions of reality emphasised by emotional investment; though it is acknowledged that realities and our identities within them are also constantly being re-constructed (Burr, 2015; Patton, 2015). Therefore, these pre-conceived notions of the world become impediments to our objective engagement with the world including how we perceive objects, our roles within society and our emotions in response to what we experience. For example, we know that young women shape their interpersonal relationships according to what might be socially accepted norms that are reinforced by their peers (Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007). In the dating context there is evidence that the influence of family also impacts significantly on young women's behaviours and attitudes towards dating and hooking up even if living away from them (Allison, 2016; Debnam et al., 2017). Thus, a young woman faces pressure to behave as per her family's expectations and while this is a state of oppression, it is considered to be an acceptable and benign social norm. What we understand and practise as dating is also taught to us by movies, music, books and other forms of art and media that are consumed by society in the form of entertainment (Bonomi, Nichols, Carotta, Kiuchi, & Perry, 2016; Bowen et al., 2013; Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Srdarov & Bourgault du Coudray, 2016). We are thus taught through entertainment and by society 'how' to perceive dating and related behaviours and 'whether' to acknowledge certain behaviours at all, therefore our individuality in attributing meanings to dating and dating violence, is severely limited.

Further, it is inevitable that these realities are shaped by voices that tend to be more dominant in the discussion and in the cultural context that is being examined (Patton, 2015). Therefore it must also be acknowledged that power differentials 'affect and shape social constructions and perceptions of reality' (Patton, 2015). In other words, the meanings attributed to the world around us are likely to be controlled by more powerful people within a cultural context and these perceptions of reality may be of more benefit to the privileged, while disadvantaging others (Patton, 2015). Burr (2015) refers to this as 'macro' social constructionism, which 'acknowledges the constructive power of language but sees this as derived from, or at least bound up with, material or social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices'. The concept of power with respect to the macro level of social constructionism is compatible with the feminist paradigm and thus is pertinent to conducting research into various types of social inequality including gender based violence, with the aim of 'challenging these through research and practice' (Burr, 2015). The concept of power is incredibly relevant to the study of intimate partner violence among young women, where power overwhelmingly favours the

young men in intimate heterosexual relationships (Banister et al., 2003). As such, this research project sought to engage with young women who had experienced dating violence, to understand their perspective, thus empowering them to shape knowledge of dating violence which occurs within these relationships. The concept of power and its role in society is central to feminist theoretical perspectives. The overarching feminist paradigm informing this thesis is discussed in the following section.

Feminism

Along with social constructionism, this thesis was also informed by a broad feminist paradigm that has underpinned the planning and execution of each stage of this piece of research. Feminist theory is a 'change-oriented scholarly practice' where theory and activism go hand-in-hand (Ferguson, 2017). Ferguson (2017) elaborates that the main goal of feminism is 'to trouble power relations, imagine better worlds, and work to achieve them'. The feminist theoretical perspective 'centres on women's experience as a primary source of knowledge', thus ensuring that women's experiences and perspectives are heard (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminism goes beyond the philosophical definition of a 'theoretical perspective' because of its commitment to social change through honest critique of established social norms that ultimately endeavour to improve the lives of women and girls (Burgess-Proctor, 2015; Ferguson, 2017; Lennon, 2004). Feminism also strives to acknowledge and address the diversity of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and other differences, and the systematic oppression that occurs due to inequalities relating to these differences (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Kleinman, 2007). In this thesis exploring Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence, feminist research principles acknowledge the gendered nature of systematic violence against women (Gressard, Swahn, & Tharp, 2015) and the concept of power within intimate partner relationships which are central to this thesis (Andersen, 1993). The feminist paradigm is prominent throughout the thesis as effort was made to ensure that the voices and stories of the young women remain at the forefront throughout the research design process and reporting.

Feminist research is particularly relevant to research in violence against women, as patriarchal social structures have been described as the root cause of violence in our society (Shorey et al., 2008). Patriarchy is an overarching structural system of our society which automatically renders males as being the more important and dominant citizens of our society, with racial and class-based oppression being offshoots of this same system (hooks, 2015; Kleinman, 2007). For centuries, patriarchal societal norms have been underlying our attitudes, behaviours

and politics, favouring males over females, in distribution of economic and social powers (Carter, 2015), thus leaving women to be the disempowered, subordinate citizens of society. Gender norms and stereotypes in society are taught and applied very early in life and are also likely contributing factors to gendered dating violence experienced by young women (Gressard et al., 2015). Kleinman (2007) writes, based on her studies of feminism (hooks, 2015) that ‘patriarchy is the only system of oppression in which members of the disadvantaged group are meant to love their oppressors’. Consistent with this it is known that young women learn to love their oppressors early, with many committed to achieving the ultimate fairy tale narrative in their dating relationships while sacrificing their own well-being (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2007; Jackson, 2001). Gendered norms and stereotypes are established early within young people’s relationships, where young men are expected to adopt dominant roles within the relationships while the young women adopt more passive roles (Banister et al., 2003; Eaton et al., 2016; Volpe et al., 2014) and to maintain these norms is encouraged by peers (Chung, 2007).

Language is a significant way in which patriarchy is normalised and propagated (Kleinman, 2007). For example, generic terms such as ‘mankind’ render women invisible, or somewhat part and parcel of the men, thus denying that women exist as respected individual beings (Kleinman, 2007). Language is therefore important with respect to the topic of dating violence against young women, where abuse and violence is systematically perpetrated by young men towards young women with negative consequences for young women’s health and well-being (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Jennings et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). The commonly used term, ‘violence against women’, for example, suggests that the violence is a women’s problem that should be dealt with by women alone and fails to name the main perpetrators of this violence; the men. Kleinman (2007) suggests that the term ‘violence against women’ undermines the problem, gives it a passive voice, and absolves men of their responsibility; thus we should be referring to the problem as ‘men’s violence against women’ which actively names the perpetrators and calls for the men to take responsibility for their actions and become involved to address the issue. Thus, effort has been made to use the term ‘men’s violence against women’ through this thesis to describe the problem of intimate partner violence perpetrated by men against women. Effort has also made to not label the young women as ‘battered’ or ‘victims’ because this sort of terminology is not necessarily useful to make sense of their experiences, and further, it is needless to define the young women by their intimate relationships alone (hooks, 2015). Further, it is known that young women dislike being viewed as passive victims and perceive themselves to be independent young women who learn from

bad experiences (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Jackson, 2001; Wiklund et al., 2010). However, simply adopting gender-neutral language is not enough – the underlying conceptual framework also needs to shed its overarching masculinity (Lennon, 2004).

Males have traditionally dominated academic research, history and the arts (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Lennon, 2004). As a result of this, knowledge constructed has been directed by men's experiences and concerns; for example, androcentric principles have dominated how research is conducted, ignoring gender as a unique category in the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Lennon, 2004). Male dominance in the process of knowledge creation means that the conclusions of these works are unlikely to be universal or relatable to women's lives and experiences. Women have historically been excluded from retelling stories in literature, art and history; thus writers, artists and scientists have predominantly been men, with women simply being the consumers of these works (Lennon, 2004). Feminist researchers began the process of eliminating androcentric research between the 1960's and 1980's by including women in research samples and shaping research questions to be inclusive of women's perspectives and experiences and eliminating male dominance over women (Hesse-Biber, 2012). However, it is known that feminist research still has a long way to go, and particularly in the space of men's violence against women. For example, researchers continue to treat gender as a simple category when researching intimate partner violence against women despite overwhelming evidence that violence against women is a gendered problem where male violence is systematically perpetrated against women (World Health Organization, 2013). Thus, feminist research exploring young women's perceptions of dating violence is needed more than ever, to enable the voices of the young women to be heard. Therefore, adopting the narrative approach in collecting data was important in being consistent with the theoretical perspectives of this study and allowing the stories of the young women to remain at the forefront of this thesis.

Feminist research is also concerned with being participant centred. Participant centred means that the research must accurately represent the perspective that it is concerned with (Lennon, 2004). Participant-centred research should also serve to focus on empowering its participants to yield the most accurate data, in addition to simply focusing on the ethics of participant protection, specifically when researching abuse and violence (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). Reducing the power differential between participant and researcher is vital to this process so that data generation is a collaborative process and not directed by the researcher alone (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). It is also not adequate to attempt to make sense of another's world from within one's own world or trying to artificially switch perspectives; rather, feminist

research principles encourage adequate immersion into the world of whom we are studying so that we may represent their world most appropriately (Lennon, 2004). Thus, our capacities for understanding another's world is limited and only partially achievable. It is also important to acknowledge that our own perspectives can never be completely left behind when we study another's world; our own perspective becomes influenced by it too, thus resulting in new perspectives and judgements (Lennon, 2004; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The theoretical perspectives informing the narrative approach

The theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism have informed the decision to adopt a narrative approach to this study. Social constructionism acknowledges that knowledge about dating is defined and limited by social and cultural influences that are reinforced by family, friends and the media (Burr, 2015; Chung, 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Patton, 2015). This theoretical perspective also encourages us to challenge and critique what we perceive to be true knowledge so that we may better make sense of the world around us (Burr, 2015). In order to understand young women's social constructions of dating, approaching the data collection with a minimally structured narrative approach was appropriate as it allowed freedom to make sense of each young woman's perspective and perceptions of dating and dating violence. Feminism builds on this by approaching this critique of knowledge through a gender-focused lens, so that we may better understand how patriarchal social norms have contributed to what we understand as dating and dating violence (Burgess-Proctor, 2015; Hesse-Biber, 2012). This is relevant as there is evidence that while young women are aware of the issue of dating violence, they do not equate this with systematic patriarchal social norms (Baker, 2003). The narrative approach is also true to feminism as it allows the data collection process to be organic and participant-centred allowing the participating young women to take charge of the interview and lead the co-construction of knowledge on dating (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). The narrative approach allows the freedom and space to capture stories from the young women and remain authentic to their voices throughout the research process. The following section discusses the narrative approach in more detail and its consistency with the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism.

Adopting a Narrative Approach

The social constructionist and feminist theoretical perspectives informed the decision to use a narrative approach to explore Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. The narrative method of eliciting data was used to build on existing knowledge of dating and dating violence from the perspectives of young women in Australia who had

experienced dating violence. Narrative research consists of four themes that are markers of authenticity of the design, study and engaging in the research project, which this thesis has endeavoured to be consistent with. These themes or 'turns' move away from rigid positivist ways of research design and include: 1) the researcher-participant relationship; 2) moving towards the use of words as data instead of numbers; 3) moving towards a local and specific focus as opposed to a more universal focus; and 4) a broadened view of philosophical perspectives underpinning knowledge (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The move away from positivist research methods and with a focus on participant-centred, collaborative data generation, the narrative approach demonstrates consistency with the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism.

Narratives are 'illuminative, novel and accessible to readers' (Bold, 2012). Narratives can be in many different forms including spoken, written or visual media that can be presented as short topical stories, extended stories about an aspect of a person's life or life histories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Narrative interviews are ideal to study how people construct and interpret the world around them (Bold, 2012; Josselson, 2013; Patton, 2015). Narrative interviews involve retrospective meaning-making of a person's experiences, where the participant re-shapes and re-orders what they know and presents this non-chronologically, as a meaningful whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Narratives focus on participants' stories from their points of view and examine their human lives to better understand the world from which they come and the purpose of the narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2015). The participant presents themselves as the protagonist of their narrative and describes events, objects, their thoughts and interpretations. Narrative interviews are therefore 'multilayered' and help us to understand what participants have recalled and recreated in their minds, based on their own perceptions and the subjective reality which they have created. These stories then become central to the analytical process and also contribute to the campaign for respect and justice for the cause at hand (Ferguson, 2017). The purpose of this thesis was to 'co-create' knowledge about intimate partner violence through the stories of young women who have experienced dating violence, and it is known that experiences are shared via story-telling, thus the narrative approach was most appropriate.

Narrative methodology is well-aligned with social constructionism because narratives are 'socially situated interactive performances' that are produced within a certain context in a specific time and place and narrated to a specific researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The participant and researcher are both enabled and constrained by their unique social situations

and resources and co-construct the narratives together (Patton, 2015). Consistent with the social constructionist theoretical perspective, this research project aimed to explore dating and dating violence through the voices of Australian young women, while taking into account the influence of established cultural and social meanings and knowledge. The narrative methodology was appropriately aligned with social constructionism because it allows data collection via conversations where personally meaningful knowledge is constructed from shared understandings (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Further, the narrative method of data collection allowed for free-flowing conversations where mundane aspects of the narratives were important to make sense of the young women's broader worlds. The mundane aspects of the narratives that may appear to have no direct connection with the topic of dating violence contributed to a wholesome understanding of the young women's identities and a better appreciation of the power dynamics surrounding the young women and shaping perceptions of themselves, their relationships and their gendered roles within these contexts (Burr, 2015).

Narrative methodology is well-aligned with the feminist theoretical framework. The narrative approach brings the identity of participants to the forefront, and in this study, through this process, the young women's voices have remained central to the thesis (Ferguson, 2017). Consistent with feminism, narrative methodology also allows for researchers and participants to work as equals in the research process, in the co-construction of knowledge to reduce the power imbalance that exists between researchers and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). It was thus determined that narrative interviewing would be the most appropriate method to delve into the minds of Australian young women in a participant-centred way and access tacit data to investigate how they perceived dating and dating violence. Consistent with the feminist theoretical paradigm, effort was made to reduce the power imbalance between researcher and participant by recognising that both researcher and participant would learn and co-create the data, and that knowledge creation is focused on 'interpretation and the understanding of meaning' (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This includes acknowledging the fact that knowledge cannot truly be objective as the researcher's own social constructions will impact on the young women's participation and interpretation of the young women's stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). A holistic approach to data collection by interpreting the meanings of narratives in their entirety along with the young women to whom they belonged, was a key aspect of moving away from traditional positivist methodologies, which is in line with the feminist theoretical perspective of this thesis. Moving towards a local and specific focus, which in this case is study of Australian young women's perceptions of dating violence, emphasises the value of this

specific problem and addresses the need for a more in depth understanding of this problem that we know is widespread at a population level. Presenting data in the form of narratives that represent the real voices of the young women and making public their stories of oppression, has the potential to leave a powerful or perhaps a more relatable impact than facts and numbers alone (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Adopting a social constructionist theoretical framework informed the research project's attempt to explore dating violence while acknowledging that there are 'multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience' (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Keeping the young women's stories visible and attempting to remain authentic to their voices throughout this thesis was central to keeping with the narrative research and feminist philosophies.

Ethical considerations

There were several ethical considerations that were necessary for this research project. These included ethics concerning minors in sensitive research and ethics concerning research into gender-based violence. The complexity of gaining ethics approval included consideration of the target population, the sensitivity of the research topic, assessment of the mature minor and researcher self-care. Ethics approval was granted by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on 1 June 2015 with the last amendment approved on 17 September 2015 (HREC approval number 1544130.2). All documentation related to the ethics approval can be found in the appendix unaltered from the time that ethics approval was obtained.

Dating or experimenting with romantic interactions usually begins in the teenage years, with sexual activity usually beginning around the age of 16 years among Australian young women (Rissel, Richters, Grulich, de Visser, & Smith, 2003). Therefore, a decision was made to include young women aged 16 to 25 years in the study. As 16 and 17-year-old young women are legally minors, a mature minor assessment template was put together with input from my supervisors who have expertise in young people's health and intimate partner violence, and using the World Health Organization guidelines for ethical conduct of research into violence against women (World Health Organization, 2016). This template was used to guide the telephone assessment of young women under the age of 18 years, prior to inviting them to participate in a face-to-face interview (Attachment 5: Telephone conversation with mature minor). It was fortunate that as a practising general medical practitioner, I had the training and expertise to assess a young person's mature minor status because of needing to evaluate

whether minors presenting to me alone in practice are mature enough to understand and make informed decisions about their own health.

The mature minor assessment included reviewing the purpose of the research project with the young women, assessing their understanding of the project and their potential involvement in it. Informed consent was reiterated, and the young woman's freedom to exit the project at any point and situations of mandatory reporting were also thoroughly explained, with plenty of opportunity for the young woman to ask questions. This initial telephone assessment was also used as an opportunity to build rapport through some light-hearted conversation to allow the young person to get to know the researcher and feel comfortable with participating in the interview. Once at the face-to-face interview, the young women's understanding of the project, implications of taking part and the confidentiality agreement were assessed again to confirm that they were indeed eligible to take part in this study. Other than confirming the young women's mature minor status all other aspects of data collection remained consistent with other participants, except that telephone interviews were not offered to mature minors. Mature minors were not required to obtain parental consent to participate in the project. The option of obtaining parental consent was available to all minors and they were also encouraged to discuss the project with their parents if they felt comfortable to do so.

The topic of research, men's violence against women, was the second major aspect of this thesis that required careful ethical consideration. The WHO ethical guidelines for research in violence against women were consulted carefully when finalising the research design (World Health Organization, 2016), though it is important to acknowledge that ethical and moral obligations may never be completely mitigated (Clark & Walker, 2011). Obtaining written informed consent was a priority with all participants and sensitive qualitative interviewing methods, similar to those described by Dempsey (2016), were strictly adhered to. Ethical considerations related to violence research involved safety considerations, therefore all face-to-face interviews were conducted at the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne. Entry into the department is restricted, requiring programmed identity card access and thus was deemed a safe place for researcher and participant. Participant privacy and confidentiality were protected with careful data protection and storage and all data were backed up. Consistent with feminist principles of participant empowerment all participants were requested to select their own unidentifiable pseudonym that they felt comfortable with, for the purpose of this thesis and dissemination of findings arising from this thesis. The young women were also requested to select unidentifiable pseudonyms for people and alternative names for

places that they talked about during their interviews in order to maximise anonymity when disseminating the research findings.

All of the young women were given the option of receiving a summary of the research findings at the end of the research project. This process gave the young women the power to define their own identities and then see the result of the work that they contributed towards (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). All audio files were downloaded onto the university student drive after each interview and copied onto a password-protected external hard drive for back up. Original audio files were deleted from the voice recorder. Participant information and demographic details were stored in a password-protected *Microsoft Excel* spreadsheet and detailed demographic information has been excluded from the thesis, with the aim of representing each participant with respect and anonymity. Further, to optimise preparation to manage significant participant distress and manage high risk to the participant (from themselves or others), a distress and disclosure protocol and risk management framework were put together, which can be found in the Appendix (Attachment 8: Distress and disclosure protocol and Attachment 9: Risk Assessment Framework). All participants were also offered a resource card via email and at the end of each interview, which contained important helpline numbers and websites (Attachment 9: Risk Assessment Framework).

In the case of narrative interviews, it is acknowledged that there always lies the risk of an individual being identified through their stories (Bold, 2012). However, consistent with ethical feminist research principles, including participant-centred research and ethics of care, emphasis was placed on creating an environment of participant empowerment during interviews as opposed to excessive focus on protecting the participants (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). Burgess-Proctor (2015) argues about the importance of striking a balance between overprotection and participant empowerment, as research in the social sciences often focuses on participant protection which may be perceived as individualistic and paternalistic positivism that is not necessarily ethical or of benefit to the participant. Nor does overprotection allow for free-flowing conversations that are most likely to contribute towards creating meaningful knowledge about dating violence. Therefore, effort was made to protect participant safety and anonymity through the methods discussed while also acknowledging realistic limitations.

There is also evidence collected through interviews with Australian public health researchers that researchers are at risk of physical and emotional harms through conducting research (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2008). Conducting research interviews in a

safe environment and researcher self-care were priorities, with regular planned debriefs with my supervisors and fellow PhD students. Reflective memo notes that were written following each interview allowed for a mental debrief as some of the young women's stories were emotionally intense and it was a therapeutic experience to write down how I felt and reacted during and after the interviews. As safety protocols were followed closely the risk of harm to the researcher or the participants was deemed to be minimal (Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2011). The final aspect of feminist ethics was to disseminate the findings of this research project (Burgess-Proctor, 2015) through conferences and relevant publications, which is crucial to use the research findings effectively to inform policy and thus ultimately improve the lives of Australian young women.

Participants

This section is concerned with a description of participant sampling and recruitment. This includes detail of the sampling framework, how the young women were screened for dating violence before inclusion into the study, and then the sources of recruitment.

Sampling framework

Effort was made to include young women from a wide range of backgrounds. A convenience sample of young women were recruited from the University of Melbourne. However, to avoid a one-dimensional approach to exploring dating violence among Australian young women a maximum variation sampling strategy and snowball sampling were used (Patton, 2015). Maximum variation or heterogeneity sampling aims to ensure that there is a good diversity of participants with respect to their background characteristics, such as their occupation, ethnicity and location. A maximum variation sample adds to study rigour by allowing the opportunity to identify patterns that are common across a diverse sample (Patton, 2015); in this case, recruiting and interviewing Australian young women from a range of different backgrounds is useful to demonstrate any differences and similarities in the way a diverse range of Australian young women perceive dating and dating violence.

Effort was made to achieve diversity of participant age, geographical location and occupational backgrounds. The aim was to achieve a fair distribution of young women aged between 16 and 25 years of age to reflect any possible differences in the dating violence experiences of young women of different ages (Azziz-Baumgartner et al., 2011). Previous studies (Barter, 2009; Spencer & Bryant, 2000; Vézina & Hébert, 2007) have also found there to be regional variations in experiences of violence, possibly due to cultural differences compared to

urbanised regions. Further, it was recently established that there is a need for more research into violence against women in non-urban Australia (Hooker et al., 2017), therefore effort was made to recruit young women from non-urban areas of Australia. Experiencing dating violence may also be associated with young women who have a lower educational attainment and lower income (Banyard & Charlotte, 2008; Dillon, Hussain, & Loxton, 2015), therefore effort was made to include young women from a range of occupational and educational backgrounds. The sampling frame was reviewed throughout the recruitment process and effort was made to purposively sample young women from diverse backgrounds that were least representative at the time; recruiting young women from rural Australia was most challenging. This process of 'guided sampling' where the sample is revisited throughout the research process adds to study rigour (Gibbs et al., 2007). However, young women from marginalised groups experiencing significant vulnerability and disadvantage, such as homeless or Indigenous young women did not respond to the advertisements and were thus not included in the study. It was also important to be mindful of oversampling for diversity of backgrounds in such a small sample because of the risk of generating excessive heterogeneity that may have distracted from the original research questions (Patton, 2015). Achieving a limited heterogeneity of the sample had the advantage of generating common patterns and shared dimensions of dating violence, while also highlighting the diversity of dating violence perceptions and experiences between the different social groups (King & Horrocks, 2010; Patton, 2015).

A snowball sampling strategy was also pursued. Snowball sampling, also known as chain sampling, is 'an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases', and involves participants advising relevant contacts about the research project who might add value to the findings (Patton, 2015). Snowball sampling is particularly useful to gain access to vulnerable or difficult to reach populations (Woodley & Lockard, 2016), which in this case is young women who had experienced dating violence. All the young women in this research project were asked at the end of the interview if they felt comfortable with telling their contacts about the research project. Participants were advised that their contacts could make direct contact with myself if they were interested, to go through the informed consent process prior to participating. Direct communication with myself had the advantage of protecting young women's confidentiality and privacy. While snowball sampling can be an effective source of recruiting highly relevant participants, this method of recruitment was not popular in this research project.

Recruitment

Young women were invited to participate in interviews only if they had screened positive for some form of abuse and violence in their romantic relationships. There was no restriction placed on when the dating violence was experienced and in order to remain inclusive, there was also no specification on the advertisements about the gender of the young women's partners. Achieving diversity of sexual orientation was not the aim during recruitment because heterogeneity of sexual orientation may have created too much variation in the findings, given the possible differences in the prevalence of dating violence within heterosexual and same-sex relationships (Edwards, Sylaska, et al., 2015; Graham, Jensen, Givens, Bowen, & Rizo, 2016).

Upon commencement of the recruitment phase, an electronic advertisement was published to screen young women for dating violence at the University of Melbourne. This initial screening process included a few basic questions which have been used in the past to advertise for IPV in previous studies conducted at the Department of General Practice (Attachment 12: Advertisements). However, after interviewing the first few young women who were screened in this way it became apparent that a more detailed dating violence screening questionnaire would make study purpose and eligibility clearer to the young women and thus produce a better sample of participants. All of the young women received a multipurpose \$30 shopping voucher to compensate for their time and effort for participating. Shopping vouchers were given to the participants at the conclusion of the face-to-face interviews or posted to an address nominated by the young woman at the conclusion of telephone interviews. Travel and parking costs were not reimbursed.

At the time of planning the research design there were not yet any validated measures to screen for dating violence in Australia. The Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) was originally designed to measure predominantly physical abuse and was later revised to include more measures of abuse (CTS2) (Straus et al., 1996). This is one of the most popular screening tools for dating violence overseas, particularly in the United States. The Composite Abuse Scale (CAS) (Hegarty et al., 2005) built upon this to include measures for more types of violence such as emotional violence and stalking, severity of violence and also upset scores. The CAS was validated for screening for IPV within adult intimate relationships but young women under the age of 20 years were underrepresented in the validation of this study (Hegarty et al., 2005). These scales, however, do not include the recently developed forms of cyber abuse, where emotional abuse and stalking can occur using the internet. With the recent surge of internet usage and the explosion

of technological mediums of communication, there was a need to include technology-facilitated abuse in measures of dating violence which have not been covered by most of the older and popular scales measuring intimate partner violence, therefore this was included in this study's screening questionnaire. Recently many new studies have been undertaken investigating technology-facilitated dating violence, also known as digital dating abuse (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, & Calvete, 2015; Reed et al., 2017; Zweig et al., 2013). Therefore, the survey questions to screen for dating violence were created by myself specifically for this research project with advice from my research advisory panel (Appendix Attachment 17: Screening for dating violence). The screening questionnaire was put together using the CAS (Hegarty et al., 2005) developed in Australia, and international surveys that have been used to screen for dating violence (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2012; Barter et al., 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013) and digital dating abuse (Borrajo et al., 2015). Care was taken to ensure that the survey questions were as gender-neutral and inclusive as possible, consistent with the social constructionist and feminist approach of this thesis. The questionnaire was included as part of the baseline questionnaire in the Link project and promoted via the University of Melbourne student portal, Facebook, Twitter, YAWCRC and snowball sampling. If a young woman emailed me expressing interest in the study through snowball sampling, the survey monkey questionnaire link was sent to her to complete electronically. Young people fit the criteria for dating violence if: they answered 'yes' to feeling afraid of a partner; were afraid of anyone else that was deemed by the research team to fit the definition of a dating partner; and if they ticked one or more of the listed abusive behaviours in (Attachment 17: Screening for dating violence).

Link trial

The Link Project

- A stratified, pragmatic randomised controlled trial (RCT) testing the effectiveness of a custom-designed online tool called '*Link*', to facilitate help-seeking for various psychosocial/mental health concerns or information needs.
- The Link project was conducted by the University of Melbourne in partnership with ReachOut.com and funded by the YAWCRC.
- *Link* is a self-help website designed to increase help-seeking behaviour based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and meets the youth-friendly services standards set by the World Health Organization (2012). Participants of the control arm of the trial were directed to a standard internet search engine to utilise their usual help-seeking strategies.
- The RCT of *Link* aimed to evaluate the intervention's impact on help-seeking and access to appropriate care for young people suffering from mental health problems and relationship concerns.

Box 1: The Link Trial (Sanci et al., 2017)

The Link trial, described in Box 1, was a randomised controlled trial testing the effectiveness of a custom-designed online tool called '*Link*' for mental health and relationship problems in young people. The purpose of the *Link* tool was to act as a conduit between service providers and the young person using *Link*. Young people were recruited into the Link project via targeted online advertisements on Facebook, Gumtree and Google. Once recruited into the Link project website, young people were randomised into using either the *Link* online tool to seek help, or their usual help-seeking strategies. Participants were aware of the arm that they were randomised into.

Following randomisation, all participants completed a baseline survey that collected demographic information and validated measures of mental health symptoms, help-seeking behaviours, help-seeking intentions, access to care, emotional well-being, and mental health literacy. Included in the survey, was the set of questions to identify young people experiencing dating violence (Attachment 17: Screening for dating violence). Resources, including emergency crisis numbers were displayed and available for the young people to use at any point during their interaction with *Link*. Those who screened positive for dating violence or prioritised relationships as a problem, and who agreed to consider being interviewed, were contacted via email by myself to take part in telephone or face-to-face interviews depending on their location.

University of Melbourne student portal ('the student portal')

The student portal is the University of Melbourne intranet site with administrative facilities and a virtual noticeboard for enrolled students (University of Melbourne, 2003). Previous research projects at the Department of General practice have successfully recruited young people via this platform for sensitive research including research into partner violence and sexual health. Once ethics approval was confirmed, an advertisement was posted on the student portal requesting young women to contact myself via email if they were afraid of a partner and interested in participating in the research project (Attachment 12: Advertisements). As described earlier, this basic wording was not effective as participants expressed some confusion about the study purpose and participant eligibility. While a few young women equated feeling afraid of a partner to feeling fearful of them, others interpreted it to mean many different things such as feeling afraid of losing the relationship and so on, that were unrelated to IPV. Therefore, the student portal advertisement was revised, which included a link to complete a short screening questionnaire (Attachment 12: Advertisements) on *Survey Monkey* (an online survey creating website). Screenshots of the Survey Monkey questionnaire can be found in the appendix (Attachment 17: Screening for dating violence). This was approved as an amendment by the Ethics committee. This questionnaire screened for participant age, geographical location, occupational status, and this was followed by a series of questions screening for physical, verbal, emotional, online and sexual violence.

Facebook

Facebook advertisements were commenced soon after ethics approval was obtained for the project. Facebook advertisements initially targeted 18 to 25-year-old young women from anywhere across Australia listing English as a spoken language, and 16 and 17-year-old English speaking young women from across Victoria (Attachment 12: Advertisements). Young women interested in the advertisement would click on the advertisement and be directed to the survey monkey questionnaire (Attachment 17: Screening for dating violence).

While the Facebook advertisement received several 'clicks', many young women did not complete the screening questionnaire and only one young woman expressed interest in participating in an interview. Therefore after about seven weeks of intermittently posting Facebook advertisements and discussion with a PhD colleague also recruiting via social media, a Facebook 'page' was created for the research project, titled 'Dating Experiences Research Project' (Attachment 18: Project's Facebook page) which can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/datingexperiencesstudy/> (last accessed on 21 June 2019). The

Facebook page had all the information relevant to the project including a summary of the plain language statement, my University email address and a link to the survey monkey screening questionnaire. When the page was initially published in September 2015 following receipt of ethics approval, paid Facebook advertisements were set up to promote the study page to young women aged 16 to 25 years of age across Australia. After a week or so of promoting the study page and not receiving much interest, the advertisement focused on promoting the survey monkey questionnaire link on the page, and posts about the study were actively published on the page to encourage engagement by visitors. These posts were then ‘boosted’, which means that paid Facebook advertisements were used to promote the posts on the Facebook project page to the target audience. This happened around the third week of September 2015 and resulted in a significantly increased response to the screening questionnaire. In mid-October 2015, the participant background characteristics were reviewed and this revealed that there were many young women in the sample who had undertaken higher education, mostly at the University level. Therefore, an electronic poster was designed to help target young women who were working or unemployed (Attachment 12: Advertisements). This poster was promoted on the Facebook project page and advertisements were targeted at 16 to 25-year-old young women living in Australia.

Twitter

Twitter is not known to be the preferred form of social media amongst Australian young people and is even less popular among young women compared to young men (Sensis, 2017). An announcement about the research project was posted on my personal Twitter account. Relevant mental health and youth health organisations and individuals were ‘tagged’ in some of these posts. Some of these organisations and individuals shared, or ‘retweeted’ my project post amongst their followers. Amongst those who shared my Twitter posts about the research project were YAWCRC, SANE Australia, Melbourne Social Equity Institute at the University of Melbourne, ANROWS (Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety) and ReachOut.com. Several individuals and smaller organisations also ‘retweeted’ my Twitter posts, which allowed exposure of my post to their followers. However, ultimately Twitter was not effective in recruiting any participants into this study.

YAWCRC

YAWCRC was one of the scholarship providers for this research project and they were known to have a good network of young people interested in participating in youth focused research

projects. YAWCRC kindly shared the research project blurb and survey monkey link with their youth network via their newsletters, Facebook page and Twitter account.

Snowball sampling

The process of snowball sampling for this study involved participants who had completed interviews with me agreeing to pass study details on to their personal contacts, if they felt comfortable to do so. If young women emailed me expressing interest in the project they were sent the screening questionnaire via the survey monkey link.

Other sources

In an attempt to improve heterogeneity of the sample, specifically with respect to including more young women from rural and regional areas and different occupational backgrounds I was put in touch with two Technical And Further Education Institutes (TAFE's) in rural Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. Details of the research project were also disseminated among the local Aboriginal community by one of the University Department's research higher degree coordinators, Dr Phyllis Lau, in an attempt to recruit Indigenous young women. The rural TAFE staff members were helpful and printed out and circulated hard copies of the research project advertisements (Attachment 12: Advertisements) across their campus. During this time there was a small increase in responses to the *Survey Monkey* screening questionnaire although it wasn't clear if any were actually from the TAFE, the Facebook project page or snowball sampling, as there was no obligation for young women to disclose their exact location or how they discovered the project in the questionnaire. This recruitment period was fairly short as there was no incentive to readvertise again at the TAFEs due to exams and summer holidays in early December 2015. The contact from the Melbourne metropolitan TAFE was not reachable and calls were not returned. One email expressing interest was received from the Aboriginal community. However, after two email exchanges further responses were not received and so this recruitment source was also abandoned.

Data collection

The social constructionist and feminist theoretical perspectives informed the narrative approach to collecting data. Data collection involved conducting interviews over the telephone and face-to-face, taking field notes during the interviews and writing reflective notes at the conclusion of each interview. This in-depth and reflexive approach was deemed to be the most appropriate method of data collection to develop a comprehensive understanding of Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. As discussed previously, collecting

narrative data from women is consistent with feminist principles of research, as these methods are seen to challenge male-centric assumptions about society that were traditionally positivist (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The interview schedule was thus minimally structured to give the young women space and plenty of time to take more control of the interview content and flow and share their perspectives of dating and dating violence through telling about their life experiences. Interviews with participants were introduced in slightly vague terms without using words linked to 'violence' or 'abuse' that might have been too directive or made participants feel singled out (Josselson, 2013). Remaining mindful about consistency with feminist research principles was important in order to minimise the power differential between myself and the participants (Kleinman, 2007). Effort was made to establish a trusting rapport with participants prior to interviews, such as offering them a cup of tea or water and engaging in casual, general conversation. Interviews with the young women were conducted in a non-judgemental way while remaining consistent with the social constructionist and feminist lenses.

Face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews were conducted. As will be discussed further on, internet mediated interview methods were not used due to concerns about privacy, confidentiality, data quality and safety (Ayling & Mewse, 2009; Bouchard, 2016; King & Horrocks, 2010). Challenges were noted in correctly clarifying the participant's identity prior to the interview and gauging the participant's feedback about their safety during the interview. It was decided, based on the review of traditional and technology mediated interview methods, that face-to-face and telephone interviews would be most appropriate to interview young women based on the theoretical perspectives of the research design, the narrative approach to interviewing and the sensitivity of the interview topic.

Data collection occurred in a systematic way similar to that described in Dempsey's sensitive qualitative interviews framework for vulnerable groups (Dempsey et al., 2016). All of the young women who completed the survey monkey questionnaire or responded to the initial advertisements were contacted and sent a consent form over email. They were invited to take part in a face-to-face or telephone interview and advised to return the signed consent form by post, email or fax if they preferred a telephone interview. Dates, times and locations for interviews were negotiated over email. All face-to-face interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the Department of General Practice during and outside of work hours. Telephone interviews were conducted at various times of the day depending on the young person's availability. Interviews were conducted as per the narrative interview schedule (Appendix: Attachment 7: Interview guide) but following the participant's lead. The young women were

invited to talk about any romantic relationships, interactions or experiences that they had had, without judgement regarding the gender of their partners and without asking directly for information about abusive relationships. This enabled the young women to ease into the interview by discussing more light-hearted romantic experiences before delving into difficult conversations about their experiences with dating violence. Some interviews had breaks in the middle of the interview for various reasons such as the participant needing to top up their parking meter or requiring a toilet break.

During each telephone and face-to-face interview, effort was made to maintain active listening skills and adopt a non-judgemental attitude (Josselson, 2013). The young women were given the time to talk about superficial aspects of their lives while comfort and rapport were established, before prompting them more directly (Josselson, 2013), although most of the young women became comfortable enough to spontaneously begin talking about their more difficult experiences. Focusing on active listening skills and empathic responses as suggested by Josselson (2013), thus allowed the data to emerge more naturally and with minimal prompting. Effort was made to minimise prompting and interruptions so that the young women had adequate space and time to tell their stories. When the young women's narrative went off topic for a prolonged period of time, they would be gently reminded of the research topic and question while simultaneously attempting to demonstrate respect and trust and reflect on what they had recounted up until then. Each interview concluded naturally when the participant had nothing further to add about their romantic relationships. While nearing the conclusion of each interview, field notes that were taken during the interviews were checked to ensure that there were no aspects of the interview that required further exploration.

Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. It is important to acknowledge that due to the qualitative and constructionist nature of data collection, data analysis occurred concurrently in order to identify codes and themes arising from the interviews with the young women (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Green et al., 2007). Further detail on the data analysis process is discussed in later sections. Upon reflection, according to Hennink's (2017) discussion of code saturation versus 'meaning' saturation, the interviews were ended when meaning saturation was achieved. Code saturation or the range of themes pertaining to the research questions was reached once approximately 15 interviews had been completed. However, meaning saturation, or when further depth of understanding was achieved from the young women's voices, was achieved closer to the completion of 30 interviews. At this point I had

begun transcribing some of the interviews and revisiting old data while collecting fresh data. Data collection ceased at 35 interviews after a collaborative decision with my supervision team.

Interview mode

In order to collect high quality narrative data about Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence, interviews were conducted face-to-face and via the telephone. This is because high quality narrative data needs to be detailed with multiple lengthy themes as opposed to short or fragmented segments of text that might be elicited through other forms of interviewing (Riessman, 2008). It therefore makes sense that internet mediated interview methods including instant messaging (IM) which were initially considered for their many aspects of convenience, would not have been suitable for this project due to yielding different kinds of data. This will be discussed further below. Individual, participant-focused, narrative interviews were conducted with Australian young women who had experienced dating violence in their own relationships, to explore their perceptions of and responses to dating violence. This participant-centred approach was consistent with feminist research principles (Burgess-Proctor, 2015).

Face-to-face interviewing was selected as an interview mode because of its ability to collect high quality rich, detailed data, cutting across multiple themes (Riessman, 2008). Consistent with feminist research principles, face-to-face interviews allow plenty of opportunities for the researcher to encourage the participant to disclose their experience through good rapport building and creating a comfortable and non-judgemental atmosphere (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). The face-to-face interviews yield data related to speech, other verbal cues such as hesitation and tone of voice, and visual cues such as body language and eye contact (Opdenakker, 2006) which all add to the tacit data that is an important aspect of narrative research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). These additional aspects of the interview enhance the quality of the data and help to elicit the tacit, or less obvious, unspoken meanings woven into the narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Face-to-face interviewing has been the traditional mode of conducting narrative interviews with participants, particularly for sensitive research topics, therefore it seemed obvious that for a sensitive topic such as intimate partner violence it was the ideal method of data collection, for those who were willing and able to attend face-to-face interviews. As the topic was potentially distressing to participants, this interviewing method allowed for the opportunity to recognise and respond instantly to verbal or visual cues indicating participant distress, which may not have been so straightforward when conducting interviews via other types of media (Opdenakker, 2006; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

Despite the many advantages, face-to-face interviews did pose some challenges such as time and cost of travelling to the venue, and inflexibility in reorganising the interview in the case of last-minute problems and cancelations (Opdenakker, 2006). As all of the face-to-face interviews happened to be conducted at the university, there was no additional cost for the researcher, but some of the participants who travelled from outside the university precinct bore the costs of public transport and car parking. None of the participants opted to be interviewed face-to-face at an alternative location. A few participants cancelled attendance at the interview minutes before the scheduled start time and some participants did not turn up to the interviews at all and did not communicate their intended absence, thus resulting in lost time. Safety concerns for the researcher and participant are also an important consideration in face-to-face interviews, particularly in this field of intimate partner violence (World Health Organization, 2001), therefore all face-to-face interviews were conducted at the Department of General Practice, which was considered to be a safe location. This was discussed in the preceding section on ethical considerations. Another possible downside of face-to-face interviews that is described by some authors is participant discomfort in expressing socially undesirable views in a face-to-face setting due to a fear of being judged (Mealer & Jones, 2014; Trier-Bieniek, 2012). Thus, all participants, apart from mature minors, were given the option of taking part in telephone interviews.

Telephone interviews had the advantages of being flexible in terms of time and place of interview, and saving time and money associated with travel. Telephone interviews have previously been demonstrated to be effective in conducting interviews using a narrative approach (Holt, 2010). Interviews were conducted afterhours if a participant worked full time during the day. The option of telephone interviews as a mode of interviewing allowed for inclusion of rural and remote participants and those living interstate. While the telephone interview potentially overcame issues of safety for the researcher the participant was still responsible for ensuring that they were attending to the telephone interview from a safe and private setting and away from any perpetrators. Interviews were easily rescheduled when compared to face-to-face interviews and if the interviewee was running late to the interview a certain degree of anonymity may have protected them from potential embarrassment (Holt, 2010). Mealer and Jones (2014) also purport that the anonymity and the absence of the researcher's reactions encourages honesty as participants are less likely to feel judged by the researcher.

One possible disadvantage of telephone interviews includes the challenge in confirming participant identity. In this study, this problem was reduced by using a unique reference number that was emailed to the participant following receipt of their consent form. At the start of the interview the participant was required to confirm their full name and quote the unique reference number. Most people also expect telephone interviews to be in quick survey style (Holt, 2010; King & Horrocks, 2010) therefore the project invitation email and the consent form had written information about the estimated interview duration being 30 to 120 minutes on average and this was reiterated at the beginning of each interview. Also, unlike face-to-face interviews a level of ambiguity may have existed wherein the participant's emotions may not have been evident through their voice alone (King & Horrocks, 2010). This could have delayed detection of participant distress or discomfort and therefore limited researcher ability to empathise or respond promptly. Along the same lines, reflective listening skills were also limited because the traditional gestures of head nodding and attentive body language were not able to be shared with the participant over the telephone (Holt, 2010; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

While telephone interviews may not produce data as rich as a face-to-face interview might due to the absence of visual cues, there is some evidence that narrative interviews conducted over the telephone can be a positive experience for participants (Mealer & Jones, 2014). Telephone participants have found the experience to be enjoyable and sometimes even therapeutic when discussing traumatic issues (Mealer & Jones, 2014). However, silence from the interviewer while participants spoke, could have resulted in some participant anxiety and uncertainty, although effort was made to increase reassurance and verbal fillers for encouragement (Holt, 2010). Mealer and Jones (2014) agree, claiming that a range of listening skills, also known as chronemics, such as control of silence, tone of voice, pitch, volume and so on can be effectively used to fill the gap of the more traditional methods of reflective listening and rapport building, thus there was more researcher effort to maintain rapport within the telephone interview setting. There is limited research on the role of telephone interviews in producing narratives. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic and the age-group of participants, anonymity and flexibility of interview scheduling made telephone interviewing a feasible option for this research project.

Internet mediated interview methods, such as video conferencing and instant messaging, were also considered. In Australia, internet use is rising at a rapid rate with the majority of users being young people aged under 34 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Sensis, 2017), and online interviewing techniques are thought to be beneficial when researching vulnerable

populations (Neville, Adams, & Cook, 2016). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to consider conducting interviews using an internet mediated platform. Video interviewing appeared to be a feasible option due to the combined advantages of telephone and face-to-face interviewing. Time and money would have been saved due to the flexibility of interview time and location while visual and verbal communication would not have been significantly compromised (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, it was envisaged that technical difficulties such as poor internet quality could have been a major disadvantage leading to disruption of the interview and thus interfering with the natural flow of the narrative interview (Hanna, 2012). While this disruption might be acceptable for other research methods and topics, the topic of dating violence is sensitive and technical disruptions can potentially get in the way of a sensitive moment in the interview and disrupt the narrative flow. Further if video interviews were to be conducted from a home setting, the issue of privacy may have been compromised unknowingly, with the risk being higher than telephone interviews due to the visual element. Therefore, the potential technical disruptions were the main deterrent to considering video conferencing to conduct narrative interviews on the topic of dating violence.

Instant messaging is also a major mode of communication for young people nowadays. Instant messaging has been used to conduct interviews about sensitive topics (Ayling & Mewse, 2009; Barratt, 2012) and has the advantages of saving money and time, with the flexibility of participating from a public computer (Neville et al., 2016). While it offers excellent anonymity due to the participant's appearance and voice remaining confidential, the flipside is that it might be challenging to confirm the participant's identity, thus potentially compromising participant safety (Bouchard, 2016). Further, data obtained from instant messaging would not have produced the type of rich narrative data that is appropriate to addressing the research questions regarding young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. For example, instant messaging is limited to typing on a phone or computer, and so including detail on relationship experiences could take a very long time to type out (Ayling & Mewse, 2009). Other human factors such as tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and so on are absent too (Ayling & Mewse, 2009; Opdenakker, 2006), thus limiting the quality of data and limiting the researcher's ability to respond promptly and appropriately to participant distress. Given the limited role of instant messaging in conducting narrative interviews and the ethical and safety concerns, instant messaging was not used for this research project.

In summary, the traditional modes of face-to-face and telephone interviewing were deemed most appropriate to explore Australian young women's perceptions of dating violence. This is

because these modes of interviewing were most suited to conducting narrative interviews and generating depth data, that might not have been possible with other interview modes. Additional features of safety were also better understood using the traditional modes of interviewing and this was important due to studying the sensitive topic of dating violence. However, with the rising use and expertise in the use of internet-based communication platforms it would be worthwhile considering internet mediated interviewing in future studies into dating violence, depending on the type of data that is required.

Data recording

All interviews were audio-recorded with a digital voice recorder. Informed consent was obtained from all of the young women to record and store their data relevant to the research project. All participant details and demographic data were recorded in a confidential, password-protected database which included participants' personal details, source of recruitment (where known), availability, safe time to contact them (if applicable), demographics and interview appointment details and any follow up notes. A note was made about whether or not they were given their compensatory shopping voucher or whether or not it needed to be posted.

All face-to-face and telephone interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder once written permission was obtained from participants via the consent form. As I conducted some telephone interviews from home after hours and did not own or borrow any sophisticated telephone recording equipment, I recorded telephone interviews by having my mobile phone on loudspeaker and placing my digital voice recorder. All telephone interviews I conducted at home were set up in a private room that was away from all the main living areas, with the door shut and with advice to anyone in the house to not enter the room until I opened the door. Audio files were transferred immediately post interview from the digital voice recorder onto my external hard drive and the University back up drive. At the conclusion of the interviewing process, all files were erased from the digital voice recorder. Memo notes written during the interview were typed up into word files and reflective notes written after each interview were added to the memo notes. Back-ups of all files related to the PhD are stored on a personal, password-protected external hard drive as well as a folder in my private University drive.

Field notes and reflection

Field notes and memos were recorded for every interview. Charmaz (2006) emphasizes the need for memos to accompany qualitative interviews in order to improve connections between the researcher's thoughts and the interview experience, aiding formation of codes and therefore

data analysis. Field notes were recorded during the interviews and then upon conclusion of the interview reflective memo notes were taken. The interviews, reflection and memo notes followed by discussion and debrief with supervisors and colleagues helped with immersion into the data and reflecting on interviewing style while drawing parallels with the preceding interviews (Bold, 2012), thus improving depth and quality of the data. Bold (2012) emphasises the need for self-reflection on the researcher's part as a means to grow as a person and researcher and become immersed in the research process. The purpose of reflexivity is also a matter of ethical conduct, particularly in the situation of conducting sensitive narrative interviews. The reflective process also allowed me to reflect on my role as researcher and the participant's role and acknowledge the potential power differential between us. This is important as the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participant is heavily dependent on the participant's perception of the researcher and therefore what and how they wish to tell their stories to the researcher. Reflexivity helps to acknowledge that it is not in the researcher's power to control or predict the influence of 'past experiences, social background and position, personal assumptions, self-narrative, appearance and behaviour' as well as emotional connection to the research, on the data collection, analysis and presentation of the research findings (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Hume, 2007).

Social constructionism consists of the construction of knowledge; therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that past constructions may influence present and future constructions of reality. My own past constructions include my personal experiences and beliefs as well as knowledge that I have gathered through reading literature related to dating and dating violence. Therefore Lincoln and Guba (2013) suggest the use of reflexive journals to revisit thoughts and get in touch with the researcher's own tacit constructions, in order to more effectively analyse the data at hand. I therefore wrote down reflexive notes following every interview and returned to these notes several times after completion of data collection. This reflexive exercise helped me to see the data differently at times and also helped me to acknowledge and take into account some of my own past constructions, including my gendered roles and my privileged roles in society as researcher and medical practitioner, that were shaping the way I interpreted and co-constructed the young women's narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This point is significant because the themes of gender and power are paramount in the topic of dating violence and so this goes hand in hand with the overarching feminist theoretical perspective of this thesis.

Data analysis

Narratives can be analysed using several different approaches depending on its suitability for the specific project (Bold, 2012; Riessman, 2008). However, the central aspect of narrative research is to keep the stories intact and prominent throughout the analysis process and the way the findings are presented (Riessman, 2008). Stories enhance the retelling of mundane aspects of the everyday and are also well suited to accomplish change through emotional engagement (Riessman, 2008). The decision was made to use a thematic approach to analysis due to its appropriateness to analysing interview data where macro concepts, such as gendered power imbalance and other social constructions can be well examined (Riessman, 2008), whilst ensuring that the young women's stories of abuse and violence remain at the forefront. Thematic analysis is also better suited to the application of theory to the analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013), which is described in further detail later in this section on data analysis. Structural and linguistic analysis involves a more structural approach that examines the linguistic structure of the text and focuses on how the story was told, the time context of the story and the sequence of events (Bold, 2012). This approach was not necessarily suited to the research questions of this thesis which sought to explore young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence in a depth manner.

The interviews were analysed using a continuous, iterative and retrospective data analysis approach. The interview data were analysed systematically using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Green et al., 2007; Riessman, 2008), followed by application of social script theory (Berne, 1973; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Wiederman, 2015). Finally, the findings were synthesised with the existing literature. The stages of data analysis were by no means linear, but having a structure in place to guide the process of data analysis is helpful to remain systematic, and it is understood that researchers will go back and forth between the stages (Green et al., 2007).

Data analysis began at the interviewing stage (Bold, 2012). Immersion into the data began while conducting the interviews, taking field notes, reflecting on the interviews and listening to the audio recordings while transcribing and checking the transcripts. Writing field notes during each interview and then reflective memo notes at the conclusion of each interview enhanced the quality and depth of the analysis before moving to the more critical stages of theory application and comparison with relevant literature (Bold, 2012). While the analysis process was guided by a structured thematic analysis plan, the focus of the analysis was on the

meaning of the interviews, as opposed to the structure, to best make sense of how the young women perceived dating and dating violence. Field notes which were recorded during the interviews, detailed participants' mood, their mannerisms and interesting aspects of the spoken interview that might have been useful for the reflective phase (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). The purpose of the field notes was to aid as reminders in prompting the participant about certain aspects of the interview that needed further exploration during the interview and then the field notes were useful again as they contributed significantly to the next stage of the analysis through facilitating initial coding (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). At the conclusion of each interview each audio file was uploaded onto a computer and then time was spent to reflect on the interview and expand on the field notes in an attempt to enhance the data immersion stage. This stage included reflective notes on aspects of the interview such as the participant-researcher rapport, reflective thoughts on the interview, plans to improve interviewing style for future interviews and finally notes on prominent themes that arose within the individual interview. When new themes would arise, notes were made to search for similar themes in subsequent interviews. The reflective notes helped to recall each interview, especially when there were prolonged breaks between reading the transcripts.

Six of the interviews were transcribed by myself and the rest were transcribed by a well-reputed transcription company that was used frequently by the Department of General Practice. Interviews that were transcribed by the transcription company were checked against the audio recordings for major errors. This process also contributed significantly to the data immersion. All transcripts were then read through once and checked for major errors. No major errors were identified in the transcripts. Minor errors in the transcript were edited accordingly.

Following transcription, and the initial transcript check, the young women's narratives were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) thorough yet straightforward thematic data analysis guidelines, while being vigilant about remaining authentic to and preserving the young women's stories of abuse and violence in their dating relationships (Riessman, 2008). The analytical process and the themes that were identified were reviewed fortnightly at supervision meetings with A/Prof Palmer and monthly with the supervision team. The thematic analysis process is described in further detail in the following section.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data' (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis was undertaken in six stages using the step-wise

and iterative approach as described by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013), while remaining consistent with the feminist and narrative approach by ensuring that the young women's voices remained at the forefront of this process throughout (Lennon, 2004; Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis was the analytical method of choice due to its flexible approach and applicability across theoretical paradigms; in particular this method of analysis is consistent with the social constructionist theoretical framework and also feminist principles of participant-centred research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis also lends itself to a theory-driven analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013), which was the second stage of analysis, where social script theory was applied to make sense of the Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence.

The data set, consisting of the young women's narrative interviews, was analysed through a social constructionist and feminist lens, specifically focusing on content concerning the young women's perceptions of their intimate relationships and abuse and violence within these relationships. Data was analysed inductively, which means that the data was studied in a participant-centred way, for elements of the young women's perceptions of their relationships without a rigid requirement to 'answer' the research questions; and thus the research questions were moulded as per the findings of this stage of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis was also the 'latent' type in its social constructionist assumptions that knowledge is socially constructed, and so the findings of the thematic analysis were interpretive throughout this process of thematic analysis rather than being simply descriptive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six phases of thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) included: data familiarisation, initial code generation, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally the write up of the findings for the thesis. These phases, which were not necessarily conducted in a linear fashion, will now be discussed in further detail.

The preliminary phase of data familiarisation involved immersion with the data at the beginning of the data collection process. As described in the preceding section, data immersion involved conducting interviews, taking field notes during the interviews, writing reflective memo notes at the conclusion of each interview, transcribing the interviews, listening to the interview audio recordings to check transcripts and then the process of formally reading and re-reading the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Non-verbal utterances such as coughs and laughs were also included in the transcription in order to retain the authenticity of the voice and remember the emotions associated with that

particular interview. During this data familiarisation stage, some of the broad patterns concerning the young women's romantic relationships were becoming apparent and these were noted down for reference along with other key events and episodes in the young women's lives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008) so that they could be referred to again in the formal coding phase. Literature was not referenced at this stage in order to remain consistent with a more inductive style of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was followed by active reading of the transcripts where patterns in the data relevant to the young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence were highlighted in different colours on a word document and notes regarding these patterns were recorded in comment boxes on the side of the word document. At this stage, the transcripts were read searching for larger concepts or macro structures within the young women's stories (Riessman, 2008), such as the role of patriarchal social structures and related gendered power imbalances.

Following the phase of data familiarisation and checking of transcripts for errors, the phase of code generation was formally commenced. Coding was undertaken manually using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel, rather than using a software programme. Codes are 'descriptive labels that are applied to segments of the transcript' (Green et al., 2007). Each transcript was read again on Word and the codes were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. Notes were written beside each code concerning relation of the code to the overarching research question about Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. Excerpts from the young women's transcripts relating to these codes were also recorded alongside each code as reminders of the contexts from which the codes originated. At this point all possible codes related to dating and dating violence were recorded without mapping them out to the research questions. Regular meetings with A/Prof Victoria Palmer were scheduled to discuss the data analysis process and emerging codes.

The third phase of the thematic analysis process was to search for themes among the many codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Codes relevant to dating and then dating violence were studied for patterns and collated into broader themes. For example, codes relating to 'romantic relationships' were broken down into several different types of romantic relationships that the young women discussed during the interviews. The fourth phase of thematic analysis involved reviewing and refining the preliminary themes. This process involved re-visiting the original data in the transcripts and checking to see if the themes and codes were consistent with the young women's overall stories. The transcripts were also checked for additional codes that might have been missed and interestingly during this process

the research questions were also easier to articulate. Revisiting the codes and reviewing the themes pertaining to the young women's perceptions of dating violence were the most challenging and the themes were redefined multiple times until it became clear that the themes were truly reflecting the young women's stories as a group.

The fifth phase of the thematic analysis process involved defining and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). By this point the thesis writing was well underway and this was helpful in articulating the findings and addressing overlaps between themes. Themes go beyond a description of the data and are rather an explanation or an interpretation of the topic that is being investigated (Green et al., 2007). The themes were examined through the feminist and social constructionist theoretical perspectives and linked to the young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. By this point the literature was also revisited, and relevant references were recorded next to each theme on the Excel spreadsheet where the codes and themes were recorded. This led naturally into the sixth and final phase of the thematic analysis process which was focused on writing up the findings and commencing the discussion section of this thesis. This stage involved refining the links between the findings and broad theoretical concepts including feminism and master narratives (Nelson, 2001). The themes were interpreted with a social constructionist and feminist lens with regular reference to the research questions and the overarching story narrated by the young women who were interviewed. Excerpts from the data were selected to support and illustrate these themes and ensure that the young women's voices were regularly in the forefront, consistent with the narrative approach (Riessman, 2008). In parallel, the second stage of the data analysis was conducted, which involved application of social script theory with a feminist lens to the thematic findings. Social script theory and its relevance to the thematic findings on Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence is discussed further in the following section.

Social script theory

The thematic analysis findings relating to the Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence were completed before moving on to the next stage of the analysis. Thematic analysis lends itself well to theory-driven analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013), and so the second stage of data analysis involved the application of social script theory to the thematic findings, using a feminist lens. In this section the background of social script theory is introduced, including one of its major branches, sexual script theory, followed by discussion

of how this theory has been applied to understanding intimate sexual relationships. The relevance of social script theory to young people's dating experiences are discussed and then this is followed by a description of how social script theory was applied to the findings from the Australian young women's narratives to better understand their perceptions of dating and dating violence.

Introduction to social script theory

The theoretical framework of social constructionism suggests that our culture and way of living is informed by large scale concepts, metaphors and images that we build on to form our identities and world views (Burr, 2015). Related to these large-scale concepts, is social script theory, which purports that human beings will behave in situations the way actors would behave in a play, as per a written script (Berne, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Stoica, 2015; Wiederman, 2005). Social scripts are learned through social interactions throughout one's lifetime and are used to 'predict, interpret and understand new experiences' and therefore govern behaviour and cognition (Stoica, 2015). Scripts provide us with stereotyped sequences of actions within certain contexts that give those contexts some predictability (Schank & Abelson, 1977). There are three types of social scripts; event, physical and role scripts. Event scripts shape how one behaves in specific situations (e.g. meeting and greeting a new date) and provides some connectivity between events so that the series of events makes sense; physical scripts specify how one must behave in a certain place (e.g. behaviour at home might be different to behaviour in a fine dining restaurant), while role scripts shape our actions when we adopt specific roles (e.g. one's role as a romantic partner would be different to their role as a parent) (Funnell, 2001; Halpern, 1997; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Stoica, 2015).

Social script theory has its origins in cognitive and developmental psychology. Basic foundations of patterns of organising and recalling memory were described by psychologists Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Sir Frederic Charles Bartlett (1886-1969). Piaget closely studied children and described how early learning of behaviours at the infant stage such as grasping and suckling at the breast are applied later by the child when they grasp and put other things into their mouths. Bartlett, (1932) on the other hand, explored how humans recall and retell stories, and from there, described how memory works to form patterns that help us make sense of stories. However, Gagnon (Gagnon, 1990) adds that scripts are not just the result of individual cognitive processing by individuals but 'must exist as part of a social structure'.

One of the early works dedicated to social script theory is Berne's (1973) work, *What do you say after you say hello?: the psychology of human destiny*. This piece of work discusses in depth the power of scripts or 'preconscious life plans' in people's lives. Social scripts, or ways we behave in social circumstances, are learned by an individual from the time they are conceived and perhaps one's life script, or how one should lead their life, is virtually decided by their parents and influenced by their upbringing in early childhood, thereby dictating their life course (Berne, 1973). Berne argues that scripts are so powerful in shaping one's day-to-day behaviour and destiny that autonomy and self-determination are merely illusions, unless psychotherapy is undertaken to challenge one's script and be 'given permission' to break out of it, away from 'parental programming' (Berne, 1973). Berne cites several examples in his book such as the pre-decided life script of an individual addicted to alcohol and the possible life script of a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

In accordance with Berne's work, it is known that social scripts are *learned* rather than *instinctive* (Gagnon, 1990; Meng, 2008), thus bringing it in line with the social constructionist theoretical framework. Social situations governed by scripts could include anything in the social context such as making conversation in a social setting, going to a restaurant, receiving gifts and going on a date, where the learned behaviour comes into play (Berne, 1973; Eaton et al., 2016; Meng, 2008). Scripts are associated with 'roles' and therefore it is recommended that scripts be written from one particular role's point of view; however, it is possible to combine multiple perspectives and form a 'whole view' of a specific situation or context (Schank & Abelson, 1977). One such example of a 'whole' view of a social situation is the restaurant script (Abelson, 1981), which is a commonly quoted example when illustrating social script theory. When one goes to a restaurant there is a clear sequence of predictable actions and events that take place. From the customer's perspective, you enter the restaurant and you might communicate with the waiter who then leads you to a table (depending on the type of restaurant). You are then given a menu by the waiter. You scan the menu and make a mental list of the food items you are likely to order. The waiter then returns to take your order. Once the food is brought to you by the waiter you eat the food, pay the bill and then leave the restaurant. This sequence of events is adapted from Abelson's (1981) description of a restaurant script. This description illustrates the patron's experience of the restaurant script including expected behaviours. The restaurant script could also be written from a waiter's perspective.

Social scripts influence human behaviour. Verbal and non-verbal behaviours are influenced by our own experiences and observations over our lifetime, and Simon and Gagnon (1984) write

about the three levels of influence on behaviour: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts. They discuss that cultural scenarios influence our behaviour in every role at every level in society and this gives behaviour some predictability. However cultural scenarios do not necessarily play out as they should in real life, therefore the person experiencing a social scenario needs to become a 'partial scriptwriter' along with being the 'social actor' to form socially acceptable interpersonal scripts that would best fit with the social scenario that they find themselves in. If a particular social situation is complicated by conflict, abuse or another type of ambiguity, the 'social actor' may need to further fine-tune their behaviour according to others' scripted behaviour and this may require some in-depth and meaningful mental and internal preparation, which Simon and Gagnon call the 'intrapsychic script' (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). While such a simplistic approach to social scripts is described, Simon and Gagnon (1984) acknowledge that every social scenario is unique and the three levels of scripts are also different in any given setting. This is consistent with Abelson's (1981) concept of 'weak' and 'strong' scripts. Abelson uses the example of a circus to illustrate a weak script, where there are multiple events that might occur, such as a trapeze artist performance or a clown show, but there is no strict sequence or predictability of events. The restaurant script on the other hand, is a much stronger script as there is much more predictability in the sequence of events and behaviours of the patron and hosts. Simon and Gagnon (1984) add that having scripts is a useful metaphor for understanding how social conduct results from an individual's personal metaphors combined with the way they make meaning of their world.

Social script theory can be further extended into the sexual and romantic contexts. Simon and Gagnon were pioneers in describing the sexual script using a social constructionist approach (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). They emphasise that sexual script theory is not only an explanation of sexual behaviour but a far more in-depth 'conceptual apparatus'. Sexual activity is not purely a one-dimensional phenomenon driven by physiology, but in fact it is experienced by each individual in a unique way, shaped by their cultural influences, life experiences and stage of their life. Simon and Gagnon (1984) argue that an individual's *reasons* for behaving sexually far outweigh the actual physical sexual behaviour. They argue that an individual's sexual behaviour is dependent on the partner's perceived and actual actions and behaviours with expectations on how the partner should behave. Traditionally heterosexual sexual experiences were divided into premarital, marital, extramarital and post marital phases and, while these particular life phases are continuously evolving, adopting a particular life phase can influence how sexuality is experienced and perceived. The opposite can also occur,

i.e. sexual behaviour, can also signify an individual's life stage and the societal role they have adopted, though of course none of this is black and white (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). For example, a young adolescent, through sexuality, may develop a meaningful identity and form their social scripts in relation to their sexuality, which in turn might signal that they have indeed achieved adolescence. In addition to correlation with life phases, the sexual script is also inevitably married to 'social, gender and moral competence' and therefore sexual scripts are complex and unique, and adapting the script to various situations can be challenging, with high potential for conflict (Simon & Gagnon, 1984).

Wiederman (2005) builds upon sexual script theory in his review of the gendered nature of sexual scripts. Wiederman (2005) discusses that humans take comfort in having scripts for social situations, such as sexual encounters, because it gives them some guidance on how to behave in certain situations and also helps to know what to expect from other people within these situations. In his review he highlights a gendered difference in sexual scripts, where the male and the female sexual scripts are significantly different to each other. Therefore, it would then make sense that a heterosexual couple is likely to experience some discordance in the way they view sex. Having some concordance in sexual scripts where the couple share similar understanding and expectations of what would happen in their sexual world, is likely to result in relationship harmony. Whereas if one partner's sexual script does not match that of the other partner, relationship disharmony may result (Wiederman, 2005). He then goes on to talk about the role of psychotherapy in counselling couples to become aware of and understand each other's sexual scripts in order to minimise the relationship disharmony. Wiederman (2005) concludes that psychotherapy would involve forming a shared script with old and new scripts and that this would be important in effective management of conflict in sexual relationships. The gendered nature of sexual scripts can then be extrapolated into the dating context and then into the dating violence context. This is discussed in further detail in the following section.

Social script theory and dating

Social script theory has been applied to the dating context by a few researchers to produce dating scripts. Studies of dating have revealed quite structured scripts with gendered roles and behaviours within the heterosexual couple unit (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Eaton et al., 2016). Eaton and Rose (2012) first studied initial romantic encounters among Hispanic young people, and then used a quantitative cognitive script methodology to study these initial romantic encounter scripts in more detail to form a first date script (Eaton et al., 2016). They expanded on these findings by examining the dating script more closely and confirmed that roles were indeed

gendered, where male partners were usually expected to be the proactive partner who had lots of active behaviours within the dating script such as initiating and planning activities and paying for the activity, such as eating at a restaurant. In contrast the female partner was usually expected to adopt the more passive role within the dating script and ‘react’ to the male partner’s actions (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Eaton et al., 2016). Another recent study examined the cultural and romantic scripts within 40 narratives of young women and men living in Guatemala (Singleton, Schroffel, Findlay, & Winskell, 2016). This study adopted a qualitative methodology where a thematic analysis was undertaken, followed by examination of the findings for scripted patterns within the romantic relationships. This study also confirmed the heavily gendered nature of the romantic scripts but included the added cultural element of melodramatic romantic scripts which ended in tragedy for the passive young women who were betrayed by evil young men.

The gendered dating scripts appear to have changed little over the years. Older studies have also confirmed gendered and structured dating scripts which were centred around male dominance over the dating process and female passivity. Rose and Frieze (1993) studied hypothetical and actual first date scripts among 135 students at a Midwestern University in the United States, using a cognitive script methodology and found that first dates were gendered and scripted. In another study in Midwestern United States, 209 college students took part in a study examining first dates using cognitive script methodology (Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). This study also revealed strong gendered scripts, but the additional interesting finding was the contextual variation of the first date script; i.e. the script could vary based on where the date was occurring and whether or not the person was known to them prior.

These studies have demonstrated that dates and first dates tend to be scripted and strongly gendered. However, dating scripts have not been studied in depth in the Australian context and the methodology used in these examples have mostly been quantitative. The following section discusses the application of social script theory to the thematic findings of this qualitative study on Australian young women’s perceptions of dating and dating violence.

Application of social script theory to the thesis

Social script theory purports that every individual adopts roles in society depending on the life stage and social situation they find themselves in and this includes scripts in sexual and romantic situations (Berne, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2015). According to social script theory, behaviour is learned from a very early age through regular and repetitive

social interactions which are then stored in our memories (Schank & Abelson, 1977). Consistent with the social constructionist theoretical framework, behaviours occur as a result of cultural influences, life experiences and ‘scripts’ where we adopt roles and behave in certain situations according to how we have observed it done previously. We might then fine tune this behaviour according to the specific situation and person we are dealing with, particularly in complex social situations such as during times of conflict (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). In studies conducted overseas and amongst various populations (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Eaton et al., 2016; Singleton et al., 2016) it is apparent that dating scripts are traditionally gendered, with specific male and female dating and sexual scripts influencing how the male and female partners’ roles and behaviours are defined within the heterosexual romantic setting. It would be sensible to understand whether or not Australian young women follow the traditional romantic dating and sexual scripts and how their scripts influence their roles and behaviours within heterosexual romantic encounters. These dating scripts would then contribute to enhanced knowledge of the young women’s understanding and response to abuse and violence within such relationships.

Therefore, social script theory was applied to the thematic findings with a feminist lens, to understand how the young women perceive dating and dating violence. This study is different to recent overseas studies examining dating scripts due to the population studied and the method of examining the narratives for dating scripts (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Eaton et al., 2016; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). Most of the studies discussed used a quantitative checklist method, based on cognitive script methodology, to investigate frequencies of actions and events within various types of romantic relationships among college students, which helped to define scripts pertaining to these relationships. However, this doctoral study approached the dating and relationship scripts using a qualitative methodology to examine socially defined roles and behaviours within dating and its evolution into a relationship. The young women’s narratives alongside the thematic analysis findings were examined carefully to make sense of how their relationships progressed within casual and committed romantic relationships. Young women’s journeys from getting to know a young man to then entering into a casual or committed romantic relationship were studied for recurrent patterns that might resemble a script. The young women’s roles were examined in the narratives through a feminist lens to identify patterns related to the young women’s perceptions of their roles and behaviours within the romantic relationships and specifically in relation to the young men’s roles. Once the young women’s roles and behaviours within the romantic relationships were clearly identified, the narratives were examined for patterns of perceived roles and behaviours within the contexts of

abuse or violence. Comparison was made with the young women's perceptions of their roles and behaviours within the romantic relationships where there was no abusive context. It was expected that the young women's perceived roles and scripts within their romantic relationships would then impact upon how they would navigate situations of abuse and violence.

Application of social script theory to the thematic findings resulted in development of a 'dating script' and a 'dating to relationship script'. These scripts describe the Australian young women's journeys from the initial stage of knowing a young man through to the first date and then becoming involved in a committed, long-term relationship. Applying the feminist lens to the analysis, the dating to relationship script was carefully examined for gendered roles and behaviours; i.e. the young women's perceptions of their roles and behaviours based on their gender and the young women's perceptions of the young men's gender-based roles and behaviours. The dating to relationship script and the young women's perceived roles within these relationships became the foundation for interpreting the young women's perceptions of their roles and behaviours when abuse and violence occurred within these relationships. The findings from the thematic analysis and the social script analysis are discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the research design was described, including the overarching theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism, which informed the study's narrative approach. Important ethical considerations were discussed including researcher self-care and reflexivity, which are most important when studying a sensitive topic such as dating violence. Participant sampling, data collection and the thematic analysis process were also discussed. The chapter ended with a discussion of social script theory and how this framework was applied with a feminist lens to the thematic analysis findings of Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. In the next chapter, findings pertaining to the first research question, concerning the young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships, will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: Dating and other romantic relationships

Introduction

The previous chapter described the study's research design, including discussion of the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism that have informed the design and conduct of this research project. The narrative approach, consistent with the social constructionist and feminist theoretical perspectives, informed participant sampling and data collection. Minimally structured narrative interviews were conducted with young women from across Australia about their perceptions of dating and dating violence. Data analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis followed by application of social script theory with a feminist lens while ensuring that the young women's voices remained at the forefront of the analytical process.

This chapter is the first of two findings chapters. The findings from the analysis of the interviews with the young women pertaining to the first research question addressing Australian young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships are presented in this chapter. First, a description of the young women is presented, and then the findings from the thematic analysis are detailed, including excerpts from the young women's narratives. The young women's pseudonyms were selected by themselves, as were names of other people and places as mentioned in the previous chapter. This is followed by findings resulting from the application of social script theory with a feminist lens, which resulted in formation of a dating script (Figure 6) and a dating to relationship script (Figure 7). In accordance with social script theory, having an in-depth understanding of the young women's dating scripts and how they perceived and made sense of dating and other romantic interactions, is important to understand how the young women, who had all experienced dating violence, perceived their roles and behaviours within these relationships. This in turn would be a prerequisite to understand how these young women would make sense of abuse and violence in such relationships and how they would respond to it. The findings related to the young women's perceptions of abuse and violence follow on in the second findings chapter. As mentioned earlier in the thesis introduction, the term 'relationship' will be used loosely to refer to any type of casual or committed romantic partnership or interaction, in the same way that the young women used

this term during the interviews. The term ‘romantic interaction’ will also be used interchangeably with the term ‘relationship’ when referring to casual romantic encounters, such as casual sexual interactions.

The young women

This section presents a description of the young women who were interviewed for this research project. As outlined in the research design chapter, the project was advertised through several channels including the University of Melbourne student portal, the *Link* project, social media (including *Facebook* and *Twitter*), snowball sampling (SS), the YAWCRC, personal contacts and large organisations between July 2015 and December 2015. Nineteen participants were sourced through the University of Melbourne student portal, six young women were from the *Link* project, five from Facebook and one participant was recruited through snowball sampling (Figure 4). Two of the participants were from unknown sources, where the participants completed the screening survey and expressed an interest to participate but were unable to recall where they had heard about the project. Thirty-five young women who had experienced dating violence in their relationships were interviewed in total. Twenty-three young women were interviewed face-to-face and twelve interviews were conducted over the telephone.

Figure 4: Participant recruitment results

Participant age ranged from seventeen to twenty-five years. Five of the young women were aged seventeen years and were legally considered to be minors. Although effort was made to

recruit sixteen-year-old young women, and a few completed the screening questionnaire and expressed initial interest, none participated in the interviews. Thirty-one of the thirty-five young women lived in major metropolitan areas and four young women were living in rural and remote Australia at the time of being interviewed. Further, while most of the young women were living in Melbourne at the time of being interviewed, many of them had shifted base to Melbourne from interstate, rural Victoria and sometimes from overseas for the purpose of study and work. Sixteen young women identified as Australian Caucasian, while the remainder identified with seventeen unique ethnic backgrounds even if born and/or raised in Australia. Twenty-four of the thirty-five participants were university-educated, five of the students were high school students, while the remainder were working or studying a non-university course. However, the young women studied or worked in a wide range of educational and occupational fields, including the arts, business, law, youth welfare, music, theatre, science, retail, food and prostitution. None of the young women reported being unemployed or homeless. Specific details of the participants' age, background and characteristics were not included in the thesis in order to protect the young women from being identified.

The initial screening questionnaire that screened for partner violence was gender neutral and did not specifically ask whether the participant had experienced dating violence from a male or a female perpetrator. However, all of the young women who participated in the interviews shared stories of their romantic relationships with young men and recounted experiences of dating violence perpetrated by a male partner. Only one young woman spoke about experiencing abuse from a female partner, but she had also experienced dating violence from male partners. Sexuality was not asked about but during the interviews a few of the young women did identify with sexual identities other than heterosexual. While sexuality was not explicitly asked about in the screening surveys or during the interviews, once the young women had settled into the interviews, they voluntarily weaved in information about their sexuality into their narratives in order to contextualise their dating experiences. At the time of being interviewed, thirty of the thirty-five young women identified as being heterosexual. The remainder of the young women identified as bisexual, queer, pansexual or asexual. Sexuality was fluid among some of the young women who identified as not being heterosexual; for example, one young woman identified as previously bisexual but pansexual at the time of being interviewed. This fluidity of sexual identity is consistent with what has been described as the dynamic social construction of sexuality (Jourian, 2015). It is acknowledged that there is the possibility that some of the young women may have chosen to not discuss all of their dating

and romantic relationships, some may not have come to terms with their sexuality and others may not have disclosed their true sexuality during the interviews. As the interviews were focused on the young women's perceptions of the relationships with young men and the abuse and violence they experienced, the topic of sexuality was not central to most of the narratives in this instance. The following section presents the findings related to the first research question on Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence, predominantly with young men.

Australian young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic interactions

The Australian young women described a range of romantic experiences with young men, including casual and committed romantic interactions or relationships. The young women described dating as having definitions that tend to evolve over time and with age. The young women described their perceptions of dating as being influenced by their own romantic experiences, their family, friends, culture, the media and sometimes porn. Most of the young women I interviewed used the terms 'dating' and 'relationships' interchangeably when referring to various types of romantic interactions. While the term 'relationship' was used to refer to a formal long-term relationship with a young man, it was also used loosely by many of the young women when talking about both casual and short-term romantic interactions, and therefore I too have used the word 'relationship' loosely throughout this thesis when referring to any form of romantic interaction. Due to the nature of this study, the young women usually named the type of romantic interaction they were talking about, e.g. dating, hooking up and so on, therefore the context of their romantic relationships was usually elaborated on during the interviews and in the transcribed narratives. The sections that follow will discuss the nature of casual and committed romantic relationships as described by the young women and the terminology used by the young women to describe the types of romantic relationships they experienced.

Introduction to casual and committed romantic relationships

The young women shared their experiences of casual and committed types of romantic relationships during the one-on-one interviews. Figure 5 summarises the types of romantic relationships experienced by the young women and the nature of these relationships. The casual and committed nature of these interactions or relationships were based on the activities and emotional investment between the young woman and young man. These types of romantic

relationships were distinct in most cases while some occasionally merged or overlapped with dating. Some were clearly casual or committed relationships while some romantic interactions were somewhere in between. Casual relationships included seeing someone, friends with benefits, flings and hooking up. 'Relationships' were defined as long term commitments with one partner. Dating was sometimes perceived to be casual, particularly in the early stages, while some young women perceived dating to be a serious commitment heading towards a long-term commitment. Hooking up is placed in the diagram intersecting the casual domain and dating because while participants described hooking up as being predominantly casual, they remarked that 'hooking up' is a term that is also used to refer to sexual activity within a dating situation.

Figure 5: The casual and committed domains of romantic interactions

The young women described the casual interactions as predominantly involving casual sexual activity, whereas the committed relationships were less focused on sexual activity. Committed relationships were centred around spending quality time together, getting to know the other person well, sharing each other's worlds through conversation and recreational activities and waiting for more meaningful sexual intercourse further into the relationship. Casual romantic interactions were described to be typically self-contained, isolated relationships of short duration. There was not much agreement among the young women about the actual duration of these relationships; casual relationships or interactions could last for hours, days or months and dating could last for days or months too, thus highlighting that the nature of these relationships was most important in considering the definitions and terminology. However, the

casual relationships were considered short-term relationships, while dating could be short or long term depending on how the interaction evolved. Committed relationships were considered long term relationships with no end in sight. It is also important to note that while casual relationships had the potential to evolve into a committed one, transition from a committed relationship to a casual one was not described in the young women's narratives. The majority of casual relationships experienced by the young women in this study were described as being self-contained without evolution of the relationship into a committed one. 'Hanging out' was another term that was briefly mentioned but this has not been included in the diagram because it was not defined as a romantic interaction or relationship. Hanging out was a term that was used by some of the young women to describe the situation of friends spending time together. Hanging out was sometimes described by the young women to be the friendly interaction before the initial stages of the dating process, when a couple would spend time with each other as other friends would, without romantic or sexual interaction or expectation.

Dating, for the young women, was the romantic interaction that was 'hopefully' on the way to a formal and committed relationship. The young women described their experiences with dating as starting off being casual in nature and then progressing to becoming more committed and comfortable, unless the relationship ended along the way. The casual nature of this initial period of dating was mainly around the freedom to also see other people without exclusivity. Dating was described as being the 'prerequisite' to a relationship, where you try to get to know a partner with the aim of deciding whether or not they would be worth the long-term commitment. However, while dating was not necessarily associated with sex for the young women, dating sometimes involved unplanned sexual activity that overlapped with the casual romantic domains. Therefore, dating is placed in the middle of the diagram in Figure 5, intersecting with the casual and committed romantic domains. A relationship on the other hand, was perceived by the young women to be a clear commitment between the male and female partner where the couple would usually spend significant amounts of time together and share time with each other's friends and family. Exclusivity and loyalty were key features of commitments that were identified by the young women. There was no casual element described within most relationship scenarios, therefore the category of 'relationships' does not intersect with the casual domain.

In the following sections the romantic interactions and commitments described above will be discussed in more detail, with the young women's stories at the forefront, to illustrate their perceptions of dating and other romantic interactions.

Casual romantic interactions

The young women who were interviewed talked about several types of casual romantic interactions that they had experienced, including hooking up, friends with benefits, seeing someone, having a fling and sometimes, dating. While each young woman was able to articulate the types of romantic interactions she had experienced, it was sometimes difficult to name a particular romantic interaction and there was some blurring of boundaries and definitions. Identifying a romantic encounter as 'casual' was difficult enough at times and therefore naming the various types of casual relationships within this construct were even more challenging for the young women. For example, although 'seeing someone' and having a fling' were terms that were used regularly by the young women I interviewed, some of the young women were not able to clearly define what these situations involved, except to classify them as casual romantic encounters. Sometimes these situations were even equated with 'friends with benefits' type of casual relationships. In this section, the casual types of romantic relationships will be described as the young women have described them.

Hooking up

The young women described 'hooking up' between a young man and young woman as a casual sexual interaction that occurs most frequently at parties. Hooking up was described as sexual experimentation, where young people experiment with kissing and other sexual activities, sometimes resulting in sexual intercourse. The couple may or may not have known each other prior and there is usually little conversation or formality around this interaction. Interest in hooking up is judged quickly by the young woman and young man at the party and then the sexual interaction results. The young women described this judgement as being influenced by the party environment where hooking up is expected to occur and the decision between the couple is made in an impromptu manner. There is no expectation of emotional connection or commitment within this interaction. Once the sexual interaction is over, there is unlikely to be any further interaction or follow up by either individual. The young women spoke about how they did not usually expect further romantic or sexual interaction with a person who they had casually hooked up with in the party scenario.

Becky described how hooking up was a regular activity that occurred during high school parties she attended at young people's homes. The interactions were experimental and unplanned.

There'll be a group of people at a party or something like that and you hook up. Which is, there's some sort of sexual experimentation.

(Becky, 20, Melbourne)

Rebecca discussed her hooking up experiences but used the word 'relationship' to refer loosely to these experiences, demonstrating the fluidity of the terminology used to describe these romantic interactions. Similar to other young women in the study, Rebecca described her experience of hooking up with more than one person in parallel, thus rejecting any expectation of loyalty or exclusivity. Interestingly she also discussed how she was involved in a romantic relationship with a partner at the same time as being involved in two hooking up situations.

So I had two different hooking up relationships that those two and my ex kind of overlapped, it was kind of concurrent.

(Rebecca, 17, Melbourne)

A situation where hooking up may occur as part of the dating process is a slightly different scenario. In this case a young man and young woman would be interested in dating each other; this is a more formal romantic interaction where a couple would go out for dinner or drinks and with the intention of establishing a meaningful companionship. However, this initial romantic social interaction may result in some sexual interaction and experimentation and sometimes involve sexual intercourse. This unplanned sexual encounter which occurs within the early dating process was also referred to as hooking up by some of the Australian young women. Dating is described in detail later in this chapter.

Rebecca compared sexual intercourse in a hooking up situation with sexual intercourse within a committed relationship in her narrative. She discussed how hooking up is a casual romantic encounter that often involves casual sex where the couple have no significant interest in getting to know each other; the sole nature of the interaction between the couple is sexual. Whereas when a couple are considering heading into a relationship, they would usually withhold sexual intercourse until later in the relationship when the sexual interaction might be more meaningful to the young man and young woman in the relationship.

If you just meet them at a party, if it's a house party, or I don't know. If they just message you do you want to come to my house [laughs]? Yeah with the dating it can just happen whenever, sometimes you don't know them that well, and that will be just like if you sleep with them quite quickly after getting to know them. You don't kind of know that it's not going to – I mean in my case I know it's not going to go anywhere, because you don't want to see them for that long. But if you want to be in a relationship with someone

you wait for a while and you wait till you're in an actual relationship. Even then after you get in a relationship you wait a little bit, and then yeah, it's more meaningful.

(Rebecca, 17, Melbourne)

Seeing Someone and Friends with Benefits

Seeing someone and friends with benefits were described by the young women as two separate types of casual romantic relationships but with overlapping qualities and unclear definitions. One participant, Ruby, described 'seeing someone' as a casual romantic interaction, where she was 'seeing' the person she was dating but also 'seeing' other people in parallel. The connotation here is that of a casual sexual nature, but when a couple are seeing each other on a regular basis the situation can be confused with dating. In this early stage of dating, where the couple are not committed to each other, it may be acceptable to have casual sexual interactions with other people and so there is often no expectation of exclusivity. Ruby emphasised the need to have a conversation to clarify the relationship status with the young men to work out each other's intentions.

When I first started seeing my boyfriend we were dating, we were seeing each other, we were sleeping together, but we were also both sort of seeing other people... if you're seeing someone quite often, then it's probably a good idea to sit them down and say, so are we just seeing each other? Are we seeing other people?

(Ruby, 19, Melbourne)

For Ayu, seeing someone is the stage before dating and she added that there is no commitment or requirement to be 'faithful' when a couple are involved in the 'seeing someone' stage. For her, exclusivity and loyalty were expected only if seeing someone evolved into a dating situation.

Seeing someone would be more the stage before dating. So when you're getting close to that person, when you're getting to know them better. But at that time you still have no commitment or anything yet. So there is no official commitment from both sides that you guys will try to stay faithful to each other.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

Sarah was in a committed relationship at the time of being interviewed but had experienced casual romantic relationships prior. Sarah had a similar view to Ayu and Ruby when she

discussed the situation of seeing someone. She compared it to the ‘friends with benefits’ situation to illustrate how the latter situation is of an even more casual nature than ‘seeing someone’. Seeing someone could lead into dating and perhaps even a long-term relationship. ‘Friends with benefits’ is a situation where the couple are already friends with each other but then at some point during their friendship, they mutually decide to have sexual interactions with each other, without any commitment or emotional connection. They might continue to be friends with each other during and after being friends with benefits, and they would both be allowed to date other people if they wanted to. There is no expectation of loyalty within the friends with benefits situation either, so the young man and young woman would be free to have sexual and romantic relationships with other people in parallel. Sarah explained how over time, her understanding of these terms has evolved based on her own romantic experiences and relationships. For her, friends with benefits is a distinctly sexual interaction without other social interactions; whereas seeing someone was more enjoyable where she felt she could connect with the other person at a more personal and emotional level. For her, friends with benefits seemed to consist of a sexual nature that she did not want to be associated with, suggesting that it is possibly less acceptable in society or looked down upon.

Seeing someone... I associate it with sex as well but also spending time with – like not friends with benefits or anything but – because also friends with benefits I see as just sex and you don't really want to hang out with them but when – seeing someone I think – like I actually enjoy spending time with him as well as that.

(Sarah, 20, Melbourne)

Elaine, on the other hand, almost equated seeing someone to dating them, and did not use the term ‘dating’ to describe her relationships, thus highlighting the lack of clarity around how romantic relationships are perceived and named by the Australian young women. However, she went on to explain later in her narrative how this stage of dating or seeing someone is an initial assessment to help decide if the young man would be worth a long-term commitment and this is consistent with how the other participants perceived dating too, which will be discussed later. In Elaine’s example, she also suggested that the term ‘dating’ was perhaps more acceptable and perceived more favourably by others in society, such as her parents. Perhaps dating, then, is a preferred and more normative way of interacting romantically when compared with other types of romantic relationships and interactions, which might render it a type of relationship that young women aspire for. Elaine described the interchangeable nature

of the terms dating and seeing someone and the meanings that lie behind those terms, depending on who you are speaking to. She preferred not to use the word 'dating' in most situations, so she referred to her romantic relationships with young men as seeing someone. However, this is not necessarily a black and white definition either as Elaine's quote illustrates. She described feeling comfortable telling others that she was seeing someone, but her parents were more comfortable using the term 'dating', possibly indicating that it was more socially acceptable to use the term dating when talking to parents. Elaine elaborated that the terms dating and 'seeing someone' can be interchangeable.

So, if I spoke to anyone and they say 'Elaine, are you seeing any boys?' I'd say yes at the moment I'm seeing this person, yeah, but to my parents I'd say I'm dating someone. I probably wouldn't say the word 'dating' though. I'd probably say I'm 'seeing' but they're probably interchangeable I suppose.

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

Having a Fling

The Australian young women described having a fling as a temporary, casual and fun-filled, romantic interaction. However, having a fling also had its elements of unclear and blurred definitions and boundaries when compared with the other types of casual relationships. As with other casual relationships, when having a fling there is usually no expectation of loyalty and no expectation that the fling will evolve into a committed romantic relationship. Tori and Michelle described flings based on their own experiences. Tori described her fling as a short-term romantic interaction with no intention of progressing to a long-term relationship.

A fling's very short-term. Like, I was only seeing this guy for a few weeks, I think. We were just trying to – I don't know. Basically, I had no intent whatsoever of it, yeah, ever becoming anything... I knew there was no future there for us.

(Tori, 22, Gold Coast)

Michelle agreed with this perception of a fling and put it down to a situational need. When a couple want to be in a romantic relationship but are not ready to be committed, they might decide to have a fling. Michelle shared her own experience of having a fling where she met a young man during her summer holidays and had a casual sexual relationship that lasted through the summer. There was no expectation of a further relationship or interaction once the holidays had ended and there was no expectation for it to evolve into a long-term commitment either.

'Oh a fling is where you find someone who you think is really attractive and maybe they like you or something ... and you maybe run around together, party together, maybe sleep together, go on dates together... for a little while, but for whatever reason it doesn't evolve into anything. I think sometimes that's situational like you're not ready or they're not ready or you're busy or you're travelling or, you know this kind of thing.

(Michelle, 21, Melbourne)

According to one of the young women, Sally, a fling is equivalent to being friends with benefits. She also went on to say that the 'friends' in the friends with benefits situation is not necessarily of significance. This quote from Sally reiterates the fluidity of the terms used by the Australian young women to describe their casual sexual and romantic relationships. Similar to Sarah's excerpt above, Sally also discussed that friends with benefits is not a 'nice term', suggesting that it is likely to be a less socially acceptable relationship.

Fling is – I'm putting a nice term on it. I think it's just like – it's really – it's called friends with benefits but [knocking out the friends] and with part, it's just benefits.

(Sally, 22, Melbourne)

In summary, there were four main types of casual romantic interactions that the Australian young women spoke about in their narratives: hooking up, seeing someone, friends with benefits and having a fling. Dating was mentioned a few times as overlapping with some of these types of casual romantic relationships. The young women's narratives revealed that the terminology used to describe and name casual relationships is usually fluid and interchangeable and not every young woman uses the same terminology to describe the same type of casual relationship. Casual romantic interactions usually involve casual sexual activity that are of short duration and with no expectation of future interactions. Sexual activity within these casual relationships was described to be a 'no strings attached' interaction where the young man and young woman usually have no emotional attachment or expectation of exclusivity. Young women's perceptions and definitions of these sorts of relationships were unclear, though, with some confusion in the level of commitment involved. Hooking up is usually casual and involves sexual experimentation in party situations but can sometimes involve sexual interactions within a dating context. Seeing someone can be a stand-alone type of casual romantic relationship but it can sometimes also lead to the next stage of commitment, also known as dating, which is discussed in the next section. Flings and friends with benefits

situations are almost always casual in nature and tend to not have a future. Friends with benefits tend to overlap with seeing someone and flings, but the young women presented the friends with benefits relationship as a less socially acceptable form of casual relationship compared to the others. Dating, on the other hand, can be a romantic relationship that is more variable in nature, sometimes being casual and sometimes more committed and leading into a long-term relationship. The next section is focused on the Australian young women's perceptions of dating.

Dating – the test drive

The Australian young women, who predominantly identified as heterosexual at the time of being interviewed, perceived dating to encompass a range of romantic interactions. Dating was characterised by taking part in a range of recreational activities with the male partner rather than sexual activity. Dating involved regular communication between the young woman and young man and over time, the dating relationship would usually become exclusive with hope of evolving into a committed long-term relationship. Most of the young women agreed that dating is the romantic relationship between a couple that occurs prior to and perhaps leading into a long-term commitment. Dating is usually the 'fun' and less formal part of the 'test-drive' process of trying to figure out whether or not a young man is suitable to be a long-term or life partner. However, some of the young women also considered dating to sometimes be a casual romantic relationship while others equated dating with being part of a formal and committed long-term relationship that might lead to marriage. Dating was also usually perceived to be the more socially acceptable type of romantic relationship when compared to the other more casual types of romantic relationships. These social norms were perceived by the young women to be based on family influences, cultural values, movies, music and sometimes pornography. Due to the varied perceptions regarding what encompasses dating, there was variation in the level of seriousness within dating situations and this will be discussed further in this section supported by the young women's narratives.

The young women overwhelmingly agreed that the term 'dating' is up for interpretation and that there is no clear definition that would be agreed upon by all young people in Australia, as Lia's quote below demonstrates. For Lia, the early stages of dating involve 'hanging out', which is a term that the young women used to describe spending time together the way friends would. Hanging out was not perceived to have romantic or sexual connotations or expectations.

Dating, for Lia, is an experimental phase before entering a relationship and she used the example of test driving a car prior to buying it.

Pretty much getting to know people, male or female, and potentially finding a life partner through mutual interaction. Just having fun. Stuff like that... Anything from just hanging out at home, maybe keeping cooking something or going out to the movies or the Melbourne Show or something like that, yeah. It's all up for interpretation... Me personally, I've been on a few dates where it's been just hanging out in Melbourne and to most people it would just look like two friends hanging out, to us it's just, yeah, no, we're on a date. Yeah. Like I said, it's all up for interpretation. Some people might see it as a date, some people might see it as just hanging out.

Thinking about it as like buying a car, dating is the whole looking around and getting more in-depth information about the car you are buying, then the relationship is after you've bought the car.

(Lia, 17, Melbourne)

The young women in this study did not classify hanging out as a type of romantic relationship or interaction; rather it was a casual and friendly way of spending time with each other and occasionally preceded a romantic relationship. Sandra also described how the initial dating stage involves 'hanging out'. She reiterated that this is more of a friendship stage and not the romantic part of dating; for example, it does not involve holding hands. However, she then went on to contradict this and suggested that some people might consider flirting at this stage. Hanging out can be interpreted in different ways by different people as her narrative highlights, but it is mostly a non-romantic way of spending time with someone.

Hang out is – for me I wouldn't hold hands with a person. So, it's trying to see if you can feel some sort of connection with the person but it's also a period, for example, if you didn't know that person before. So you didn't start out as just being friends, it's a chance to sort of be friends first and then take things further... I guess people will start flirting but also depending on the people involved like some people take flirting differently. So someone might just ask; do you want to hang out? To me that would be, all right, we'll see how it goes but to others that will mean, oh yeah he's asking me out.

(Sandra, 20, Melbourne)

Sandra reiterated, as illustrated in the following quote from her narrative, that the definition of hanging out, just like any other romantic encounter is variable and perceived differently by different young women. While hanging out could mean spending time as a ‘friend’ in some circumstances, in other circumstances it could be a step before the start of a romantic interaction or relationship.

So for instance if you do have group work and then you say, oh is everyone going to a class after this class or if someone says I'm done for the day and you're like, oh I'm done too. Do you want to go for a coffee; do you want to hang out. For me if I was to ask that it would be just to kill time but to someone else that could mean like, all right, she's sort of into me, let's see what's happening.

(Sandra, 20, Melbourne)

Some young women perceived dating to be a more casual relationship, whereas others equated it with a serious commitment. Tori described dating to be a casual relationship. Tori's perception of dating was that of a sexual nature where the young woman and young man would have regular sexual interactions. Interestingly Tori also seemed confused with her own perception of dating as she describes it to be a casual sexual relationship, however mentions that it is a ‘bit exclusive’, thus highlighting the lack of clarity that exists about romantic relationships. Tori also used the term ‘hanging out’ to refer to the process of spending time together.

Dating's just a lot more casual. I think, like the relationship means you're planning to spend that future together whereas dating is when you hang out having fun... most of the time, it's like a bit exclusive but it'd just be two people hanging out as an item, you know. Probably, just like two people casually sleeping together, is dating.

(Tori, 22, Gold Coast)

The young women and young men met each other through a variety of sources. The young women might have already known the young men whom they were considering dating, either through pre-existing friendship or as an acquaintance. Sometimes they met the young man through mutual friends. Alternatively, the young women described using mobile phone apps to meet young men. Angela described dating as a period of ‘trying someone out’ before deciding whether or not it was worth being in a relationship with them for longer. She also discussed how, from her perspective, dating is an awkward, artificial and almost ‘forced’ way of meeting

someone, where there is an obligation to play along with the date script and expectations. She preferred to know someone prior to getting into a dating situation as for her, this is a more natural progression into dating. This is perhaps where the hanging out stage might play a role.

Maybe it's like trying someone out, I don't know. Getting to know someone to see if you would work together... I'd prefer knowing someone already and not through a date. It would make more sense to be friends first yeah or to go out as friends and then obviously if there's going to be a spark it would just evolve but I feel like a date is kind of... creates this strange awkward context and then everyone has to go along with it...

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

It is important to highlight that 'dating' someone was perceived to be different to 'going on a date' for the young women in this study. Going on a date involves going out and spending time as a couple, e.g. going out for a meal, and can take place within any type of romantic relationship, whether casual or committed. Consistent with how the other young women perceived going on a date, Gen's quote highlights how anyone can go on a date regardless of their relationship and it is not restricted to just young people.

I think there's a difference between going on a date and dating, if that makes sense. Going on a date is – you can do that at sixty, when you've been married for forty years or whatever.

(Gen, 19, Melbourne)

Angela and Cara explained how there is no specific set of activities that need to occur when a couple are dating. The emphasis is on spending time together and getting to know each other and this could range from playing video games together or dressing up and having a formal outing, depending on the young woman and young man's interests. The main theme was that the activities need to be of a romantic nature to be classified as dating. The concept of romance can also vary depending on the couple as Cara highlights in her narrative.

I feel like people would just get together just to go out and have some like frivolous time and I don't really think that you can boil it down to one thing other than there has to be some kind of romantic context. I feel like otherwise it's not really a date, in a sense.

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

Well I guess that really depends on the people. For some people a date is a big thing, getting dressed up, going out somewhere fancy. For some people it's sitting on your bedroom floor playing video games for four hours because that's what you like to do. I think it's more about being with the other person doing something you both enjoy, that you've planned to do together without other people than it is about going to the movies or getting a coffee.

(Cara, 19, Melbourne)

Technology was commonly used by the young women to find a romantic partner. Nowadays there exists a wide range of dating websites and mobile phone applications (apps) such as 'Tinder' where young people will search for casual or committed partners, depending on their interests and preferences. Such websites would include photographs and very basic details about the young men, and the young women would have uploaded similar details about themselves. The young women discussed how they would shortlist young men based on the photograph and then commence 'chatting' with them via an instant messaging service on the dating app. When searching for a dating partner, this initial chatting is important because the young man and young woman establish whether or not they have enough basic interests and personality traits in common that make it worthwhile to meet in person. If this initial chatting period unveiled little in common for the couple, they would choose not to meet face-to-face.

Ayu described the time that she was looking for a dating partner on a website. She was put off by young men interested in casual sex and used the chatting interaction to gauge personal safety and the young man's intention with the relationship.

I always judge a guy first before I decide to meet – like whether it's safe or not. Well first I would chat with him first to see what he's like and see his intentions. If his topics are relating to sex and things, I would just probably delete him, because that's not what I'm looking for.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

Claudia used online dating platforms regularly and she perceived this platform to be important in determining the young man's worth. For her, the intellectual engagement with the young man was more important than his looks and so the quality of the online conversations she had with young men aided in her decisions to meet them in person.

If they're attractive through conversation, if I can develop a rapport with them over Tinder or over other instant chat things. Then usually they can be not as 100 per cent drop dead gorgeous because I'll be interested in their personality. And that's all I need. I do tell guys very – I'm very upfront, if we can develop a rapport here it will make the first date so much easier for both of us... What can influence that though is getting to know them a little bit beforehand. Because if I'm not 100 per cent attracted to them that can be bolstered by getting to know them a little bit better. So, if I think they're really clever, if they stimulate me intellectually, if I think they have a great sense of humour, I won't mind if they have a big nose.

(Claudia, 23, Melbourne)

Technology was used as a screening tool to make decisions about who was worth going on a date with. Regardless of whether the young woman already knew the young man, through friends or dating websites, technology was used to vet the young man. If the young woman and young man were introduced face-to-face, they would initially exchange mobile phone numbers and then add each other to their social media profiles. The aim of this would be to continue the communication outside of the face-to-face context and observe each other's online personalities and behaviours. A period of online interaction through instant messaging, similar to chatting on *Tinder* might follow where the couple will decide whether or not to meet face-to-face, based on the quality of the online interactions. This online interaction is also an icebreaker to reduce the potential awkwardness of a first date.

Cara highlights the importance of the social media outlet, *Facebook*, when considering meeting someone for a date. The information gleaned through young men's social media profiles gave the young women clues about the young men's personalities and interests.

The first thing I'll do if I see someone I'm thinking of maybe asking out on a date, or something who I've been set up with, the first thing I will do is I will go and look at their Facebook.

(Cara, 19, Melbourne)

Susie elaborated on the importance of *Facebook* and its critical role in 'sussing out' the potential date, though she confesses that this might be superficial. However, the icebreaker aspect of communicating over social media prior to meeting for a date was described by most of the young women as an advantage.

If someone that you kind of have maybe been flirting with adds you as a friend on Facebook, it's sort of that extra step of, okay, right, they definitely – from that sort of behaviour seems like they're interested. Then you have the fact that, well, if they're adding you on Facebook, you have photos on Facebook, so they're going to look through your photos and that's a way of them sort of sussing out more who you are as a person in a very superficial way. Yeah, I think it is a good sort of – it's a good icebreaker, technology, yeah, and social media, I think.

(Susie, 23, Hobart)

Due to the lack of clarity with respect to defining dating, it was not always clear to the young women whether they were in a dating relationship or not with a young man. Going on a date was sometimes perceived to be a 'superficial' and perhaps 'flimsy' interaction that might initially include going out for a drink at a bar or pub, coffee at a café, dinner at a casual restaurant, shopping or to the movies. Sometimes meeting with each other is clearly referred to as going on a 'date' whereas sometimes you would just spend time with each other as friends would, also known as 'hanging out', therefore leaving each other guessing about whether the interaction was a date or not. While the young women in this study often hoped that dating would lead to a committed relationship, this was not usually the case.

Susie identified as queer at the time of being interviewed and has dated young men and young women. For her, dating is a testing time to see if she wants to get into a committed relationship with the other person. Although Susie's quote highlights that dating is filled with hope of a positive future relationship, the transition into a long-term relationship does not always happen.

I think dating is a pretty transient way to connect with people. Well, not really connect... it's not – I feel that it's quite superficial and not particularly fulfilling. Yeah, it's sort of fleetingly meeting people in the hope that it might be something that works out, but generally not so much.

(Susie, 23, Hobart)

Dating can be exclusive sometimes, but it is not always, particularly in the early phase when one is deciding who they want to be dating. Elaine explained how a non-exclusive dating situation can exist and this is often an unspoken aspect of dating, where you would not necessarily discuss with the other person that you are meeting other people in a romantic context. This helps to keep the options open prior to narrowing down to dating one person.

So, for me, if you're dating someone, but you're not exclusive, then you can kiss other boys. You probably wouldn't but you could if you went out. So, if you went out and you met someone nice and you wanted to kiss them, you can...there's times when I've gone on a date with three different people, like three different instances. And maybe two of them I'll continue to see the next week and the next week or something but yeah, I'll never tell them that that's what I'm doing.

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

The events that follow this first romantic interaction or 'first date' are important in determining in which direction the relationship goes. For example, according to the young women in this study, if you hear back from the person you went out on a date with, it is likely that there is ongoing interest and likely that you will have another date. Young couples will often use technology to communicate with each other between dates and any interaction during this time is scrutinised by both parties. Meera's quote highlights the importance of technology-led communication between dates.

In between two dates, whatever happens is really important and that is led through technology... anything that you say becomes important or you are trying to make a point or you're being judged.

(Meera, 25, Melbourne)

Acknowledging a young woman's posts on social media is one way of showing that a young man cares about her and wants to remain in touch. Susie discussed how she posted a photograph of herself on *Instagram* and she perceived the young man's acknowledgement of her post as a sign that he was interested in her.

He just liked a selfie I put on Instagram. It's so weird that our generation takes that as sort of like social currency. But he – I don't know – he doesn't do that kind of thing. He's very – not particularly into tech stuff, so – I don't know – I sort of took that as a sign.

(Susie, 23, Hobart)

In more established dating relationships, the role of technology was seen to be central in keeping communication channels open between the young woman and man in between seeing

each other face-to-face. Young women would update their partners on events of their day and expect their partners to do the same, as Briony explained during her interview.

Tim and I text all through the day and when we're at work we email each other a lot and stuff.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

Long-distance dating was also experienced by several young women who were interviewed. Dating over long distance was a common experience for the young women who had left their home countries when moving to Australia. Long distance dating was also experienced by young women whose partners travelled overseas or interstate for work, study or extended holidays. Technology was described by the young women to be even more crucial in these situations of establishing and maintaining long distance dating relationships as per Angela's quote.

I'm still with the guy from work ... because of technology because we were able to keep in touch when he was away for so long.

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

Some young women, especially those identifying as coming from a traditional Asian background, perceived dating to be a committed relationship. For Ayu, dating was the stage where the couple officially refer to each other as boyfriend and girlfriend and this is differentiated from the more casual relationship stage of seeing someone.

Like in my opinion, dating is at that stage when you've officially made a status between you and the other partner, such as like being boyfriend and girlfriend or something. So, I wouldn't call just seeing someone as dating. That would just be like a step before dating somebody but like an official meaning of dating for me would be when you've changed the status into boyfriend and girlfriend.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

Young women identifying with the traditional Asian culture also entered dating situations with a bit more caution. Often, they would not spend time alone with the male partner until they felt that the young man was 'safe'. Dating would start off as a social affair which included the young woman's friends accompanying the young woman and her partner on an outing. Lisa,

who was of Chinese origin, discussed how she perceived dating, influenced by her traditional Asian family, and contrasted her cautious approach to dating with the 'western' concept of casual relationships which she perceived to be confusing, scary and 'too fast' for her liking.

Traditionally back in China, when you meet a guy or – usually you don't hang out with him alone. So if you have friends or he has some friends, maybe you hang out as a small group. But if you two feel you have the kind of feelings towards each other after a period of time you may go out alone with him because you already know him a little bit. So, you feel safe to go out with him and also you are willing to know him more. But here in the western culture, I feel sometimes fear or afraid or confused because everything happens too fast. For example, you can see young people just hook up in the bars and they may kiss and hug or just know each other so quickly and I feel this kind of confuses me.

(Lisa, 23, Melbourne)

Further, it was common for the young women to use the terms dating and relationship interchangeably. Dating and being in a relationship were sometimes seen as the same thing.

The dating itself... It was – I consider that was my first real relationship because previously I've dated other guys, but we were in a long-distance relationship.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

In summary, dating was perceived by the young women as being the prerequisite to a long term committed relationship, likened to a test-drive before buying a car. While the Australian young women perceived dating to sometimes be casual, sometimes committed and at other times, something in between, the general perception was that dating is the set of romantic interactions and activities prior to committing to a long-term relationship. The definition of dating is complex and there are several variations of how the young women interpreted dating. The level of commitment and exclusivity also varied, though loyalty was usually expected once the dating relationship was established. Technology was described by the young women to be a huge part of the dating process; dating websites were used to find young men and social media was used to vet the young men and also get to know them better before going on a date. Online interactions played a role in breaking the ice before meeting face-to-face for a date. Technology also played a key role in maintaining a dating relationship between face-to-face meetings and also for couples dating over long distance. There were some cultural variations associated with

how dating was perceived but ultimately dating, for the young women, was perceived to lead into a committed relationship, or at least, there was the hope of a long-term commitment. The journey from meeting a young man, through to establishing the dating relationship has been mapped into a dating script which is described further in a later section and outlined in Figure 6. The next section focuses on the young women's perceptions of committed relationships.

Committed Relationships – 'eating cereal in your pyjamas'

The young women in this study described that they dated young men usually with the aim and hope for a committed intimate relationship. Dating would sometimes develop into a committed, long-term relationship, but not always. According to most of the Australian young women who were interviewed, a relationship is a long-term commitment with an intimate partner. Of all the types of romantic and intimate relationships discussed by the young women, committed relationships, also referred to as just 'relationships', were the most clearly defined and understood with almost no ambiguity. In a heterosexual relationship, a male and female partner usually plan to remain together for the long term. This may involve moving in together and sometimes planning to get married. It is a more in-depth and comfortable romantic interaction when compared to dating or any of the other casual romantic interactions and carries more certainty and security. Whilst it is clear that a 'relationship' is a commitment between the male and female partner, it is necessary to reiterate that the word, 'relationship', was also used very loosely to refer to any romantic interactions within young couples. Therefore, during interviews, it was necessary for the young women to clearly state whether they were talking about a committed relationship or one of the other romantic interactions.

Susie described being in a relationship as having a deeper connection at several levels, with the partner who you are happy to spend significant time with.

I think a relationship means just being with someone who you connect with intellectually and physically and emotionally. Yeah, that you're happy to spend your time with.

(Susie, 23, Hobart)

Cara elaborates on this and perceives relationships to involve a high level of comfort with the partner, which contrasts with the earlier dating stage where there is nervousness associated with needing to impress the young man.

I think in a relationship you are more comfortable with each other. It feels more natural to be around the other person... It's more you know, you stop feeling I guess nervous around that person and it just feels natural to be hanging around and eating cereal in your pyjamas.

(Cara, 19, Melbourne)

Sometimes, relationships are publicly formalised through social media. The term 'Facebook official' was used by a few of the young women to describe how young couples would publicise their relationship status on Facebook to being in an official relationship. This public announcement was an important stage in many young women's relationships as it was perceived to be a public commitment to the relationship and thus was also congruent with loyalty and exclusivity.

Facebook official it – this is a standard understood thing in contemporary society. Facebook official is where the union is absolutely one hundred per cent formalised in a monogamous context usually. When one or both parties updates their relationship status from 'single' to 'taken'. Or from 'single' to 'in a relationship', that's Facebook official... for all intents and purposes, usually monogamous.

(Claudia, 23, Melbourne)

In summary committed relationships were well-defined with homogenous perceptions of it among the young women who were interviewed. Committed relationships were defined by loyalty and exclusivity and were associated with a high level of comfort and security. There was little ambiguity about terminology or definitions. Upon closer examination of the dating and committed relationships with a feminist lens, it became apparent that the young women perceived these relationships to have clear gendered roles adopted by the young men and young women, particularly within committed relationships. The nature and extent of these gendered roles is discussed next.

The young men take charge

Relationships were perceived to have straightforward definitions by the young women in this study and likewise, so were the roles that the young women adopted within these contexts. The Australian young women in this study spoke about clear roles within their heterosexual romantic relationships that were based on gender. These roles were most prominent and obvious within the formal dating context and long-term relationships. While during the interviews, the young women talked about vetting the young men for their suitability as a partner and alluded to making decisions about the relationship, these decisions did not always go according to the young women's wishes and plans. There was emphasis on male control of the course of the dating situation or relationship and the young women would follow on in a more passive way. Understanding the underlying influences of gender on dating and relationships is important because it ties in with the young women's expectations and interpretations of her behaviours as well as her male partner's behaviours within the relationship. This in turn would be important to understand the young women's recognition of dating violence and thus their response to abusive behaviours within their romantic relationships.

Male control over romantic relationships was described to be the norm from the very moment a romantic interaction was initiated in the dating context. The young women spoke about how it is common for young men to initiate a romantic encounter and for the young woman to passively follow, regardless of her own intentions and desires. Lauren discussed how her relationship with her boyfriend began; he initiated a first date which she was not ready for and then he went on to kiss her at the end of the date, without her consent. Lauren says she went along with it as she did not want the young man to feel 'hurt', while putting aside her own feelings of not desiring a relationship or a kiss. It is interesting to note how young women, like Lauren, feel the need to give in to young men even when they barely know them. This sets the stage for active male control and passive female subservience quite early within heterosexual relationships.

I met him through a school thing and one of my best friends said that he was interested in me. I didn't really – I wasn't really interested and I kept saying to myself and I don't want to be in a relationship right now, it's the end of Year 12. Yeah, he met up with me for something – I think he came over when I was sick or something like that and oh no, it wasn't when I was sick it was a bit after. We went out for coffee or something like that

and just a takeaway and walked back to my house. Then he kissed me and I so didn't really know what to do because I wasn't really interested but I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

(Lauren, 21, Melbourne)

While the purpose of dating is to get to know the other person through conversations over dinner and drinks, the young women recounted that physical sexual interactions do develop frequently during the dating period and sometimes even end in sexual intercourse. However, the young women in this study discussed how, in their experience, sexual interactions were often *expected* by the male partners and the young women were expected to *allow* this to happen as a sign of being in the relationship. The young women perceived sexual interaction to be necessary to please the young man and increase the chance of further contact, in the hope of forming a more meaningful relationship. When talking about sex during the dating phase, one young woman who was interviewed over the phone talked about this pressure of needing to fulfil the male partner's sexual desires if she expected him to meet her again.

Most guys wouldn't even bother trying to go on more dates or hang out more if they didn't... you know, get something out of it, I suppose.

(Amber, 25, rural Queensland)

Another young woman, Sarah, discussed how she felt guilty about her discomfort with the prospect of having anal sex with her partner. While she felt uncomfortable, she suggested that she was prepared to consider it in the future because her perception was that it was an obligation for her to meet her male partner's sexual desires. Sarah seemed to be bothered by her partner's persistent and repetitive requests for anal sex more than her own discomfort with anal sex. Further, although Sarah's partner was aware of her discomfort with anal sex, because she had voiced her discomfort with him, he continued to persist in his requests for it. Although Sarah was able to acknowledge her discomfort with her partner's requests to herself and during the interview, she expressed feeling guilty about her discomfort and guilty about not meeting his requests. Sarah, like many of the other young women, did not want to paint her partner in a completely negative light and went on to explain that he was usually a very understanding person and further on in her narrative she continued to justify his requests by taking some of the blame for not explaining to him adequately, her reasons for feeling uncomfortable at the

prospect of having anal sex. Sarah was not able to acknowledge that her discomfort and reluctance to offer anal sex need not require any further justification to her partner.

He thinks it would be good if he could have anal sex with me and – for the first time but that's not something... I'm really uncomfortable with that at the moment because like I had a few problems with like gastrointestinal issues, so I associate that with like doctors sticking cameras up my bum and stuff, so I don't really want to go there yet and I have explained it to him but he'll often – he'll like bring it up, even if we're just having like – even if we're just doing some inappropriate text messaging he might bring it up and it just ruins the whole mood for me.

It's just – like he's a very understanding person but he just – considering when he brings it up, even though I've explained that I'm really uncomfortable with it, I just find it a bit irritating and also it makes me feel really guilty that I can't offer him that...

(Sarah, 20, Melbourne)

Ayu was another young woman who had set sexual boundaries that she wanted to preserve. However, she discussed that her boyfriend 'took that away from me' by not asking for her consent, and then went on to contradict herself by justifying it. She justified his crossing of her sexual boundaries by discussing the conflict in her mind between wanting to maintain sexual boundaries and her sexual curiosity. She justifies his behaviour by saying that in the end she did not mind the sexual experimentation. She went on to minimise her own feelings, wishes and boundaries, while placing emphasis on her male partner's needs.

I do have boundaries in which I don't want to cross. For example, I actually used to want to save my first kiss until marriage, but then that – like he took that away from me at the first time we dated. So – but at that time I was okay with it, because I was actually quite curious about kissing itself. But then at the same time, I didn't want to go further than just kissing.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

While Ayu gave in to kissing, her boyfriend continued to push her sexual boundaries without Ayu's explicit consent. She too, like some of the other women, perceived it to be a male partner's right to want to explore a sexual relationship, regardless of the young woman's wishes and desires. Ayu believed that she needed to give in, despite feeling uncomfortable and then

went on to blame herself for not protecting her boundaries. However, as is evident from the excerpt from her narrative, Ayu wanted to believe that her partner was a good person who was not pushy, but simply had a natural sexual desire, like all men, that resulted in him pushing her sexual boundaries over time.

So that's the really good thing about dating him was he never pushed me into doing anything I didn't want to do. But, as time goes by – I think it's a natural thing for a guy to always be thirsty for sexual things and as time goes by, he started doing more things other than just kissing. At first I was still uncomfortable – I think because I felt that I've been in a relationship with him for a while – I've trusted him – maybe I should just let this one go. So as time goes by, he knocks off the boundaries even more and more and more, until at one moment I became really disappointed with myself because these are the things that I never wanted to cross before I got married. But he did that anyway. So that was probably the biggest regret I have.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

As is evident from this second quote from Ayu, she continues to protect her boyfriend by justifying his sexual needs as being 'natural' and taking some of the blame for his actions, for *allowing* herself to go as far as they did. She does not acknowledge that he might have left her with no choice and little control. She explained later in the narrative that she too, like the other young women, was afraid of disappointing her boyfriend, if she expressed her discomfort with sexual activity, therefore reinforcing a young woman's need to please her boyfriend above looking after her own well-being. Ayu reflects that her desire to preserve sexual boundaries was reinforced by her cultural background which encourages sexual activities to be reserved until after getting married. She expressed during the interview that she needs to be 'stronger in holding onto my principles and be able to say no when I need to', thus focusing on self-improvement and refraining from holding her boyfriend responsible for pressuring her to do sexual things without her consent.

Decisions about how a relationship progressed was also usually in the hands of the male partner. The young man in the relationship would normally be expected to take the lead and either influence or decide whether and when a dating situation developed into a relationship. The female partner would usually be expected to go along with his decision, regardless of whether she agreed or not. The young women describe a variety of scenarios where the male partner took control as the norm. One of the young women, Meera, spoke about her experiences

with dating young men. Meera would always wait to hear from the male partner about whether or not *he* wanted to see her again before she took any further steps following the first date. For Meera, it was important that the young man takes control of the course of the relationship, while her role was to wait and see what would happen and then play along.

I would just see if he would want to meet me again first and then – yeah...

(Meera, 25, Melbourne)

Angela talked about a situation where she went home with a young man soon after meeting him, which she explained is not the norm for her. Although she was unsure about her own interest in the relationship, she went along with his pursuit of her. She justified her reasoning by saying that she was fairly certain that it would not turn into a serious relationship that she was not ready for. Angela talks about how *he* liked her and *he* pursued the relationship but she did not mention anything about her own feelings for him or her desire for a relationship with him. Ultimately, she ended up following his lead and entering a relationship that she did not desire or intend to enter into.

He really liked me and then he pursued that and I guess I didn't really think it would lead to anything serious so I went along with it.

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

Ruby talked about a situation where she had just come out of a year and a half long relationship with a male partner and 'didn't really want another boyfriend'. Following this break up she started casually dating a young man while seeing other people and had a discussion with him about not wishing to get into a committed relationship. However, *his* desire was to be in a committed relationship, and he wanted Ruby to be his exclusive partner. Ruby then gave into the pressure and agreed to be his girlfriend despite feeling 'confused' and not ready to commit and despite communicating to the young man about her thoughts.

We'd had the discussion quite frequently through that as to why I didn't want to move into a relationship and as to why I didn't want to be exclusive just yet or commit to something just yet. But, yeah, after about that six weeks it was kind of like, well, we either have to end this or actually get into a relationship, because we both knew we couldn't really keep doing that forever.

(Ruby, 19, Melbourne)

Ruby then goes on to elaborate why moving into a committed relationship was the natural progression of their romantic interaction, thus justifying her boyfriend's decision, albeit against her wishes.

I suppose we'd already pretty much been acting like we were in a relationship. So I had already met his parents, I'd already spent quite a bit of time at his house, met his brother, he'd met my family. So not much actually changed from then on. It just sort of progressed to staying at each other's houses, I suppose.

(Ruby, 19, Melbourne)

Emily describes how one boyfriend took her permission to refer to her as his girlfriend, but this was the exception and has not always been the case in her experience. Another boyfriend began referring to her as his girlfriend without checking with Emily first. While she was 'put off' she felt obliged to agree with him in public, to avoid embarrassment, and perhaps felt the pressure to display a united front that she was indeed his girlfriend.

They're like 'can I call you my girlfriend?' Then I was like, 'yes'. But that doesn't always happen. The ones after that, that hasn't happened. It's more like there'll be a moment where suddenly they'll call you their girlfriend. You'll be like, oh, okay, yeah...

...He just started telling other people that I was his girlfriend. Then I found out through other people, yeah... I was a bit put off... but then I felt silly saying – telling people we're not because then it looks like I don't know what's going on and I'm just being taken advantage of or something. So, yeah, I just went along with it.

(Emily, 17, Melbourne)

Similarly, Briony too, found herself in a relationship unexpectedly, after clearly expressing to the young man that she was not interested in a relationship with him. Although completely aware of Briony's wish to not become involved in a committed relationship, her male partner introduced her to his family as his girlfriend without any consultation with her. Rather than denying this Briony agreed because of her preference to not publicise their casual romantic relationship.

Then when I was there, he'd told all his family that we were in a committed relationship which was really awkward. Of course, I wasn't going to be like, oh actually no, we're just kind of like sleeping together. I was kind of like, yeah for sure, like totally.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

These young women's narratives illustrate the passive role of the female partner in young heterosexual dating relationships, where her opinions and wishes are not necessarily accounted for by the young men. The male partner will usually make decisions about their relationship without consulting with the female partner, and make these decisions public too without her knowledge, thus leaving her with the difficult choice of either publicly appearing to be on the same page as the male partner or challenging it. Emily chose to avoid public conflict and therefore agreed reluctantly that she was indeed in a relationship with the young man. Her situation was complicated by the fact that she held a major leadership position in her high school and therefore she was a role model to other young women in her school. Her reputation as a strong and independent young woman was important to her and therefore she felt that publicly admitting that she had no control over a personal relationship would have ruined this image. Interestingly, Emily, Ruby and Briony were from different age groups and stages in their lives, yet their gendered views on relationships were similar, thus reinforcing the fact that a gendered perception of relationships begins early on and continues as a young woman grows with age and experience.

Susie talked about a similar situation, where she met a young man from Sydney. She was keen to have a casual, short term romantic interaction with him and expressed this wish to him. However, he dismissed her wishes and continued to pursue her for a relationship with persistent comments such as, *'I know you're going to change your mind. I know this is going to work out.'* She acknowledged that she did not like him telling her what was best for her and did not like him pursuing a relationship with her without her consent.

I tried to be respectfully, like, we can still be friends, or I'm happy for us to catch up on occasions, and then he just wouldn't stop texting me and wouldn't stop calling me.

(Susie, 23, Hobart)

Susie went on to explain how the media influences society's gendered roles in dating and relationships, particularly in the context of stalking. Stalking is glorified and glamorised, and

a woman's choice to decline is shown to be overpowered by the man's persistence in pursuing a relationship with the woman in the name of love.

...from Disney films you see as a kid, Hollywood glorifies the person that is persistent. When a girl says, no, that doesn't mean no, that means you just have to keep trying until she sees that she's wrong, which is ridiculous. I think, yeah, our society as a whole views men's persistence as a chivalrous, noble thing, when actually it's creepy... I think it glorifies some really unhealthy behaviour, yeah, with regards to how men should treat women.

(Susie, 23, Hobart)

Briony discussed how heterosexual relationships are portrayed in the western media and how they reinforce gender stereotypes and physical attraction. Briony spoke about how exposure to this sort of media influenced how she perceived her own role as a girlfriend. While she defended her boyfriend, who she said did not pressure her to dress up like movie stars she discussed how he appreciated and emphasised her physical attractiveness. He would emphasise how Briony looked 'so beautiful' but did not articulate his appreciation of her personality or intellectual attributes which were perhaps perceived as being not as important. For Briony the emphasis on physical beauty, that is reinforced by media, impacts on her own self-esteem and feelings of adequacy.

I think another difficult thing is the way that Hollywood and other kind of cultural tropes portray relationships in our culture, even pop songs and things. It's all very much based on physical attraction, lust, love at first sight and romantic love... it's hard to hear some pop song on the radio be like, I'll keep myself all sexy for you baby and I'm just going to wear the tightest clothes in the world, or whatever they say. But do you know what I mean? Then you kind of feel like maybe you're not doing the right thing or you're an inadequate girlfriend.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

Briony then spoke about the role of porn, which is an example of an easily accessible media source that is regularly used by young people to learn about sex. She was working with children and young people at the time of being interviewed and reflected that almost every young person has their own mobile phone or at least access to a mobile phone, where they can easily find and watch porn. Briony spoke about the violent and gendered nature of porn, where the female is

submissive to the male's violent actions and endures physical and verbal abuse, which is portrayed as an enjoyable and acceptable way to engage in sexual activity.

Porn is one of the ways that young people are educated about sex and sex acts. That's concerning... It's horrific. It's really awful. Like women resisting is seen as a turn on and there's lots of slapping and really violent hair pulling and denigrating the woman like, you slut, you love this, you little whatever. If you're a 10, 11 or 12-year-old child that's looking at this stuff and have seen it so many times you're desensitised.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

In some cases, the gendered view of dating whereby the male partner had the authority in the relationship is reinforced by cultural norms and beliefs that are based on patriarchal beliefs and social structures. Anne was an international Masters student in Melbourne at the time of being interviewed. She described herself as independent and had a good relationship with her boyfriend, who she referred to as her 'soulmate'. However, she described how she looks for characteristics of dependability in a long-term partner; someone who is expected to look after her and the family once they get married. Anne expects to stay at home of her own will once she becomes a mother and says many of her friends have made this choice too. She explained her loyalty to her culture and upholding cultural family values that are underpinned by patriarchal tradition. Her perception was that men should be the dominant figures of the family so that women did not have to be independent.

...partly because of our culture. Like in Vietnam we uh...we tend to think that in a family the guy will be the more dominant and will support the whole family so the women can be less independent.

(Anne, 24, Melbourne)

A male partner's control within a relationship can be across all aspects of the relationship, even in making relatively small decisions, as is evident in Anne's narrative. Anne spoke of a previous romantic relationship where the male partner displayed his authority and influence over what she ate and their daily activities, among other things, thus highlighting that he is in control over the relationship. The female partner goes along with his decisions in order to 'keep him happy' and avoid conflict. Anne described how her boyfriend's behaviours and control impacted on her own self-esteem and resulted in her feeling incompetent and dependent on him.

For example, if I feel like eating Indian and he feels like Asian for our dinner, always with his choice. Like... or when we decided to go on a road trip he wanted to go to Great Ocean Road and I wanted to go to Ballarat, then I would always have to follow him... He would say, OK well if you want to go to Ballarat, then you'll have to go by yourself. I won't be there because I'm not interested. And of course, for someone like me, I'm very scared of going out by myself because the way he controlled everything around me made me feel incompetent and you know, very dependent...on him.

(Anne, 24, Melbourne)

Anne went on to describe later that once her boyfriend moved overseas and they had formally broken up with each other, she was no longer fearful of going out on her own and quite enjoyed being alone. She recalls that 'he made me feel like being lonely by myself is a very bad thing,' but did not recognise this while in the relationship. This highlights the influence of the male partner on the young woman's self-esteem and confidence, and his impact on her recognition of dating violence, which is discussed further in the next section.

While the young women from Asian backgrounds described the role of their cultures in reinforcing specific gendered roles in relationships, Australian Caucasian young women were similar and tended to follow the patriarchal way of thinking and behaving within their romantic relationships, where the female partner puts the male partner's comfort above her own, as is evident in Sarah's narrative.

I applied for an internship up in Queensland over the summer and – but I immediately thought, oh is he going to – if I'm living away for six weeks is he going to be okay or is he going to be weird about it. Yeah, so that's just a bit frustrating that I've changed my way of thinking in that way but then I think it's nice to actually have someone to be with for once and maybe it's worth it but I don't know, we'll find out.

(Sarah, 20, Melbourne)

Sarah was dating a young man who was about 8 years older than her and while she did not intend to, she found herself being very aware of how her partner would react to the news of her going interstate for a few weeks on her own. Sarah's was another case of being manipulated into a relationship without her consent, but she justified it by emphasising that she enjoyed being in the relationship, in an attempt to explain that the fear of annoying him is balanced by the value of their relationship. This behaviour suggests Sarah's need to 'protect' the reputation

of her partner so that he is not seen to be interfering in her life or too intrusive. A reluctance to trigger conflict, and a need to maintain her own and her partner's reputation, influence a young woman's choices when she gets into a relationship or dating situation with a male partner.

In summary, the narratives of these young women showcase the male partner's subtle and sometimes overt control over the young women and the course of the relationships. The male partner will suggest what they want or what needs to happen and the young woman will be expected to give in, whether she agrees or not, believing that it is the acceptable thing to do. The young women usually justified the male partner's actions, thus attempting to protect their reputation and outwardly appear to be on a united front as was evident in Ruby's situation. Emily's experience with being referred to as a girlfriend to her male partner without her knowledge or consent is another sign of male dominance, where the male partner decides that the young woman will be his girlfriend without any consultation with her. The young woman then feels obligated to maintain the male partner's perspective in order to preserve his reputation and appear peaceful together in public amongst their friends. If the young woman resists the male partner's wishes or pursuit, he will respond with persistent, regular communication, in an attempt to shape the situation according to his own liking.

Dating and relationship scripts

The Australian young women's perceptions of gendered roles and behaviours within dating and committed relationships followed dating and relationship scripts. The young women's narratives were analysed using a thematic analysis first. With the application of social script theory through a feminist lens, it became evident that the young women followed a fairly consistent and predictable script which guided them from the point of meeting a young man, through to the dating phase as illustrated in Figure 6. Once the young women had entered the dating phase, the transition from dating to a committed relationship followed a reasonably strong script as illustrated in Figure 7.

The young women's narratives disclosed a journey from hanging out and getting to know someone to then dating them. This series of events has been put together from the perspective of the Australian young women who were interviewed and has been named the *Dating Script* (Figure 6). This dating script starts off with gender neutral roles and slowly progresses to becoming more gender-specific, with increasing male control. The significance of the gendered roles was discussed in depth in the previous section. As illustrated in Figure 6, the *Dating Script* starts off when the young man and young woman first become known to each other; they might

already know each other as friends or acquaintances or might meet each other for the first time through friends or online through a dating website or app. The next stage of exchanging mobile numbers and interacting online was also described by the young women as being gender neutral. This was an important screening stage for the young women who based their decision to meet young men face-to-face, on the quality of the online interactions. The decision to go on a first date was also described as a mutual decision between the young man and young woman with the young women feeling empowered to decline the first meeting following online interaction. Situations where the decision to go on a first date were made face-to-face were not common scenarios among the young women who were interviewed, and not gender neutral either. If in the face-to-face setting, a young man would often be the one to ask the young woman to go on a first date, with the young woman feeling pressured to agree to this. This situation was discussed in the previous section focused on gendered roles.

Once the decision for a first face-to-face date is made, the young woman and young man would usually meet at a mutually agreed upon public location to have drinks, coffee or a casual meal together just as friends would. This stage of spending time is sometimes called 'hanging out' and might not be much different to what friends do. The date might last for about an hour or several hours depending on the level of interest. Following the first date, the young woman might decide not to meet with the young man again, or if there is mutual interest, the young woman might consider going on further dates. This is the crucial point where the gendered roles take effect. Following the first date the young men were expected to initiate further contact via online platforms, where further online interaction would take place. If these interactions were favourable, the young men would usually suggest meeting again and the young women would agree, as noted in the previous section on gendered roles. If the young women did not agree, the young man might be persistent in trying to pursue the young woman as discussed previously also. The romantic interaction could end at any point during this process. This dating script is illustrated below.

Figure 6: The Dating Script

Once a couple have been on a few dates and developed more comfort and trust with each other, they will begin spending time at each other's homes. At this point the *Dating to Relationship Script* might come into effect (Figure 7). The Dating to Relationship Script was a 'strong' script that most of the young women's narratives were consistent with. This script might include activities such as watching movies at home, cooking together and indulging in more sexual activities than previously. As the dating interaction progresses and the young couple become more interested in each other, they will begin seeing each other more frequently during the week either outside or at home. Allowing each other into their private worlds through meeting each other's friends and family is seen to be a significant progression in a young couple's interaction that is normally seen to be part of transitioning into a committed relationship. Moving in together is a concrete stage in a young couple's relationship, signifying commitment. Nga and Elaine described the significance of this progression in the dating to relationship script.

Being introduced to friends I think is a big stage. Family's an even bigger stage but yeah that's way down but being introduced to friends is a big one because it shows I think that you feel comfortable with that person, yeah.

(Nga, 23, Melbourne)

Yeah, I was dating this really, really, nice boy and we were seeing each other heaps and he lived really far away. He lived in like Aspendale.. So, he'd come to my house and stay there 2 or 3 days and stuff of a week and yeah... and I was getting really, really into it like I was really into him. And he'd met a lot of my friends and he got along with them which wasn't... I didn't... I never... I had this weird thing where I sort of don't mix my worlds. So like my friends are over 'here' and my boy I'm dating is 'here' and if he's good enough then maybe he gets to meet them. And then from there we progress to the family.

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

Figure 7: (Left to right) Dating to relationship script

While the Australian young women described a fairly clear journey from dating to relationships, there is some overlap and there are some exceptions to the rules. For example, some young women met their partner's friends and family early on in the relationship or knew them prior to entering the relationship. The exact transition from dating to a relationship is not always as clear as described in Figure 7 and seems to happen almost anywhere along this journey. The relationship may also end at any point during this time. The transition may occur based on a clear conversation about it between the couple or may simply be mutually understood. Alternatively, one young person, usually the male partner, will start referring to the young woman as his girlfriend, either with or without her permission, which usually signifies that they are 'officially' in a relationship. Sometimes young couples will continue

along this journey without a conversation, thus leaving each other to guess what is going through the other partner's mind.

Nga explained in her narrative how dating and being in a relationship are synonymous to her:

To me there's really no difference between a relationship or dating, it's just someone may say, oh yeah I'm dating him, it still means they have a relationship with him you just don't know how serious it is. I would still, I'm in a relationship now and I would still say I'm dating my boyfriend, it's just the same thing.

(Nga, 23, Melbourne)

Elaine discussed how it is usually not clear where the relationship is heading until you have had a conversation about it. The terms boyfriend and girlfriend appear to be an important part of dating.

But then you would have this conversation about 'are we exclusive, are we seeing anyone else or is it just us?' And once you're like, 'OK, it's just us,' pretty soon after that you're like OK, let's call it 'boyfriend-girlfriend'.

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

Cara describes how there is no easy way to figure out the type of relationship you are in. She expressed how some will have a discussion about their relationships while others 'realise' that they are in a relationship along the way.

Again, it depends on the people like pretty much everything. Some people will sit down and have a discussion. Okay, do we want to be in a relationship or not? Some people, it just happens and then they might realise through something someone else says and be like, oh? Well shit, we're in a relationship.

(Cara, 19, Melbourne)

Sexual activity seems to be a factor that is very specific to each couple. Some couples will begin sexual activity early on in their dating phase, whereas others will wait until they are in a committed relationship before they become sexually active together. Time does not necessarily seem to play any role in how these relationships progress; some young women will get into a relationship within two to three months, whereas others will still be dating for over six months and not be ready to commit. A break-up can happen anywhere along this journey.

Chapter summary

This chapter addressed the first research question of this thesis investigating Australian young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships through a social constructionist and feminist lens. Findings revealed that the Australian young women experienced several types of casual and committed romantic relationships, with dating being something in between a casual and committed relationship. Casual relationships included hooking up, seeing someone, friends with benefits and having a fling. Dating was sometimes considered to be a casual romantic interaction. Casual relationships were characterised by sexual activity and experimentation with less expectation of loyalty and exclusivity.

While casual relationships and the initial stages of dating were not described by the young women as having very gender-specific roles, once dating was established, the young men often took charge of the relationship. The Australian young women described several instances where the young men would make decisions about the relationship and initiate sexual interactions and other activities without the young women's consent. The young women described feeling pressure to accept the young men's requests and guilty if they were not able to. The young men automatically assumed a greater degree of control within the relationship compared to the young women. The young women's wishes and preferences were usually secondary and ignored by the young men who bulldozed over decisions with their own preferences. The young women offered insight that environmental influences including media and porn had an impact on gendered stereotypes and behaviours within romantic and intimate relationships between young women and young men. This knowledge has implications for understanding abuse and violence in such relationships.

Examining the young women's narratives using social script theory revealed a consistent and predictable dating script which helps to describe the events that take place from the stage of knowing a young man to the start of the dating relationship. This leads into the dating to relationship script which describes the stages of the journey as narrated by the young women, from dating a young man to settling into a committed intimate relationship. The journey from dating to a relationship was a reasonably strong script with a predictable set of behaviours and events along the way. The couple may separate at any point during the dating and relationship scripts. The dating scripts start off being more gender neutral, but once the dating relationship is established and the young man and woman are in a more stable commitment, the young

man's control over the young woman and the relationship becomes stronger and gendered roles become prominent.

The next chapter furthers this knowledge and presents the Australian young women's perceptions of abuse and violence within these romantic relationships.

CHAPTER 5: How do young women recognise and respond to dating violence?

The previous chapter introduced the young women who were interviewed and their perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships, thus addressing the first research question. The young women's experiences of casual and committed relationships were described. Application of social script theory with a feminist lens revealed that dating and committed relationships were scripted and young men were predominantly in charge of those relationships while the young women perceived themselves as being obligated to follow. The young women's wishes and preferences were secondary as the young men steered the dating relationships according to their own needs and desires. This chapter builds on these findings by presenting how the young women perceived abuse and violence within these scripted dating relationships.

The young women's narratives confirmed that most of them did indeed struggle to understand and recognise dating violence. Most of the young women struggled to make sense of the violence and acknowledge the perpetrators' behaviours as being unacceptable. Some could talk retrospectively about how they recognised the abuse, some spoke about recognising the dating violence at some point during the relationship, while others described being in an abusive relationship at the time of being interviewed, and yet minimised and normalised these experiences. The young women felt obligated to be protective of their partners and look after them during times of adversity. The abuse and violence was usually tolerated or excused for a 'greater good'. Consistent with the gendered dating scripts, the young women usually responded to dating violence passively, unless there was a crisis that triggered them to take action. In this chapter the first two sections are dedicated to how the Australian young women in this study interpreted and recognised dating violence in their romantic relationships. The second section discusses how the young women responded to dating violence in their relationships. Examples from the interviews to illustrate these points are presented.

Understanding and recognising dating violence

This section is concerned with interview findings relating to how the Australian young women in this study made sense of dating violence and then how they recognised it. The interviews with the Australian young women revealed that they interpreted the abuse and violence to be

caused by themselves or other external factors, and rarely perceived the violence to be the male partner's fault. The young man's control is established early and insidiously in the dating relationship and therefore escalation of this control was not obvious to the young women. The young women were usually unaware that non-physical forms of abuse were indeed abuse. Recognition of dating violence was therefore challenging for the young women, who struggled to recognise the abuse due to inexperience with relationships, being in love with the partner and feeling invalidated by their significant others. While some of the young women were unable to recognise violence in their relationships, those who did recognise the abuse and violence in their relationships did so either independently or with help from someone else. Examples from the narratives are presented, which illustrate how the young women made sense of the dating violence in their relationships and then their experiences with recognising it.

It's not his fault

Dating violence was very rarely blamed on the young men. The young women would usually blame external hardships or mental illness experienced by the young men instead of criticising the young men's behaviour. The young women took it upon themselves to fiercely protect their partners' reputations, even during the research project interviews. The young women seemed to uphold a duty of care towards the young men and aimed to live happily ever after with the young men who they were dating or in a relationship with. It was interesting to note in the interviews that many of the young women described their male partners as suffering from mental illness. The young women spoke about how their partners suffered from depression or anxiety and occasionally substance abuse and would need to be looked after by the young women. Sympathy and often a strong sense of duty to care for the young men often got in the way of interpreting the abuse and violence for what it was. The young women would describe the young men's behaviours as 'raging' or having 'temper tantrums' with emphasis on external hardships as causative factors, and often denied any effect on the relationship or the young women themselves. The young women were focused on the positives of the relationship and many of the young women who were in abusive relationships at the time of being interviewed continued to paint a happy fairy tale picture of their relationships during the research interview and to their community and friends, while ignoring the reality of the dating violence they were experiencing. Experiences of abuse and violence were minimised and normalised by the young women while they attempted to get on with living a 'normal' life like everyone else.

Melissa, who was interviewed by telephone, was a classic example of a young woman painting a fairy tale picture of her relationship with her boyfriend, whilst minimising and normalising

the abuse. Melissa had responded in the project screening questionnaire that she was afraid of her partner and that she had experienced physical and verbal abuse from her male partner. However, while talking about the relationship where she had supposedly experienced abuse, Melissa described feeling loved and supported. She spoke about how her boyfriend was always present for her and supported her during a time that she was hospitalised with a serious illness. When asked about the dating violence and her response to the screening questionnaire, she chose to justify and rationalise it, stating that it was something that happened in the past and that it was no longer a problem. Melissa perceived the male partner to have used abuse and violence towards her due to several external and internal factors, such as study related stress and her partner's mental illness. She even went as far as to backtrack in her questionnaire responses and said that she was indeed afraid of her partner and that he 'almost' hit her but did not quite lash out at her and that she 'shouldn't have been scared'. Her interpretation was that she and her boyfriend were both stressed and that they had both reacted adversely towards the relationship due to external factors. She then elaborated on the verbal abuse and took responsibility for it; Melissa described how *she* had reacted 'emotionally' to her partner's verbal abuse, thereby taking blame away from him again with emphasis that it was not *his* fault for the abusive behaviour, but probably her fault for feeling afraid. In this extract from the interview Melissa demonstrates joint responsibility for the abuse and violence that she experienced, which she reported in the screening questionnaire.

Researcher: Now I noted that in the [Link] survey you mentioned that you'd had some difficult experiences with a partner. I don't know if you remember doing it, but...

Melissa: Yes.

Researcher: ...you'd mentioned that you were afraid of a partner and had had not so good experiences, and I wondered if you felt comfortable talking about that or if that was too hard to talk about...

Melissa: No, that's okay. I think what you're referring to was earlier in my relationship with my current partner we went through quite a difficult time where he actually mentioned to me that life got so stressful and his depression and anxiety took a turn for the worse and he wasn't seeking help for it...

... He got lots of fresh air, had time to think and he came back and we both agreed that we should talk about things...

... But, yeah, after he came back we were able to talk about things and it's the first time that he'd really opened up to me in a long time. It turns out that a big thing for both of us was just the stress with his job, stress with me being at uni and we just bottled up things for so long and not talked.

(Melissa, 21, South Australia)

Jess was another young woman who blamed dating violence on her partner's possible mental illness. Jess had responded in the screening questionnaire that she had experienced verbal, emotional and sexual abuse from her boyfriend. However, during the interview it became apparent that she perceived the abuse to be a sign of her partner taking out his frustrations on her. While Jess described her partner's negative criticism about her appearance and dress, she minimised this emotional abuse and explained that her empathy allowed her to understand why he might have behaved in this way. Jess perceived this behaviour to be normal and acceptable within the realms of a normal and healthy intimate romantic relationship. This narrative also emphasises the young women's perception that they were expected to be 'empathetic souls' who had a duty of care towards these troubled young men.

I dunno he was going through some troubles himself I guess, um... and he kind of I felt like took it out on me a bit... That he was having problems with like my appearance and things like that, which at the time I kind of just, because I knew he was having a hard time and I feel like a soul who's reasonably empathetic. So, I was like oh he's just being snappy or whatever because he's having a hard time and he's not very good at expressing his you know emotions and stuff.

(Jess, 25, Sydney)

Apart from blaming mental illness it was also common for the young women to blame themselves for the partner's abusive behaviour. Briony discussed that she perceived herself to be responsible for the dating violence and perceived herself as deserving her boyfriend's abuse because she had not been faithful to him while she was away from him overseas. She was in the abusive relationship at the time of being interviewed and described how she was enduring emotional, verbal and sexual abuse from her partner during the relationship even prior to her travel. However, while Briony was away overseas on an exchange program, her and her

boyfriend had separated temporarily and during this time she had had a romantic relationship with a woman. Upon her return to Australia she reunited with her partner and the abuse continued. While it appeared from Briony's narrative that she was already experiencing dating violence prior to travelling overseas, she now interpreted the abuse as a form of punishment for breaking up with him and becoming romantically involved with someone else while they were separated.

When I was going through the process of having him treat me unkindly and in sending all those photos and not wanting to there was a part of me that kind of felt like well this is what I deserve because I broke up the relationship and was in a relationship with somebody else.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

Elaine was in a dating situation with a male partner who she was starting to become close with. They had been dating for a few weeks. Elaine described a time when she was forced to perform sexual acts on him that she was not comfortable with. She recognised the discomfort and spoke about feeling angry and disgusted at the time. However, rather than blaming his behaviour, she took responsibility for 'choosing' to be there and not getting herself out of the situation despite recognising the abuse. She talked about the frustration and disappointment she experienced with herself, about knowing that her unwanted sexual experience was unacceptable and having expectations of herself that she could not meet. Elaine appeared to be minimising the scale of the abuse and ignoring the unequal male to female power dynamics that were likely to have been at play within this situation. While Elaine was able to acknowledge that the young man forced her to do sexual things, she continued to focus on her own behaviour and the disappointment that she was not able to 'stop' the abuse when she perceived in hindsight that she had a degree of control to act in a way she would have liked.

That I put myself in a position where that happened, that I let it happen, and I didn't stop it when I could have... So I just sort of let it all happen and then that was annoying and weird for me to have an idea about myself where I'll be a certain way. I'll act a certain way and it wasn't keeping with that. I just have very set ideas about what I expect and how I want you to treat me, what I deserve and if you don't meet that then I've always responded in a way that's been, not necessarily aggressive but defensive – I won't allow it. And I did and it was awful... I guess I chose to be there because when he first shoved my head down, when it all started going all haywire, I could have shoved

him off, been like, 'get out'. That was an option. If it had come to something physical I wouldn't have had a chance.

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

It is evident from the young women's narratives that they were reluctant to blame their male partners for perpetrating dating violence. Further, it is also clear that the young women perceived themselves to be part of the problem and took responsibility for the abuse or for 'choosing' to be in the abusive situation. Regardless of whether the young women were in the abusive relationship at the time of being interviewed or they were talking about a past relationship, the young women preferred to blame external factors or themselves for the violence. Mental illness might have allowed them to see the violence as an unfortunate side effect of an otherwise healthy relationship, perpetrated by a loving young man who had no intention to hurt them. It perhaps allowed them to continue to enjoy the positive aspects of the relationship, such as the support and love, without viewing their partner as a villain in the fairy tale. This perspective might also have allowed the young women to normalise their experiences so that they could continue to fit in with their peers and feel like they were still leading a 'normal' life with their boyfriends with 'normal' ups and downs.

It is unclear though, why the young women were comfortable with blaming themselves or taking responsibility for the dating violence. This behaviour underscores the young women's perceived need to protect their boyfriends from being labelled as the abuser. Perhaps taking some blame allowed the young women to feel less victimised, thus allowing them feel as if their relationship with the male partner was that of equality. Interestingly, duration of the relationships did not seem to affect whether a young woman was ready to protect their partner's reputation as is evident from Elaine's relationship with her boyfriend of a short duration. She had only been with her boyfriend for a few weeks when he forced her to do sexual things, and yet she shared the blame for it. In the next section, discussion is focused on the Australian young women's recognition of dating violence in their relationships.

Recognising dating violence

When intimate partner violence is not recognised, it is not named and thus not addressed. Recognition of dating violence is important to understand because to recognise that one's human rights are being violated is fundamentally linked to that person's identity (Iser, 2013). The young women endured significant physical, emotional and sexual abuse and often

discussed during interviews that they did not realise that there was anything wrong with the relationship because the good times outweighed the bad. The young women identified as empathic and good carers of the young men. Further, the young women interpreted dating violence to be an expected and acceptable aspect of being in romantic and intimate relationships with young men and thus perhaps enduring the dating violence allowed the young women to identify as being 'young women'. Dating violence was minimised and normalised, with the young women choosing instead to focus on positive aspects of the relationship such as love and support. Further, it is also evident that the young women rejected the victim identity and thus chose to take responsibility for the dating violence which might have allowed them to project a normal life and fairy tale relationship to the outside world. It is thus important to understand the factors that contribute to young women's recognition of dating violence using a social constructionist and feminist lens, and also examine factors that get in the way of recognising and responding to the dating violence. This may help to better understand why the young women interpret the dating violence in the way that they do and also give us a better understanding of their identities as young women. Young women who had come to the stage of recognising dating violence within their relationships spoke about their perceptions of why they did not initially recognise the violence and then factors that contributed to recognition. Inexperience, justifying the violence, minimising the violence and feeling invalidated by significant others were reasons attributed by the young women to not recognising the violence. The young women better recognised the violence if someone else helped call out the violence and sometimes inherently recognised it.

Inexperience

Lack of experience in dating relationships was cited as a barrier for recognising dating violence. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, concrete association cannot be made between inexperience and participant characteristics. However, the young women who spoke about inexperience with dating relationships came from a range of different age groups, occupations and educational backgrounds. One of the participants, Jess, spoke about how she was a virgin and had not had much experience with dating or with sexual activity. She attributed this inexperience in sex and dating to her inability to recognise an abusive experience during one of her new dating relationships. She spoke about the example of when she was coerced to have sexual intercourse while she was asleep; while she found the experience physically and emotionally uncomfortable, she adds that she did not know whether or not others in her situation would have had a problem with it. She described that she did not know if her

discomfort was due to it being her first experience with sex and she questioned if this was the norm in romantic relationships. In other words, while she is now able to acknowledge her discomfort with being forced to have sex by her male partner, she questioned the validity of her own feelings. As is evident in her quote, she sought to rationalise and normalise her experience of sexual coercion instead of seeking help and exploring her feelings further. It is also interesting to note that despite having now acknowledged that her experience was 'horrible', she was afraid that I, as researcher, might judge her as being 'silly' for feeling this way. This again reiterated that society perhaps never validated her feelings thus impacting on her interpretation of dating violence. Further, blaming her own experience is another example of directing blame and attention away from the young man for the abuse and blaming her own lack of experience for misinterpreting his behaviour.

Like to be honest, it might sound a bit silly, but to be honest like when it happened I was so... 'cause I was so inexperienced, I didn't know really what to think about it. And I was like, is this normal? Like I didn't know... so, I knew that I really hated it and it was a horrible experience but I think I like rationalised it in my head like maybe that's what sex is, like, maybe... and so like I didn't talk to anybody about it at all.

(Jess, 25, Sydney)

Rebecca, talks about a dating relationship where she was a minor, aged about 15 years, who became involved in a short-term dating relationship with a 19-year-old young man. She had not had any significant experience with dating previously and was confused when the young man began behaving differently and therefore did not know whether her experience was normal or not. She described how she did not know what to expect from a romantic relationship and felt that perhaps she was imagining the problem. Rebecca also explained during her interview how she wanted to paint a happy picture of her relationship to her friends and therefore questioning the relationship publicly was not an option for her. Her recognition of the abuse came much after the relationship ended, when she had the chance to debrief with a young woman from her social circle who validated her feelings. Rebecca blames the lack of awareness building in schools as one of the reasons she did not recognise the dating violence while it was happening.

I didn't really think that anything was wrong, because that was the start of really dating someone. I really didn't know what to expect, because as well he's quite a bit older, and I just thought oh maybe he'll just – maybe things will just get better, I don't know. I

didn't really know what I was expecting, I didn't really think it was – I didn't like it, but I didn't think it was a massive problem. I thought it was just sometimes people are like that.

(Rebecca, 17, Melbourne)

Lauren, too, described how she found herself in a relationship at a time when she was 'young and naïve'. Lauren recalled that she was not interested in getting into a relationship, but she gave into pressure from her friends to date a young man and was then coerced by the young man to get into the relationship. She spoke about how her boyfriend used her as a 'trophy girlfriend' and was sexually and emotionally abusive towards her. However, she tried to ignore her discomfort with the relationship because she was going through Year 12 exams at the time and was eventually supported by her friends when he left her to move overseas. She spoke about how she only recognised the abuse after the relationship ended as she was inexperienced with relationships and did not know what to expect. She was also too busy with the final year of school and felt pressure to remain in the relationship and not break up. Lauren also interpreted the situation as being a result of her own choice and directed blame away from the boyfriend.

I was a bit young and naïve... Then I think there – yeah – I think I was just young and not listening to myself, more listening to friends.

(Lauren, 21, Melbourne)

Interestingly, neither the youngest 17-year-old nor the 25-year-old felt that they had had enough relationship experience to be able to recognise an unhealthy relationship. All three young women described here felt the need to normalise the dating violence experience, direct blame away from the young man and move on.

Justifying, downplaying and looking past the violence

'We think that if he is not hitting you then it must be fine', sums up how many of the young women, like Michelle from Melbourne, were unable to recognise abuse and violence. Young women often answered in the screening questionnaire that they experienced non-physical abuse, such as verbal aggression or being forced to do sexual things against their consent. However, it appears from the interviews with these young women that non-physical forms of abuse are not necessarily interpreted to be abusive or violent, or at least 'not bad enough' to be a problem. Abusive behaviours were often interpreted to be displays of love, affection and

attraction. Verbal aggression, threatening and harming surrounding things and forced sex were attributed to masculine personality traits. Some of the young women perceived aggression to be congruent with attractiveness and masculinity, rather than aggression and therefore did not perceive the violence to be a negative aspect of the relationship.

Briony spoke about how a long-term teenage relationship involved physical violence perpetrated towards her by her boyfriend. However, during the interview she recalled that she was attracted to these actions, interpreting them as rough and tough love and described how she ‘probably’ encouraged it. There is likely to be an element of needing to add a positive element to the relationship and needing to ‘protect’ the partner’s reputation by justifying that the violence was framed in a positive and desirable way; that it was a natural sign of masculinity and therefore not wrong. Briony is again demonstrating distracting the abuse away from the young man by taking some responsibility for ‘encouraging’ the dating violence behaviour.

There were some times in the relationship when he was quite violent but I always thought it was really attractive which probably didn't help. I would probably encourage it.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

Elaine was in a high school relationship with a male partner who was emotionally and verbally abusive. However, she equated his verbal abuse with affection which she reflected during the interview as being ‘weird’. In retrospect, she was able to recognise and appreciate the unacceptable behaviour but quickly justified it to be possibly due to depression and substance abuse.

He probably wouldn't call me very nice names. But I'd always take it like in an... endearing way...it's so weird looking back (laughs)! So weird, like that is not endearing! Yeah, yeah, that didn't last too long I think... Smokes too much weed but he's also severely depressed...

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

Ashley, one of the younger participants in the sample, interpreted her partner’s abusive behaviour as ‘temper tantrums’. From her perspective, the relationship she was in at the time of being interviewed was a supportive one that had ‘long term potential’. She mentioned at the start of the interview that her relationship with her boyfriend started off on shaky grounds due

to his 'temper tantrums' but then improved as time went by. However, she arrived at the interview slightly teary and as the interview progressed it became apparent that her boyfriend had had a 'temper tantrum' prior to her attending the interview. 'I felt everything was perfect until today,' was her response when asked if she was alright. Ashley talked about her partner getting angry at external situations and then taking that anger out on her; this would include punching things around him. Ashley appears to be likening the violence to childishness and immaturity, when she referred to the violence as a 'tantrum', and thus minimising the seriousness and scale of the violence. This perspective of the male partner being the child was a common perception among the other young women too, particularly in situations where the young women felt obligated to care for and protect the young men. This will be discussed further in the section on responding to the violence. Despite describing feeling fearful Ashley minimised the feeling of feeling unsafe. She preferred to describe herself as feeling uncomfortable with the violence rather than portray herself as a victim who felt fearful of her partner.

I just think it's never at me but he just gets angry and because I'm in that environment, I don't feel that comfortable. Yeah, not unsafe, just uncomfortable.

(Ashley, 17, Melbourne)

Angela is a young woman who was afraid of her partner due to regular emotional and verbal abuse directed at her and physical aggression directed at surrounding objects. Her partner often blamed Angela for his abusive behaviour but the young woman was validated by her friends, who attempted to reassure Angela that it was not her fault. Angela equated her boyfriend's behaviour with the fictional character, 'the Hulk'. He would frequently threaten to hurt himself and then carry through with it, demanding Angela's attention, affection and time regardless of her commitments. His behaviours were exacerbated when consuming alcohol. It appeared from Angela's interview that she was feeling somewhat conflicted at the time; she factually described his abusive behaviours, yet minimised the behaviour, emphasising that he would not *physically* harm her. However, then she then went on to admit that she did not think that the behaviours were acceptable, thus demonstrating insight and recognition of the dating violence.

I know he won't hurt me but he does create a threatening atmosphere I guess to me and I don't like that and I just don't think that's right.

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

Sarah spoke about her relationship which she was somewhat coerced into and where her boyfriend was putting repetitive pressure on her to have anal sex despite her having expressed her discomfort to him. While she acknowledged that the repetitive requests and the coercion into the relationship made her feel uncomfortable, Sarah minimised her discomfort and did not think that her problems were worthy of worrying about or seeking help for. She equated an unhealthy relationship with physical violence which she denied that she was experiencing, highlighting the lack of education on abuse and violence.

I feel bad, some people get beat up by their partners and I feel like my issues are – definitely don't compare to some of the more serious things that some poor women go through but...

(Sarah, 20, Melbourne)

Claudia, too, like Sarah, downplayed her own experience of an unwanted and coerced sexual experience. Her view was that she was much better off than other young women and she went on to compare her experience with other young women who had experienced much more extreme forms of violence. It also appears that Claudia wanted to distance herself from the experience, labelling the abusive experience as 'unfortunate'. She minimised her own emotional response by comparing her experience with extreme experiences of others who were 'beaten bloody' or 'physically mutilated' and therefore was unable to acknowledge the significance of the abuse she experienced. This may indicate that she may still be coming to terms with her experience and perhaps was also keen to not be labelled a victim.

It was an unfortunate experience. It wasn't overtly traumatic, I would say. I wasn't beaten bloody – I wasn't pulled into an alleyway or anything. Not that that makes the crime any less worse but I have a lot less PTS to deal with than someone who may have been beaten nearly to death from something like that. Or somebody who may have been gang raped, from someone who may have been physically mutilated.

(Claudia, 23, Melbourne)

It is apparent from these quotes that the young women in this study were not comfortable with acknowledging the abuse while in an abusive romantic relationship. There appears to be a strong reluctance to place blame on the romantic partner for his actions and a need to protect his reputation and their romantic ideal. Looking past the violence at better times while minimising the abusive behaviours and interpreting them to be signs of love got in the way of

recognising and naming the dating violence. Perhaps painting a positive picture of the male partner allowed the young women to idealise their prince and live the fairy tale that they were hoping for. Minimising the behaviours and not naming the violence may also be a protective mechanism where the young women could detach themselves from a victim identity and aim to live a normal life.

Feeling invalidated by significant others

Unfortunately, most of the young women believed that their experience with dating violence would not be validated by family, friends and the wider society. The young women described friends and family members blaming them for the abuse and violence and were sometimes advised to tolerate it for the greater good.

Elaine, from rural Australia, felt let down by her friends. Elaine described how she was in a dating relationship with a young man who seemed pleasant and even appeared to be somewhat feminist. He socialised with all of her friends and was accepted into their social group. Elaine's relationship with him flourished and appeared to be going well to her when he forced her to do sexual things against her consent. Elaine was already upset and blamed herself for being in the situation and then not being able to exit the situation at the time. When she approached her friends to talk about the sexual abuse hoping for some emotional support, instead of receiving empathy, her experience was trivialised and normalised. Elaine was left feeling ashamed and uncertain of herself due to her feelings not being in concert with her friends' advice. This reinforces the lack of awareness that exists about behaviours that constitute dating violence and society's failure to support and validate young women who experience dating violence, thus exacerbating the problem.

When I was talking to my friends about it they were sort of like ... that was sort of one of the worst things that sort of happened, in a relationship where it's not supposed to be like that, and they were all like oh yeah, guys have pushed my head down before too. And I'm like I'm sorry but how... like...? That really upset me! I think more than this horrible thing. There was a couple of things that really got me: that I put myself in a position where that happened, that I let it happen, and I didn't stop it when I could have. Um... and then my friends' reaction.

(Elaine, 22, Melbourne)

Becky elaborated on her own friends' invalidating reactions and why she did not perceive them to be a source of support. She was advised by her friends that her perceptions about sex were wrong, that she needed to learn to feel comfortable with sex and thus she was blamed for her negative experiences. Her friends disregarded the young men's behaviour and his responsibility for her discomfort, while Becky's own negative experiences were minimised. This impacted on Becky feeling ashamed for approaching her friends for help and support.

I didn't talk to my friends like that. I talked to them more about – to talk about any of this kind of stuff, they were more interested in the technical details. You know what I mean. You've got to be comfortable with sex. You've got to be comfortable with sex... you've got to be comfortable with these things. Don't do this. You know what I mean. I was a bit ashamed that I hadn't been comfortable anyway.

(Becky, 20, Melbourne)

One of the young women, Anne, who is from an Asian background talked about her protective parents and compared them to her protective boyfriend. She grew up believing that she needed to be looked after and believed in the patriarchal family structure of the husband looking after the wife and family financially and otherwise. However, while she did not necessarily feel comfortable with her boyfriend's protective and controlling behaviour, her feelings were not entirely validated. Anne's friends called out that her boyfriend's behaviour was too protective and that he should not be controlling who she spends time with. However, her parents on the other hand, tended to side with Anne's boyfriend and reassured Anne that it was a good thing to have him look after her in Melbourne while they were not able to do so. Further, her boyfriend made an effort to be in touch with her parents and complain to them when Anne's behaviour upset him. Anne's boyfriend's behaviour appeared almost childish that he would complain to his girlfriend's parents in the situation that he felt as if his control over Anne was threatened or his opinion did not have adequate validity on its own. This behaviour was encouraged by Anne's parents as they held the boyfriend responsible for Anne's well-being. This left Anne feeling confused; though for her, her parents' opinion held more weighting than her friends'. Anne therefore persisted with the relationship and the associated discomfort, wondering if her concerns were not real. Her parents only began to support her when her partner cheated on her, therefore she felt validated and supported by her family only at this point. Unfortunately, this stance from her parents reinforced for Anne that abusive behaviour was

acceptable and should be tolerated and breaking up is only socially acceptable in the case of infidelity.

My parents are another sort of influence like my boyfriend. And they made me believe that what my boyfriend did was similar to the way my parents protected me. And anytime that I did something bad, like if I didn't follow my boyfriend's choice or ended up doing some bad stuff, my boyfriend just rang my parents and said, "you know what? Today she did this and that. Today she hung out with other guys and I feel worried for her safety and stuff". And then my parents rang me and said "your boyfriend rang us today and said... blah blah ..." and it made me feel like "ok, I won't do it in the future".

(Anne, 24, Melbourne)

Feeling invalidated by significant others only reinforced the young women's insecurities and uncertainty about their perceptions of dating violence. The young women struggled to make sense of dating violence and recognise abuse but the trivialisation and normalisation of dating violence by friends and family was definitely unhelpful and diverted the responsibility and accountability away from the young men. The young women's stories of not being validated reflects society's poor understanding and appraisal of dating violence, leading to an exacerbation of the issue for the young women facing the problem.

Someone else calls the violence

While many societal influences negatively impact on young women's recognition of dating violence, some of the young women in the study recognised the dating violence as a result of someone else calling out the violence. Significant others, though sometimes responsible for perpetuating the violence, were in some cases helpful and supportive in identifying the violence and informing the young women who were experiencing the abusive relationship. Some young women were engaged with psychology or counselling services for mental health issues, which were also helpful to recognise the abuse. In some cases the young women found support through involvement from health professionals who were able to provide objective, non-judgemental advice on the relationship which helped with recognising and naming the violence. Some of these young women were seeing a therapist prior to experiencing dating violence while others began seeing a therapist because they developed mental health issues while experiencing dating violence. Michelle, a university-educated young woman, recalls that she did not think she was experiencing abuse because she was never physically hit and was very much in love with her partner. She was seeking ongoing treatment from a counsellor for post-

traumatic stress disorder resulting from trauma she had experienced in her adolescence. While addressing other aspects of her life the counsellor was able to name the dating violence for Michelle when she spoke to her about her relationship.

Anyway, so basically, I was getting some counselling and what my counsellor said to me was, “what you’re in is an abusive relationship and you really need to leave”.

(Michelle, 21, Melbourne)

Nikita spoke about her relationship with her ex-boyfriend, which she described as being characterised by an extreme level of attraction for the first time in her life, ‘to the point that it wasn’t rational, it had stopped being rational’. She says she was unable to recognise the abuse for what it was, but she was fortunate to have supportive and involved teachers and a good friend circle, who were all involved in advising her that her relationship was not a healthy one.

I think – well a couple of my teachers and stuff had said that they didn’t – even when we were just really good friends, they felt that he wasn’t the best influence on me...

... My friends, I don’t think any of my close friends who really knew what was happening were overly supportive of the relationship. Not many people knew the details, the main details, but of those people who did, they felt that it wasn’t the best relationship for me and it wasn’t helpful to me to be in that relationship.

(Nikita, 21, Melbourne)

Claudia described being in a casual hooking up situation and experienced sexual pressure from her casual male partner when she was intoxicated. While she recalled feeling uncomfortable at the time, she did not think there was anything wrong with the situation until she discussed it with a friend.

But yeah, I realised it was an unpleasant experience later when I was talking to my – any – at the time - still is actually - very feminist friend from other side of the state. I have so many friends on the other side of the state. She said to me, “well was it rape? Did you consent? Did you actually want all this?” I thought to myself well I was really drunk so I suppose I couldn’t say yes or no.

(Claudia, 23, Melbourne)

Some of the Australian young women in this study who struggled to recognise the dating violence were fortunate to be seeking help through a psychologist or counsellor. Those who were actively seeking help were able to receive objective, non-judgemental professional advice about the unhealthy aspects of their relationships. A few of the young women, although not necessarily seeking professional help, had a supportive social circle who validated their discomfort and thus helped with recognition and acknowledgement of dating violence.

Inherent recognition of the violence

A few of the young women who were interviewed said that they recognised the abuse inherently. These young women did not require a loved one or a professional person to call the violence but 'just knew' when the abuse was happening. Some of the young women recognised the abuse straight away, while others recognised the abuse early in the relationship and soon after the abuse had begun. Most commonly, the young women recognised the dating violence retrospectively, after the abusive romantic relationship had ended. The young women had their own explanations for how they were advantaged to recognise the dating violence.

Rosalie discussed how she had been sexually abused as a child and so she had gone through counselling and had a clear understanding of unwanted sexual behaviour. She was pressured by her boyfriend to do sexual things and recognised the sexual coercion which she attributed to her past experience and attending relevant counselling sessions. Despite recognising the abuse she continued to minimise it and normalise it, whilst blaming porn, rather than her boyfriend. She perceived herself as having an advantage because unlike some of the other young women, she perceived herself as being empowered to resist the sexual pressure.

I mean I knew that it wasn't right as such but I think I didn't think it was abnormal and I still don't think it's abnormal. It's wrong but it's not abnormal. I think it's extremely common and I think that's largely because of porn. Males just have completely skewed ideas of what sex is and how women perceive it...but, yeah, I think that's the male aspect of it and then the female aspect is they will feel pressured to do what they're asking because they feel it's the norm. So I think a lot of women would have given in but I think I would have if I hadn't had those experiences when I was younger, but because I had, I knew how uncomfortable I was with it and so I was actually able to just be like no.

(Rosalie, 17, Melbourne)

Apinya was a young woman who was living with her boyfriend in an abusive relationship. At the time of being interviewed she had figured out that she was in an abusive relationship. She described her recollection of how she first recognised the abuse – when her boyfriend hit her. Although Apinya described a variety of controlling behaviours and psychological abuse that had been taking place for some time, she did not recognise the abuse until the physical abuse happened, because she was always taught that physical abuse of any kind was not acceptable. However, as is evident from her quote, Apinya was quick to minimise the severity of the physical abuse by highlighting that she was slapped but ‘not strongly’.

It must be sometime last year I think...maybe June or July last year, maybe I don't know. It's not strongly, but for me it's really something that at the time I thought to anybody is something really unacceptable. It's like he, for example, I think that time, slapped me, I think. The first time I think was really strongly.

(Apinya, 25, Melbourne)

Molly described recognising abuse at the time of being in the abusive relationship. She recalled retrospectively that her partner was usually verbally aggressive when she did not comply with his wishes. She recognised that he was abusive during a particularly dangerous outburst on the road when she feared for her own physical safety.

Probably the time we were driving home from the movies. He was driving because obviously I was under 18. He wanted to use his phone. So, he wanted me to hold the car and steer it from the passenger's side. But I didn't want to, so he spent the rest of the car ride home just yelling at me and stuff like that. So that was when I realised that he wasn't the one for me.

(Molly, 18, rural Victoria)

Due to the nature of this study it is difficult to draw conclusions about whether the young women who recognised the abuse and violence inherently were any different to the rest of the young women interviewed. Most of the young women who reported inherently recognising the violence were of Australian Caucasian background and one was of South-East Asian origin, and these young women all happened to be formally enrolled in high school, pre-university or university education at the time of being interviewed. These young women shared traditional views of dating and defined it as an early romantic interaction that you would expect to evolve into a formal committed relationship. Interestingly, all of these young women had been forced

to do sexual things without their consent, which may indicate that recognising forced sexual activity might be more obvious than other means of abuse, or that recognising forced sexual pressure might help to recognise other types of abuse. Many of the young women who said they inherently recognised the abuse saw a psychologist for various reasons (not necessarily for their dating relationship), therefore it might be that being open to seeking help might have had an influence on a young woman's insight into her romantic relationship. Perhaps there was an element of psychotherapy that was subconsciously empowering these young women to recognise the abuse and violence.

However, despite some of the subtle similarities amongst these young women, they were no different to the rest of the sample in how they responded. The young women were often left feeling confused about whether or not they should put up with the abuse and whether this was just a normal part of being in a relationship. One young woman who even identified herself as a passionate feminist was unable to stop her sexual partner from having sex with her but felt empowered to tell him to leave her house once the sexual experience had ended. These young women, like the others, were afraid to be assertive in case it came across as 'rude' and being assertive was seen to be inappropriate.

Summary of recognising dating violence

The Australian young women interviewed in this study struggled to understand and recognise dating violence. Many of the young women described struggling to make sense of the abuse and violence and blamed it on their own inexperience and lack of education on abuse and violence. The young women rarely blamed their male partners for the abuse and violence and instead blamed external hardships and his mental illness. Recognition was made more challenging when the young women's experiences were not validated by significant others, who normalised and minimised abusive behaviours. Sometimes the young women inherently recognised abuse and violence whilst at other times the dating violence was called by someone else. While physical violence was usually seen as being clearly unacceptable, other forms of abuse and violence were often mistaken for love and affection and thus excused or normalised. Lack of awareness about other forms of dating violence in their own relationships, e.g. psychological and emotional abuse made it difficult to recognise the abuse and violence when it did occur. The young male partners were often cared for by the young women and perpetration of abuse was forgiven due to their hardships. Recognising the violence triggered feelings of shame in some of the young women. Some of the young women also felt that they had no control over the abuse or the abuser and therefore felt trapped when the abuse was

happening. The next section continues this discussion by focusing on what happens next; how the young women made decisions to stay in or leave their abusive relationships.

How do young women's dating violence relationships end?

Leaving an abusive relationship was challenging for the Australian young women who took part in this study. The young women struggled to recognise the dating violence and often took the blame for the abuse when they did recognise it. The young women perceived their difficulty in experiencing abuse being due to lack of experience with relationships and because abusive behaviours were often normalised and minimised. Further, recognition was hampered by lack of validation from society and near and dear ones. Some young women were part of supportive friendship groups who helped to call out the abuse. This poor understanding of abuse and the struggle to recognise it rendered leaving abusive relationships tricky. All of the young women who were interviewed spoke about their journeys through each relationship they had had including how the relationships ended. Almost all of the young women described difficulty leaving their abusive relationships despite recognising that the relationship was not necessarily a healthy one. The young women's responses to the abuse were either passive or active. A passive response was defined as staying in the relationship and possibly waiting for the male partner to break up. An active response was defined as the young woman taking action, such as deciding to leave the abusive relationship. It is important to note that exiting a relationship did not necessarily mean that there was no further communication between the young woman and young man; the couple may continue to remain friends or acquaintances following separation. It is acknowledged that there is a chance that a couple could recommence a romantic relationship, but this was not mentioned by the participants in this study. The following sections discuss the young women's decisions to stay in or leave their abusive romantic relationships.

The passive response

You just eat chocolate, have a drink and forget about it.

(Meera, 25, Melbourne)

Meera's quote sums up how many of the young women in this study responded to dating violence within their relationships. Like Meera, many of the young women in this study would sweep their experiences of dating violence under the carpet and carry on with the relationship.

Many of them recognised and acknowledged the dating violence but chose not to act against the violence for several reasons including: to avoid conflict; hope of the relationship improving; feeling isolated from others; feeling attached to the partner; and needing to look after the male partner. In the passive journey the relationship would end if the young man ended it. In this section I discuss this in further detail.

Avoiding conflict

From the beginning of the dating process the young women described being preoccupied with avoiding conflict. The young women would agree to go on a date, agree to be a male partner's girlfriend, or agree to perform sexual activities, in order to serve her romantic partner and fulfil his desires and needs, while putting her own preferences aside. Agreeing with the young man's opinions and his suggestions on what to do and where the relationship should go, continued even when the young women recognised that they were in an abusive relationship. Where there was conflict between what a young woman said or did, and what the young man desired, the onus was on the young woman to manage the conflict and restore a sense of calm. The conflict was usually a challenge for the young woman to manage due to the overarching male control over the relationship that would sometimes result in more overt abuse and violence towards the young women. Hence the Australian young women in abusive relationships would aim to avoid conflict in as many situations as possible in order to avoid experiencing abuse and violence from the male partner. Some of the young women described their personalities as being 'conflict avoidant' so they usually had experience of managing conflict in a non-assertive way and struggled to respond appropriately to the abuse.

Rosalie described her intrinsic need to care about her behaviour and manners when it involved other people. For her, being assertive felt 'rude'. She talked about how she successfully 'joked' her way out of performing sexual activities that she felt uncomfortable with, because she was unable to address it directly. As the dating violence continued she was unable to leave her abusive relationship due to fear of 'being rude'. She spoke about recognising the dating violence and desired to end the relationship. But instead of simply ending the relationship, she waited for her boyfriend to end the relationship. For Rosalie, not appearing rude was more important than caring about her own welfare, therefore she endured the dating violence. She was a mature minor and still a high school student and yet had already been conditioned to put others before herself and this behaviour was reinforced in her romantic relationships.

I don't know, I've got this very strong sense of what's rude and what's not and I've always found saying "no" being rude; walking away being rude, being assertive at all being rude.

(Rosalie, 17, Melbourne)

Angela spoke about how she recognised the violence 'immediately' but felt unable to leave the relationship because she too placed too much importance on other people's feelings. She also seemed to take the blame for the abuse, and perceived herself to 'let them get away with it', which she saw as the main problem. Angela's perspective suggests that she too seemed to have been conditioned to care for other people and put others' feelings before her own. Perhaps she perceived herself as being less powerful and even subservient, particularly in the romantic relationship she talked about, where her boyfriend was about nine years older than herself.

Immediately. It didn't take long, it's just I also like to be aware of other people's feelings I think so I try to be sympathetic or understanding so I give them too much, I let them get away with it too much. I think that was the problem.

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

Tori spoke about a severely violent dating relationship where her life was potentially in danger on a few occasions. Despite being held at gun point, she did not call the police because she did not want to see her boyfriend suffer the consequences of being arrested. She therefore chose instead to remain in the violent relationship to avoid escalating the conflict even further, and attempted to continue pacifying her boyfriend. Tori did not seem to respond any differently to Rosalie or Angela despite the violence in her relationship being at the most severe end.

There were just so many times where I could have called the cops on him and just had him done but I don't like to hurt people. I don't like to make people upset. I don't want to see anyone worse off because of me. Even though I was mad, I didn't want to do that to him.

(Tori, 22, Gold Coast)

Ayu described her personality as someone who generally disliked and avoided any form of conflict or disappointing people. This flowed into her romantic relationships where she avoided any behaviour that might have disappointed her partner. Ayu was of South-East Asian descent

and her perception of dating violence and her response to it were no different to other Australian young women of varying ethnic backgrounds.

I'm also the type of person that really dislikes being in a fight or arguing. So I think that was one of the reasons why I was afraid to disappoint my ex, because I didn't want to lead it into a fight or any argument. It's a situation that I'm not comfortable in, that I really don't want to be in.

(Ayu, 20, Melbourne)

The young women learned very early on to avoid conflict and adopt the passive role within heterosexual romantic relationships. Avoiding conflict and not being 'rude' was prioritised over the young women's own safety and well-being, resulting in opting to 'keep the peace' and remain in an abusive relationship.

Hope of relationship improving

The young women experiencing violence would sometimes recognise the violence yet hope that the relationship would improve with time. Briony described being in a relationship where her boyfriend was emotionally manipulative, and she was forced into doing sexual things without her consent. However, she did not let go of the initial honeymoon period they had at the beginning of their relationship and this helped her to hang on to the belief that their relationship was actually loving and supportive. Briony held onto the hope that the relationship would return to a stage similar to what it was at the beginning. Later in the narrative she discussed this further, explaining that she had been overseas in France in a temporary lesbian relationship which she told him about when she returned. She then felt like she was the one who had 'come back to him saying, please can you give me another chance' and therefore perceived him to have the right to power in the relationship.

I kind of felt like I would just endure it and then eventually we would get back to that sweet spot and we could just go on from there.

(Briony, 24, Melbourne)

Sandra experienced regular emotional abuse from her boyfriend and felt the need to talk to her friends about it. However, despite talking to her friend and knowing she would be better off if she separated from her boyfriend, she continued to justify his behaviour as being due to stress,

in the hope that things would improve with time. She hoped that once the stress of final school exams had passed, that they would be able to live happily ever after.

That's when I talked to my friend but if I could I try to avoid it. Just because in my head I'm still hoping that he'll change. Maybe it's just the VCE that's putting his head, you know... for so long I was hoping that maybe after VCE things would work out, things would be official, for real and stuff like that.

(Sandra, 20, Melbourne)

Nikita was in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend who had a mental illness. She did not want to leave the relationship because she hoped that things would improve and that he would change. She reflected during the interview that perhaps this was an unrealistic expectation and that change needed to come from within him.

Actually, I don't know if I felt that I needed to leave it. I felt that I wanted things to change and I felt that it wasn't right but we're I really – I didn't want to have to think about not having him. I wanted him to change. I think back to what you said in the beginning, how has your understanding of relationships and stuff changed, I think I've definitely realised that you can't go into a relationship in the hope that someone will change because they might change, but that's a bonus. You have to be willing to deal with them as they are, if they never change, because they could well never change unless their desire is really from them to change.

(Nikita, 21, Melbourne)

The young women were filled with hope that they could change the situation or change the young man and one day live without dating violence. The young women's minimisation and normalisation of dating violence reinforced the positives of the relationship. Nikita, however, described how 'you have to be willing to deal with them as they are' because there was little hope that the young men would actually change.

Isolated from family and friends

A romantic partner often filled the void for young women who felt vulnerable and lonely. Some of the young women moved away from home to attain higher education elsewhere. This normally meant being uprooted from their family and close friends. Living in a new environment usually created a void where the young women would crave companionship;

therefore, a romantic partner was perceived by the young women to fill this gap. Because a young woman's romantic partner would often be her only or main source of emotional support and friendship, experiencing dating violence in the relationship was often ignored, excused and tolerated. Young women who were in abusive romantic relationships at the time of being interviewed would talk about the dating violence but then quickly minimise it by focusing on the supportive and loving aspects of the relationship.

Anne was one such young woman who moved from overseas to Australia for postgraduate education. She left her family and childhood friends behind in her home country. Once she began dating her boyfriend she became dependent on him for friendship and emotional support. Her friends became secondary as the relationship progressed and Anne described how this further increased her dependence on her romantic partner and the thought of letting go of him brought fears of isolation. Her boyfriend intensified this fear by emphasising Anne's lack of support outside the relationship, thus attempting to reduce the likelihood of her leaving.

I was very lonely and separated from my family so he was one of the limited sources of emotional support that I had. So at the time he made me feel like he was the only one that I had. So, before I decided to break up with him I was very scared...Then he reminded me that "now you're with me. If you leave me, you will be all by yourself. If we break up, you will feel lonely".

(Anne, 24, Melbourne)

Gen was another young woman who was in a relationship with a young man who emotionally and verbally abused her. While she eventually recognised that she was not in a healthy romantic relationship, after discussion with some friends, she talked about needing the security of being in a relationship as opposed to not being in one. In addition to the security factor Gen also shared common friends with her partner, therefore leaving him would have meant also leaving their combined social network, resulting in isolation. Having recently moved away from her usual family and friends in Sydney, Gen felt the need for a social network and therefore tolerated the abusive relationship for this purpose.

It was very soon after I moved to Melbourne and I think that after – I don't know. When you're new somewhere that you want people and I think lack of a better opportunity probably... I don't know. If there's someone you can date, versus someone you – no one

you're dating, then that seemed like a better... I guess it's just to do things with other people. I don't know. That's important. I need social interaction.

(Gen, 19, Melbourne)

Ashley was a high school student and lived with her family in Melbourne. While she was not physically separated from the family, she had a distant emotional relationship with them due to what she described as dysfunctional family dynamics. So, Ashley relied on her boyfriend's family for emotional support and often stayed at her boyfriend's house overnight because she felt safer with her boyfriend's family than her own. Thus, she perceived her tolerance to the dating violence as being a better situation than losing the only emotional support she had in Melbourne.

There's a lot going on in my household and I stay there a lot as well, with their family. Their family is absolutely lovely and that has kind of been my little safe place so it means losing that as well.

(Ashley, 17, Melbourne)

The yearning for social closeness and filling the void of close family and friends being away kept many of the young women in their abusive romantic relationships. Some of the young women described moving interstate or abroad, leaving them to depend on their partners for social and emotional connection. Friends that the young woman had in the new environment were usually friends she shared with her boyfriend so he would be the anchor point for any social connection. Therefore, loss of the boyfriend would likely result in complete social isolation.

Attached to partner/being in love

Feeling attached to or being in love with the male partner often got in the way of leaving the abusive relationship. The young women described how they would become attached to the good things about the partner and it appeared from the narratives that being in love with the partner almost became a part of the young women's identities, thus rendering it very difficult to separate themselves from their partners' identities.

Daisy described her frustration of knowing that the relationship was not right for her, while at the same time experiencing a strong sense of attachment. Like some of the other women she

hated *herself* for putting up with the abuse but avoided blaming the young man for perpetrating the abuse.

It's like they've got this hold over you. You have no idea how it happened. You have no idea why you can't let go and you hate yourself for it.

(Daisy, 19, Melbourne)

Amber was in a dating relationship in which she experienced significant abuse and violence. She described episodes of breaking up and getting back together with her boyfriend, with her motivation to stay in the relationship being her love for him. She reinforced that *she* was stupid and young and avoided placing any blame on the boyfriend.

And then he'd come back and be like oh, I promise I won't ever do it again, I promise I've changed and then I'd be like okay and then – because I really, really like wanted – I don't know, I was just stupid. I was young and stupid. I thought I was in love with him.

(Amber, 25, rural Queensland)

Apinya was in a long term committed relationship at the time of the interview, where she had moved in with her boyfriend. She had recognised the abuse and even had thoughts of leaving, however she felt very attached to him, happy when he was happy and lacked the confidence to leave him and start a life on her own.

So I became really attached. But that was real. He is still like that, even until now when he's happy. He's really cute, he's really taking care of me really, really well. He says things really sweet to me. And after two years I'm really sure that this is real. That happens only when he is really happy...

... and when I step back I feel uncomfortable and under confident to do something alone.

(Apinya, 25, Melbourne)

The young women described being in love with their male partners and leaving was difficult due to feeling attached. The attachment and shared identity made it difficult for the young women to carve identities of their own and the thought of separation left the young women feeling under-confident and afraid of being alone.

Looking after the male: 'He needs me'

Fulfilling the male partner's needs was a common concern for the young women in this study. The young women perceived 'protecting' the partner and his well-being as being more important than protecting and looking after their own physical and mental health. In several cases, the young women spoke about their abusive male partners suffering from mental or physical illness, which the young women felt that they had to take responsibility for. This natural adoption of the caring role illustrates the continuation of the gendered role in relationships where the female partner feels obligated to serve and care for the male partner.

Rosalie was only a high school student, but she had already adopted the belief that she needed to care for her boyfriend. While she was struggling to deal with his abusive behaviours, she prioritised her carer role instead. She described taking responsibility for her boyfriend's mental well-being and sought the help of a counsellor to learn how best to help him.

He's got some mental health issues. So I've brought that up with them [psychologist] and tried to get their opinion on how I can help him.

(Rosalie, 17, Melbourne)

Apinya was in a long-term abusive relationship with her boyfriend, who was officially a 'dependent' on her visa for residency in Australia. She discussed how the consequences of her breaking up with him would have been potentially catastrophic for him as he would have lost his right to live in Australia. She then elaborated how she did not want to be responsible for ruining his life. She failed to factor in her own well-being while taking his visa status into account and chose instead to put up with the abuse.

I feel sorry for him...He will get into trouble. Like I don't know but I guess in this country if you do that kind of stuff like if you hit somebody you will get into trouble or ... I dunno. And also he's from overseas so he might have problems with his visa and stuff and I don't want to mess somebody's life by doing that.

(Apinya, 25, Melbourne)

Jess empathised with her boyfriend's mental illness because she too had suffered from a mental illness in the past and did not want him to have to deal with it by himself. She prioritised supporting her boyfriend's health over her own welfare. For Jess, removing herself from the dating violence was not a priority.

I kind of felt like I had to support him because I've previously had depression so I didn't want to just go and you know, abandon him.

(Jess, 25, Sydney)

Angela recognised that she was undergoing emotional turbulence because of the volatile nature of her boyfriend's mood, compounded by her dysfunctional and complicated home situation. However, her narrative was centred on the fact that she was already conditioned to being a carer at home, for two family members, and struggled to come out of that carer role when in intimate relationships. She discussed how she was not able to leave her boyfriend because of the risk of him hurting himself, therefore she placed his well-being above her own. She described having thought many times about leaving, even for a short period of time during his volatile episodes, but Angela was too afraid of creating conflict and being 'insensitive' to the situation and therefore she chose instead to adopt the caring role, which she felt more comfortable with. However, she admits that she should have been more concerned for her own safety during times when he became violent.

I don't really know if I trust him being on his own in those cases, like I think if I really did just leave I think he would hurt himself which he actually has once. So I guess I try to not ...impartial isn't the right word, just try to keep calm and grounded though I also can't really... that emotional turbulence is also not really um fun for me. I just feel like I'm being made responsible for too much of his actions or responsible for his safety. And I don't like that. Even though I should be more concerned about my own safety honestly in situations like that when he's throwing things.

(Angela, 23, Melbourne)

The young women in this study perceived themselves to be conditioned to care for and serve their male partners. The young women took responsibility for the young men's well-being and felt obliged to go out of their way to be there for the young men during times of difficulty, while compromising their own safety and well-being.

The young man needs to end the relationship

A striking feature of the interview content about these dating violence relationships was the control the young men had over the course of the relationships. This is not a surprise given that the young men tend to take control of dating relationships from the early stages. Many of the young women who found themselves in situations of dating violence would talk about how

they stayed in their abusive relationships because of the reasons discussed previously and despite knowing that they would have been better off without the relationship.

Daisy talked about her abusive relationship with her long-term boyfriend. While she knew that there were many warning ‘sirens’ in the relationship she spoke about how she was in love with him and did not want to end the relationship. In the end, her boyfriend ended the relationship on his terms, thus reinforcing the strong male control over the course of the romantic relationship.

Daisy: Then when we ended, it was he who ended it, which was – I think that's the only way it could have ended, because if I had – I couldn't have done it. Yeah.

Researcher: How did he end it?

Daisy: Well, he did the whole – he would do this thing where he would always – like, he – if he wanted to do something, he would always make it like he was doing it for my personal benefit. So when we ended, he was, like, “you're going” – I mean, “you're starting uni, I don't want to hold you back from experiences” and blah, blah, blah. Whereas it was actually like he – I don't know. I guess he just wasn't happy. I mean, I wasn't happy, but he ended it.

(Daisy, 19, Melbourne)

Nikita, one of the young women experiencing significant dating violence from her boyfriend, also spoke about how she was unable to leave the relationship. She recognised the dating violence when her good friend and her tutors advised her that she was in a toxic relationship and this was reinforced by her psychologist. However she talked about how she was very attracted to her boyfriend and that they got along very well. Therefore she was unable to separate from him despite knowing that she did not want to be in the relationship. Ultimately, her boyfriend ended the relationship on his own terms, with little explanation, leaving Nikita feeling conflicted about the separation.

Nikita: ...he ended things. It was like I had been saying for a long time, this isn't right, and this isn't good, and that kind of thing, and we either fix this or this isn't working. But then he was the one who made the decision. I don't

know whether he felt that he was helping me by doing that or whether he felt that he needed the break as well. I mean it's probably both.

Researcher: How did you deal with that?

Nikita: I was pretty angry and upset obviously. I don't know, it was probably a long process. Yeah I was angry and upset and I – my friends helped a lot and my sister as well. Then I guess eventually – I mean even my teachers helped. I guess it got to the point then when it was actually a relief and I felt like a weight had been taken off my shoulders. But that would be up and down. Sometimes I'd be like, this is actually a good thing and then other times I would miss him or whatever.

(Nikita, 21, Melbourne)

The young women's dependence on the boyfriend to end the relationship only continued their dependence on the young men from the commencement of the relationship. The young men took charge from the beginning and adopted the more active role in the relationship and hence would also find it naturally easier and consistent with their role to end the relationship compared to the young women.

Active response

An active response in this study, was defined as the young woman initiating a specific type of behaviour that led to the end of the dating violence relationship. Very few of the young women in this study described instances of leaving their dating violence relationships simply because they had had enough of the violence. There were three possible trigger points that led to the end of the dating violence relationship. One trigger point was the young man's infidelity; when the young woman became aware of the young man cheating on her she would feel justified in ending the abusive relationship. The second trigger was the young woman cheating on the young man and then waiting for him to end the relationship. The final trigger was physical separation; the young man or young woman moving away, thus forcing the couple to end the relationship. It is acknowledged that seeking help for an abusive relationship is also a valid and appropriate response to dating violence, which many of the young women were doing; however, for the purpose of this thesis, help-seeking was not the focus.

Trigger to leave

Dating violence was almost never the reason that a young woman would leave her romantic relationship. The young women I interviewed discussed how they sometimes desired to leave the relationship but were unable to due to the reasons discussed in the previous sections; i.e. avoiding conflict, hope of the relationship improving, social isolation, attachment to the partner and feeling obligated to look after the partner. When asked how they finally left their abusive relationships, most of the young women discussed the need for a crisis to take place that gave them more ‘valid’ reasons to leave. Most of the young women did not think that the dating violence itself was a valid enough reason to separate from their partners. This was exacerbated by significant others who failed to validate the young women’s experiences of dating violence. A crisis or trigger would usually involve the male partner cheating on the young woman, the young woman cheating on her male partner, or the young woman or her partner moving away from each other. It must be noted that either the young man or young woman moving way did not always trigger a young woman to leave; sometimes the young man would leave and sometimes the couple would mutually break up. In very few instances the couple would try a long-distance relationship. These long-distance relationships would end in the same ways that the face-to-face relationships ended too. Not many of the young women in this study experienced long-distance relationships.

One of the young women, Molly, was in a dating relationship where she described her male partner as being dominating and controlling and she was forced to do sexual things against her consent. She was quite fearful of him and although she recognised the abuse early in the relationship, she was afraid to do anything about it and did not think that she could leave without a ‘good’ reason. Molly described herself as a strong and decisive young woman who had a history of breaking up without hesitation once she did decide to leave. Molly discussed how she recognised dating violence in one relationship and was able to break up straight away without any triggers, whereas in another relationship she could not. An excerpt from the interview with Molly, details how most of the young women felt about leaving their abusive relationships. It is evident from Molly’s quote that perhaps her intolerance for infidelity was validated by society’s intolerance for infidelity. This may imply that society is perhaps more tolerant of dating violence, hence influencing Molly’s tolerance of her abusive dating relationship.

Researcher: What helped you to actually cut the tie in the end?

Molly: Probably just the fact that I knew and well that – that he cheated on me and that I wasn't going to put up with that. I wasn't going to have a boyfriend who cheated. The whole town knew about it. So yeah I didn't want to be one of those girls who stays with the boyfriend who is constantly cheating on her.

(Molly, 18, rural Victoria)

Anne was in a difficult relationship with her boyfriend of four years, who was controlling and manipulative. However due to his control over her life and her fear of being alone, she could not break up with him. He moved overseas and they continued their relationship over long distance until she found photographs on social media to prove that he was cheating on her. For Anne, the infidelity was the more legitimate reason to break up with her boyfriend as opposed to the abuse, which she felt she had to put up with.

Hmm... well it's actually after I discovered the girl...

(Anne, 24, Melbourne)

Sandra was in a difficult high school relationship with a boyfriend who she became emotionally attached to and struggled to break up with despite being encouraged by friends to break up. Eventually the trigger to help her break up was getting close to her boyfriend's best friend, who she ended up dating. She describes how dating his best friend helped to create a barrier that she would not cross to go back to her boyfriend and this would also keep the boyfriend away from coming back to her.

Maybe it's because part of me thought that if things happened with Keith [boyfriend's best friend] then that would definitely be something that's going to stop me from ever going back to Henry [boyfriend]. Because once you cross that line with the best friend; that was like a strategy to help myself, I guess from going back.

(Sandra, 20, Melbourne)

Lauren was in an emotionally abusive relationship with her boyfriend who initially coerced her into a romantic relationship. She put up with the relationship as she '*hadn't really had to break up with anyone before so I was a bit not sure how to do it nicely and that I think is what took me so long*'. When her boyfriend secured a place at a prestigious university overseas, she felt

that this was a valid reason to break up and went ahead with separating from her boyfriend with support from her friends.

Because he'd got into Oxford and he was going to go there. He hadn't really spoken to me about it at all in the lead up to getting that. He hadn't really talked about – I was if you're thinking this is going to go on further than when you leave you need to talk about where this is – if you do get in and it never came up. I brought it up and he'd brush it off. I felt a bit led on in a way in that sense. I'm not sticking around until August just so that you can leave; I'm not doing that for you. That's what made me go I want to get out of this now before it just becomes a bit of fun for him before he leaves for several years.

(Lauren, 21, Melbourne)

Michelle described being in an emotionally abusive and controlling relationship. She wanted to end the relationship but perceived the dating violence to be a 'weak' reason to break up. Further, she was keen to not take the responsibility of breaking up and so made the decision to create a crisis to encourage him to leave her. Thus, when her boyfriend travelled interstate for a holiday, she became romantically involved with other young men and then informed her boyfriend upon his return.

I actually started seeing some other people and I told him, I said to him, "I've cheated on you". That was like, for me, I was trying to make him leave me. I said "I've cheated on you. I don't want to be in this relationship anymore, you treat me like crap, you put me down, you make me feel small, you try and control my life, it's over."

(Michelle, 21, Melbourne)

Unfortunately for the young women, leaving the young men did not necessarily mean that the responsibility left them. Many of the young women continued to offer emotional support to the young men post break up, as they continued to worry for their well-being. Angela broke up with her emotionally manipulative and aggressive boyfriend following his move overseas and her friends and family advised her to make a 'clean cut and not have anything to do with him'. However, Angela perceived this to be inappropriate advice, because she perceived herself to have an ongoing duty of care towards her ex-boyfriend because she could not 'trust him' to look after himself and not do something 'reckless'. She described him having a history of deliberate and accidental self-harm particularly during times of emotional upheaval.

Researcher: How did you feel about that advice?

Angela: It just felt wrong, like it would make things a lot worse.

Researcher: In what way do you think it might make things worse?

Angela: Like he would react a lot, a lot more badly and that I'm not sure, I think he would just become a bit, I'd be more worried for his safety really that's all.

From these interviews, it is evident that most of the young women who took the initiative to end their abusive relationship required a trigger to leave. Triggers or crisis points included the male partner cheating on the young woman, the young woman cheating on her male partner or one of them moving away. The young women perceived dating violence to be a 'weak' reason to break up and felt the need for a socially acceptable reason to break up, such as infidelity or moving away from each other. Further the young women continued to provide some form of virtual emotional support, usually via social media, in case the young men were not coping emotionally following the separation. This duty of care towards the young men and commitment to protect them was overwhelming for the young women in this study. In this limited sample, there was no obvious participant characteristic that made a young woman more likely to require a trigger or crisis to break up. The young women who used a trigger to break up came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, educational backgrounds and ages. Neither recognition of the dating violence nor severity of the dating violence impacted on the young women leaving. As most of the young women had been in multiple relationships, sometimes multiple dating violence relationships, some of the young women responded passively in some relationships and actively in other relationships.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings from this study on the Australian young women's perceptions of dating violence. The young women who were interviewed perceived violence to be a 'side effect' of an otherwise healthy and loving romantic relationship. The young women rarely perceived the dating violence to be the fault of the male partner, often preferring to blame external factors or even themselves. Many of the young women spoke about their male partners suffering from mental illness or going through some form of hardship and used these reasons to make sense of the abuse. The young women were determined to protect their male partners' reputations and described them as troubled young men who were otherwise good young men.

They would also share the blame for the dating violence and see it as an act that they could have prevented themselves, therefore sharing responsibility for the abuse and taking the responsibility away from the young men. Unfortunately, minimising and normalising of the young men's dating violence behaviours by the young women was only reinforced by significant others who also normalised the dating violence and advised the young women to look at the greater good. Some of the young women were lucky in that they were able to inherently recognise the dating violence while some others recognised the dating violence through it being called by someone else.

The overarching finding from this chapter is that from an Australian young woman's perspective, romantic relationships end for reasons other than dating violence. The young women spoke about three different outcomes of romantic relationships: the young woman stays; the young man leaves; or the young woman leaves. The young man's control was prominent throughout the dating violence relationship until the very end while the young women maintained their constant role of providing emotional support to the young men until the very end. When the young woman stays, the relationship might continue as it is. She may want it to end but choose to do nothing about it in order to maintain the 'peace' and not 'rock the boat', sometimes hoping that the male partner will end the relationship. However, the young women were filled with hope that the relationship would improve and feared social isolation if the relationship ended. The young women were also filled with a sense of obligation towards their boyfriends and felt the need to look after them and protect them during times of adversity. When the male partner ends the relationship, it is usually on his terms and because of his desire to end it. Regardless of whether the young woman wants the relationship to end, she will usually go along with it or be left with no choice. In situations where the young woman exited a romantic relationship, she did so following a trigger or crisis. Sometimes the crisis is the young man's infidelity which then gives the young woman a good reason to leave an abusive relationship. The crisis is sometimes even created by the young woman herself, so that there is a 'valid' reason to leave the relationship. Dating violence was very rarely cited as a reason to leave a romantic relationship, because factors keeping the young woman in the relationship were given more weighting.

The next chapter, the thesis discussion, presents a summary and synthesis of the Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. The discussion continues with examination of the impact of social scripts on young women's understanding and recognition of dating violence and leads into the formation of an exit model.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion and Conclusion

The not so happy fairy tale

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Melissa who lived with her mother, father and younger sister in Sydney. She dreamed of growing into a beautiful young woman who would be swept off her feet by a handsome young man. Melissa grew up to be a clever young woman who completed secondary school with good grades. At the end of the summer holidays she moved interstate to commence a Bachelor's degree in science at a prominent metropolitan university.

In class at the university, she met a handsome young man called Dan. They got along very well from their very first conversation and seemed to have a lot of interests in common. They spent a lot of time sending each other messages on their mobile phones when they were not together at the university campus. Then one day, Dan asked her out for a coffee which Melissa very happily accepted. Following this first date, they went out for drinks, and then dinner and the movies. They spent a lot of time together during classes, between classes, going out together and sending each other instant messages and snapchats when they were not together. It had been a few weeks that Melissa and Dan had been spending lots of time together and they were becoming closer to each other. However, before Melissa had had the chance to think about it, Dan had started telling everyone that they were together, as girlfriend and boyfriend. *Oh, am I his girlfriend?* Melissa thought, feeling slightly confused. It seemed so romantic though that he would surprise her with the news that they were officially together! After all, *we do seem and behave like a couple*, Melissa reassured herself.

Dan was a dream boyfriend who bought Melissa flowers and paid for her meals. He would walk her to class, walk her home and became quite jealous if Melissa were to talk to other young men. He did not like it if she was friendly with other young men on campus. Because Melissa spent so much time with Dan, she did not make many new friends on campus but that was OK with her because Dan loved her so much. She was new to Melbourne and did not know many people. She felt incredibly grateful to have him in her life. He was her friend and a strong source of support, especially during exam time, when there was no family around. Her family was back in Sydney and she did not get to talk to them much. The few friends that she had, told Melissa how lucky she was to have such a caring and good-looking boyfriend who looked after her so well.

And in turn she would care for Dan. He had a difficult relationship with his family and he was taking antidepressants for his anxiety. He would always tell Melissa that he could never live without her and that she must never leave him no matter what happened. If Melissa wanted to go out for the night with her female friends Dan would become very anxious because he was afraid that he would miss her while she was away, and he felt as if she needed her to be with him all the time. Sometimes he would threaten to jump out of the apartment window if she left him. Once or twice, he has hit her for not staying home to look after him. So, while Melissa would feel upset and disappointed that this would happen every single time she attempted to go out, she would cancel her own social plans. She needed to look after Dan because he was going through so much and who else did he have for support? *Love was more important than anything else*, she kept telling herself. After all, her parents had been childhood sweethearts and they toughed it out and have now been together for decades. Dan always apologised profusely after their fights so he must truly love her; after all everyone said they were the perfect couple, so they must live happily ever after...

Then one day, when Melissa had finished her exam early, she decided to pay Dan a surprise visit. She found him at home with another young woman who she had never seen before! *Who was she?* Melissa's thoughts were racing. She felt like she was living in a nightmare as her dreams were suddenly shattered. Dan was meant to love her and be with her forever – so what was he doing with this other young woman? He apologised but he wasn't genuinely sorry. She had thought all this while that they would remain in love, get married and live happily ever after. Another young woman was never meant to be part of the tale. Melissa left his house and Dan began a relationship with the other young woman. That was the end of Melissa's fairy tale with Dan.

Introduction

The story introducing this discussion chapter was presented at my completion seminar and conferences where the research findings were presented. The story illustrates the findings from analysis of the interviews with the young women who generously shared stories of their journeys through tumultuous romantic relationships. The story highlights some of the subtle, gendered aspects of dating, where the young man makes decisions about the relationship and pursues the young woman without first discussing it with her. The young woman feels obliged to follow his lead and keep up with the young man's decisions, all in the name of love.

The story also illustrates the scripted nature of dating as described by the young women in this study; the scripted way in which dating progresses from an initial set of romantic interactions and then evolving into a steady situation where the young woman and young man spend more time with each other (Figure 6, chapter 4, page 133 and Figure 7, chapter 4, page 134). The young woman and young man in the steady phase of dating spend most of their spare time with each other, with the young woman taking on the caring role by looking after the young man and giving in to his demands. This story illustrates how the young man's control over the young woman begins early, but insidiously, in the relationship. But even overt dating violence will keep the young woman in the dating violence relationship because love and the associated responsibilities are so important to her. The dating violence relationship continues until the young man is no longer interested in the relationship and he then cheats on the young woman. Infidelity, or cheating, was usually perceived by the young women as being the most acceptable and valid reason to leave a dating violence relationship and thus the story ends here.

This thesis has presented how a sample of thirty-five young women from across Australia who had experienced dating violence in their own relationships, perceived dating and dating violence, and how they made decisions about leaving their abusive relationships. The thesis research questions were:

1. How do Australian young women perceive dating and other romantic relationships?
2. How do Australian young women recognise and respond to their dating violence relationships?

The thesis started with introducing the rationale for conducting this dating violence study and this was followed by a critical narrative literature review. The review focused on existing Australian and international qualitative studies examining young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence and theoretical models describing how young women and adult women exit abusive relationships. This was followed by the research design chapter which outlined the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and feminism and how these perspectives informed the narrative approach and the methods that were used to undertake this qualitative research project. Social script theory was introduced as a framework that was then applied across the data with a feminist lens, to interpret the young women's narratives. The two chapters which followed, presented the findings resulting from the thematic analysis and application of social script theory with a feminist lens on the research interviews. The current

chapter summarises and synthesises the findings from this qualitative study and concludes with the implications of the findings from this thesis for policy, the health sector and future research.

The Australian young women who were interviewed shared many stories from their personal lives, with a focus on their romantic relationships and the dating violence they experienced. The findings revealed an overwhelmingly gendered perspective of romantic interactions, particularly the dating relationship. The young women perceived the well-being of the male in the relationship to be more important than themselves and therefore put their partners first before attending to their own safety and well-being. The process of putting the male partner's feelings above their own, or placing more emphasis on the male partner's needs, often began before the relationship had even commenced. Some of the young women described becoming involved in a romantic relationship because a young man wanted it, regardless of their own desire to start the relationship. The theme of the young woman giving in to the young man's desires and requests regardless of her own comfort levels continued during the relationship and sometimes even after a relationship ended. The young women experienced a strong obligation to be a source of support for the young men and to care for the young men through adversity.

The young women's perceptions of romantic relationships were consistent with gendered social and sexual scripts that have been described previously. Several studies overseas have described dating scripts, particularly first date scripts, and established that heterosexual romantic interactions are actively male driven with passive following by the female partner (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Eaton et al., 2016; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008; Rose & Frieze, 1989). A recent mixed-methods Australian study commissioned by Our Watch also confirmed that roles between young men and young women were gendered, particularly with males being perceived as having greater sexual desires and young women adopting the more passive roles of gatekeepers for sexual activity (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). The first date in particular, has been described as being so 'scripted' that the male and the female individual are able to predict how the other will behave and respond within the first date situation; this phenomenon is gendered and the script has remained unchanged for several years, as is evident from these previous overseas studies of first date scripts (Eaton & Rose, 2012; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008; Rose & Frieze, 1989). The young women who were interviewed as part of this study appeared to conform to these gendered dating scripts and described what they (and to an extent, the male partner) expected from romantic situations and the follow up that was expected after a first date.

The gendered scripts that were established within the first dates appeared to set the relationship up for unequal power dynamics. Due to gendered social scripts dictating that young men would have more control within romantic relationships and young women have a more passive and gatekeeping role, it was challenging for the young women to recognise when the young men's control insidiously escalated. When abuse and violence was experienced by the young women within their romantic relationships, the young women continued to place the male partner's well-being above their own, thus reinforcing and exacerbating the unequal power dynamics and the belief that young women must serve young men. This therefore influenced the way that the young women interpreted dating violence in their relationships and therefore how they responded to the dating violence. The next section will focus on the Australian young women's perceptions of dating and other romantic relationships.

Dating and other romantic relationships

Australian young women were recruited into this project if they screened positive for dating violence. Dating violence was screened for via a questionnaire designed by myself for the purpose of this study, with input from my supervisors, and was based on several screening questionnaires that have been used previously to screen for domestic and dating violence (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2012; Barter et al., 2009; Borrajo et al., 2015; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; Hegarty et al., 2005). Young women who screened positive for any one type of dating violence (for example psychological or physical abuse) were invited to take part in the study.

The thirty-five young women, all with a background of having experienced dating violence, spoke about experiencing several different types of romantic relationships. Interestingly, the young women in this study frequently used the term 'dating', despite speculation by researchers overseas that the term was becoming somewhat outdated (Brown et al., 2007). Some romantic relationships were more casual and transient, while others were more formal and committed. Some casual relationships had the potential to develop into committed, long-term dating relationships, but most were limited to a short duration. The young women did not describe experiences of long term relationships evolving into short term or casual relationships. Casual romantic relationships that the young women had experienced, included hooking up, seeing someone, friends with benefits, having a fling and sometimes, dating. The casual relationships were complex because there were so many definitions, but the main concept of the casual relationship was its short duration and knowing that there was little or no prospect of a long-

term relationship. Casual relationships were scripted in the centrality of sexual activity in the interaction (Bogle, 2008; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015) and self-limiting nature of the interaction. Hooking up was described to involve sexual experimentation, often at a party setting where intercourse usually occurs early and at the end of a first encounter. Interaction after this first encounter was unlikely and if there was any further interaction, it would determine the type of relationship the couple were involved in. For example, in some casual interactions, such as having a fling or seeing someone, the young women expected further communication and interaction from their casual partners. Friends with benefits, seeing someone and having a fling involved more repetitive sexual interactions rather than a single sexual encounter but these interactions were also centred around sexual activity and there was no expectation of a future relationship. The friends with benefits and seeing someone interactions would usually come to an end naturally. However, seeing someone had the potential of developing into a dating relationship. This contrasted with dating relationships where sexual interaction would not occur in the early stages of dating. Hooking up was usually a 'one-night' phenomenon where further communication and interaction were very unlikely. However, some young women described experiences of hooking up with one person more than once. These findings are similar to previous studies of casual sexual relationships (Bogle, 2008; Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015; Lovejoy, 2015; Wentland & Reissing, 2014), where the focus of the relationship is on benefiting from the sexual nature of the relationship rather than the social and emotional aspects. The only exception for the young women in this study was seeing someone, which could involve more social and recreational activities, similar to dating. The Australian young women also described fewer types of casual sexual relationships compared to other international studies (Bogle, 2008; Wentland & Reissing, 2014; Wentland & Reissing, 2011). Finally, the young women in this study did not allude to significant gendered norms or patterns within casual sexual relationships. This was a bit different to the young women in studies overseas where young women expressed different expectations from casual sexual relationships compared to young men, impacting on emotional well-being, and were also judged more harshly than young men when in casual relationships (Bogle, 2008; Lovejoy, 2015).

While the young women in this study displayed some ambiguity with terminology related to romantic and sexual relationships, the terms 'hanging out' and 'going on a date' were clearly defined. Young couples considering entering a dating relationship would often meet someone for a first date over drinks, coffee or a casual meal just as friends would. This stage of spending

time together is sometimes called ‘hanging out’ and might not be any different to what friends would do. This finding contrasts with research by Eaton and Rose (2012; 2016) who explored the hanging out script using cognitive script methodology and categorised hanging out as a type of casual romantic encounter. The young women in this study, however, did not classify hanging out as a romantic encounter; rather it was an informal and friendly way of spending time with each other, without expectation of romance or sex, but occasionally preceding a romantic relationship or interaction. The other important terminology highlighted by the young women in this study was that dating someone was different to ‘going on a date’. This finding contrasts with Eaton and Rose’s study (2012) of predominantly Hispanic undergraduate heterosexual students’ dating scripts where dating and ‘going on a date’ were seen to be synonymous with each other.

The young women’s journeys from their initial interactions with young men through to going on a first date and establishing a dating relationship were scripted. The dating script was formed to describe this journey based on analysis of the young women’s interviews (Figure 6, chapter 4, page 134). The young women displayed some ambiguity in their understanding of dating, sometimes describing it as being non-committed while sometimes perceiving it to be a serious relationship. This is because it was acceptable to some women to be ‘dating’ several young men at the same time in the initial stages of getting to know each other until they decided which young man they preferred to become exclusive with. Thus, this deciding period could be perceived as being casual. However, dating, unlike casual romantic relationships, was not focused on sexual activity but rather was focused on other meaningful social and recreational activities. Often the seriousness of the situation was not clear until the young man and woman had been dating for some period of time. The young women in this study described regular communication with the young men between dates, usually via internet-based technology, and used social media profiles to know more about the young men (Meenagh, 2015). While there is often some ambiguity in interpreting online communication (Meenagh, 2015), the young women in this study perceived this to be a mundane aspect of their day-to-day living that did not hugely impact on their perceptions or experiences of dating or other romantic interactions. A formal conversation would usually need to occur about the status of the relationship where sometimes the young man would ask the young woman to be his girlfriend, and at other times it was a guessing game. Despite regular interaction and communication, especially via technological means, communication about the status of a dating relationship was poor and usually not discussed in a straightforward manner. Some of the young women experienced

being informed by the young man that they were dating or, in some cases, found out through friends that the young man had already spread the word that they were dating. This male entitlement and control over the dating relationship is discussed further in the next section on the gendered aspects of dating. Once dating was established, it was expected that the couple would not be romantically involved with other people and would make an effort to spend more time with each other and hopefully settle into a long-term relationship, as illustrated in the dating to relationship script (Figure 7, chapter 4, page 135). This journey from the initial dating stage to the later stage of settling into a relationship was heavily scripted and also gendered, with most of the young women describing a similar predictable journey. This journey started from the initial stages of dating, through to spending more time at each other's homes, bringing each other to interactions with friends and family and then eventually moving in together. These scripts highlight the socially structured, gendered and therefore oppressive aspects of the dating culture that the majority of the young women conformed to. The young women's gendered perception of dating violence is discussed in the following sections.

Understanding and naming dating violence

It has been demonstrated thus far that the Australian young women in this study were committed to following gendered and socially scripted dating relationships. The young women perceived their roles within dating relationships to be passive and felt obligated to prioritise and care for their male partners, above their own well-being (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Jackson, 2001; Noel et al., 2016). The normalisation of gendered dating behaviours that favoured the young men in terms of power within the relationship (Chung, 2007; Toscano, 2014) meant that the young men's control over the young women could escalate insidiously without the young women's knowledge. Thus, understanding and naming dating violence behaviours within such a relationship was a complex and challenging process for the young women in this study.

Dating violence was minimised and normalised within pervasive, patriarchal social scripts that are reinforced through fairy tales and media depictions of romance. Dating violence is socially constructed to be a 'normal' component of young people's romantic relationships within media depictions of social life, and this is reinforced by family and friends (Bonomi, Altenburger, & Walton, 2013; Chung, 2007; Ismail et al., 2007; Jackson, 2001; Luft et al., 2012; Srdarov & Bourgault du Coudray, 2016). Thus, the young women were unable to look beyond this lens bestowed upon them by societal influences. The gendered scripts of dating and long-term

relationships normalised male control and dominance and female passive femininity, thus when the control and abuse escalated the dating violence was normalised and minimised. Minimising the violence, interpreting dating violence behaviours as masculine attractiveness and feeling invalidated by significant others all contributed to difficulty with recognising the abuse. The young women struggled to make sense of dating violence, mistaking the abuse for love. For example, the young women interpreted acts of dating violence as ‘endearing’, ‘attractive’ and ‘masculine’, similar to young women in previous Australian studies, where the romantic narrative in heterosexual romantic relationship script is dominant (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2007; Murphy & Smith, 2010). Perhaps interpreting aggressive and controlling behaviours in this way allowed the young women to believe that they were living in a fairy tale with their idealised prince. After all, fairy tales tend to portray their masculine heroes as physically robust, possessive and controlling, where violence is part and parcel of attractive masculinity, therefore the abusive behaviours may well have appeared to have been fairy tale-like (Jackson, 2001). More modern adaptations of ideal romances reinforce these perceptions of masculinity and have been notorious in portraying ‘love’ as a concoction of abusive behaviours including stalking, controlling and other severe forms of violence (Bonomi et al., 2013; Srdarov & Bourgault du Coudray, 2016). The young women minimised these sorts of toxic masculine behaviours, normalised them, and took blame and responsibility for getting themselves into abusive situations, whilst actively disconnecting from any perception of disempowerment or victimisation. This emphasises Kleinman’s (2007) words about how patriarchy teaches women to love their oppressors.

When the young women did come to terms with the dating violence, they prioritised protecting the young man’s reputation and thus the couple’s reputation. The young man was usually excused of blame for the abuse, with the young woman often blaming herself (Chung, 2007; Jeffrey & Barata, 2017), other people or external hardships instead (Jackson, 2001). This perception was unfortunately reinforced by significant others who often blamed the young women and were not always supportive (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Ismail et al., 2007). The young women also blamed their own lack of experience with relationships in struggling to recognise the dating violence. The young women’s investment within a joint couple identity dissociated from her own individual identity exacerbated the challenges of recognising dating violence, as she was held responsible for maintaining the couple’s image and reputation (Chung, 2007; Haglund et al., 2012; Luft et al., 2012). At times when the young women felt ambivalent about their relationships or questioned the abusive behaviours, their concerns were brushed off and

minimised by significant others, thus leaving the young women to feel invalidated. For example, one young woman recalled that she described an example of sexual coercion to her peers, only to be told that like other young women, she needed to learn to understand and like sex, and thus the experience was minimised and normalised. Her concerns were shut down, she questioned herself, blamed herself for the sexual coercion and her feelings were internalised for fear of judgement until she participated in the research interview. The young women were often encouraged by peers and significant others to stay in their relationships and endure the dating violence, emphasising hope that the situation would improve. This is not surprising given that Australian young people continue to demonstrate some violence supportive attitudes (Politoff et al., 2019), and young women tend to be judgemental of peers who experience dating violence (Baker, 2003). This demonstrates little change from previous Australian and international research which revealed that young women were judged more harshly by other young women for being in abusive relationships, rather than blaming young men for perpetrating abuse (Baker, 2003; Ismail et al., 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). Overarching gendered and cultural scripts with power imbalances that normalise relationship abuse and place more importance on loyalty and longevity of relationships contribute to the minimisation and normalisation of dating violence (Jackson, 2001). Female passivity was encouraged by peers and significant others, while speaking up and challenging dating violence behaviours was discouraged and shut down. Yet young women are blamed for ‘choosing’ to stay in their dating violence relationships (Baker, 2003). It is an irony that society places pressure on young women to adopt passive roles within their relationships, but then criticises this same passivity when young women become trapped within dating violence relationships.

Inexperience and lack of education and knowledge were cited frequently as reasons that the young women did not recognise dating violence. However, it might also be that it is simply easier to blame their own inexperience instead of placing blame on the young man, consistent with her gendered role of needing to protect the young man. The young women identified that there is ‘a gap in resource advertisement and education on that topic for high school students’, as one of the participants, Rebecca, suggested; therefore young women are left to navigate romantic relationships on their own and figure out what dating violence is. This is consistent with recent evidence that Australian young people lack formal and structured education about respectful relationships (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). Young people’s violence supportive attitudes are informed by adhering to gender stereotypes, which are usually learned through multiple sources including social media, friends, pornography, gaming culture,

celebrities and media portrayals of women (Bonomi et al., 2013; Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015; Politoff et al., 2019; Srdarov & Bourgault du Coudray, 2016). Therefore, there is an urgent need for widespread, structured, evidence-based education targeted at youth, about respectful relationships.

The Beauty and the Beast

The young women viewed dating to be socially scripted and gendered, and adopted socially acceptable gendered roles and identities within these relationships. As dating violence developed within the dating relationships, the young women's roles and identities became increasingly set in stone. The young women in this study felt obligated to adopt a caring role towards the young men within the relationship and took a high level of responsibility for the well-being of the relationship and the young men. As reiterated earlier, the young men were rarely blamed by the young women for perpetrating dating violence, but instead likened the violence to childish behaviour. Some of the young women even likened the dating violence behaviour to a child's 'tantrum'. Minimising abusive behaviours and likening them to childishness has also been reported in a previous study on adult women's abusive relationships (Enander & Holmberg, 2008). Labelling a violent behaviour as childish enabled the young women to perceive the dating violence as being immature, yet excusable, like a child's behaviour because you don't expect a child to know better. By likening abusive behaviour to that of a child, the young women may have perceived that the young men had little awareness or control over their behaviour, thus rendering the abuse acceptable and forgivable. Perceiving the dating violence to be excusable might help the young women to feel justified about loving the young man and standing by him. The responsibility for the dating violence is thus taken away from the young man, consistent with the subtle but strong influences of patriarchal social structures that favour men over women.

The young woman's perceptions of the male partner's behaviours as being childish also influences the relationship dynamics between herself and the young man, and her perceived role within the relationship. The young woman would often look after his daily needs and care for him during times of stress and sickness and so on, just as a mother would look after her child. A few of the young women described similar situations in their family homes of needing to look after family members with chronic illness and therefore the carer role came to them quite naturally. The young woman's carer role was particularly strong in situations where the male partner suffered from a mental illness. Despite suffering from physical and psychological abuse, particularly if the male partner was intoxicated with alcohol or another substance, the

young women would describe feeling sympathy towards their partners and highlighted their roles in needing to provide practical and emotional support. This scenario is reminiscent of the classic fairy tale story, *Beauty and the Beast*, written by French novelist, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in the 1700's. This is the story of a young princess, *Belle*, who is tasked with looking after a ferocious and angry beast until he transforms one day into a kind and handsome young prince. The story ends with them living happily ever after. The young women in this study appeared to be acting out the role of *Belle*, within the *Beauty and the Beast* script; they cared for and looked after the young men just as *Belle* did, hopeful that their abusive boyfriends might transform into kind and handsome young princes with whom they would live happily ever after. Similarly, another classic fairy tale, *The Frog Prince*, involves a princess who reluctantly befriends a frog who follows her home against her wishes as a result of helping the princess. The princess loathingly agrees to his demands, but due to her kindness and a kiss he transforms into a handsome young prince and they both live happily ever after. While there are several versions of this story, the underlying message is no different from the *Beauty and the Beast* story of how a beautiful woman's kindness and accommodating behaviour can transform an undesirable creature into the love of her life.

The perception of positioning the abusive male partner as a child has been demonstrated in a study of young people's relationships in New Zealand too (Jackson, 2001). Adopting the carer's role sometimes allowed the young women to perceive themselves to be the stronger identity in the relationship as they took on a motherly, caring role towards their partners (Jackson, 2001). This identity perhaps allowed some of the young women to feel connected with their empowered feminist identities of presenting themselves as heroines who construct identities for themselves that are less demeaning to them than that of a victim of dating violence (Wiklund et al., 2010). This construction of a needy male partner identity requiring a caring and strong woman to look after him therefore impacted on the young women's decisions about leaving these relationships as the young women described worrying about the young men's well-being in their absence. The young women spoke about fear that if they left, they were risking abandoning someone who was incapable of fending for themselves. This concern was mostly expressed in the context of the male partner suffering from mental illness, whilst the young women cared little for their own safety and well-being. Male mental illness was a recurrent theme in the narrative interviews that reinforced the gendered roles and identities within the young women's dating relationships. The association between male mental illness and violence perpetration has been established elsewhere, with suggestions of a vicious cycle

(Temple et al., 2016). The young women in Baker's (2003) study also hinted at male mental illness to explain and justify the male partners' perpetration of dating violence, though this was not the highlight of the study. Male mental illness has also been implicated in perpetration of intimate partner homicide in adult relationships (Campbell et al., 2007), but requires further investigation in young people's relationships. The young women in this study often blamed male mental illness but also other external hardships to justify and rationalise the violence.

Thus, inherent recognition of dating violence was not common among the young women in this study. In a few cases, the young women described inherent recognition of abusive behaviours during their relationships, though in most cases the young women only recognised the dating violence after the relationship had ended. Interestingly all of the young women who recalled recognising the dating violence during the relationship reported having experienced some form of unwanted sexual dating violence, although recognition of the dating violence was not restricted to sexual violence alone. It was not clear why most of the young women only recognised the dating violence after the relationship ended.

One explanation could be the joint couple identity impacting on the young woman's perception of the dating violence behaviours. The young women attributed their own identities to their relationships. They created new identities and roles for themselves as girlfriend or partner which was defined by their relationship and loyalty to their male partner. The attachment and loyalty then contribute to protecting their boyfriends' reputations and thus the young women minimise and normalise the dating violence, similar to the young women in a previous South Australian study (Chung, 2007). The role of social identity theory in explaining how adult women construct their identities as a result of being in an abusive relationship in conjunction with their partner has also been explored in the Australian context (O'Doherty, Taft, McNair, & Hegarty, 2016). O'Doherty et al. (2016) demonstrated in their study of fourteen women, the disturbing effect of IPV on self-concept which in turn impacts on how women publicly portray themselves and their relationships with their partners. Revealing the abuse-identity bore the risk of being judged and reinforced low self-worth (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Chung (2005) suggests that young women might find it easier to retrospectively recognise dating violence after their relationship ends because their identities are no longer dependent on the young man or the relationship. During the intimate relationship the young woman's identity is part and parcel of her identifying with the young man as an exclusive couple unit (Chung, 2007; Haglund et al., 2012). Thus, we can understand the young woman's need to maintain her reputation as well as his so that as a couple, they are perceived by the social circle in a positive

light and seen to be following the social dating script like everyone else. Exposing dating violence within the relationship might leave a young woman to feel judged or perceived as powerless by her peers and significant others who are of little support anyway (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Baker, 2003; Ismail et al., 2007). When she has left the relationship, her identity is not married to anyone else, and so she may experience the freedom to label an abusive relationship and perhaps no longer worry about protecting the ex-partner's reputation. Further, once the relationship has ended, there is no longer the risk that the young woman will be seen as powerless as she would be independent of the abusive relationship and therefore might even be viewed positively by peers and, as an enlightened survivor.

Fairy tales versus feminism

The Australian young women in this study experienced dating and long-term relationships which were typically gendered. Regardless of the young woman's age group, ethnic background, social background, educational or occupational background, or where she lived, her expectations and beliefs of dating and other romantic relationships were similar and overwhelmingly gendered in nature. The overwhelmingly gendered perception of dating is consistent with previous studies conducted in Australia (Chung, 2005, 2007) and overseas (Jackson, 2001; Noel et al., 2016; Volpe et al., 2014) that have identified the importance young people place on adopting sexual identities informed by gendered, heterosexual norms. It is known that young children learn and identify gendered patterns from infancy, based on the social constructs that they are exposed to in their family and community (D. A. Wolfe, Jaffe, & Crooks, 2006). When toddlers observe the world around them and assign themselves gendered behaviours and roles (D. A. Wolfe et al., 2006) it is then no surprise that when they grow up to become young adults, that these gendered roles persist and are perhaps even more set in stone. While empirical conclusions cannot be drawn, examining the data in the context of the young women's cultural backgrounds, revealed that young women who identified as Caucasian or coming from an Anglo-Saxon background described experiencing more casual romantic relationships; however, their perceptions of and behaviours within more formal dating relationships were similar to young women who identified as coming from traditional Asian backgrounds.

The young women in this study likened their romantic relationships to fairy tales, with immense pressure to abide by romantic scripts, while remaining oblivious to this social construct throughout their narratives. The young women's commitment to living in a fairy tale was only taken advantage of by young men who trapped the young women in abusive relationships in

the guise of love and romance. These scripts were heavily gendered and conformed to traditional patriarchal social norms. Yet the young women did not acknowledge that they might be trapped within rigid, patriarchal social scripts that played out within their heterosexual dating relationships (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Chung, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). While most of the young women could demonstrate knowledge about men's violence against women, gender equality and feminism, they were not able to apply a feminist lens to their own relationships. Gendered power relations were ignored with emphasis placed on social status and being a part of the social heteronormative dating script. This involved amalgamation of the young women's identities with their boyfriends to form a joint identity, while shedding their own individual identities.

For many of the young women, the end of the dating violence relationship was not the end of her service or commitment to the young man. A young woman's commitment to her male partner remained greater than her own well-being even when the relationship ended, and her obligation to serve him continued. A few of the young women described experiences of feeling obligated to 'be there' for the young man if he needed help or emotional support following the break up, especially in situations where she had ended the relationship. 'Being there' for the young man for emotional support following the relationship break up occurred in the form of remaining accessible via social media and responding to direct messages or phone calls, although these interactions were described as occasional or rare compared to when the couple were dating. The young women described how they would continue to be available to provide emotional support to their ex-partners sometimes despite moving on with their own new relationships. The young women justified this ongoing support with the same reasons that they justified staying in the relationships, primarily due to concern that the young man needed to be looked after due to not having someone else more able (Banister et al., 2003; Luft et al., 2012). Some of these young women were continuing to deal with this stretched out interaction at the time of the interview while other young women had come out of this phase of extended support for their ex-partners. Ending these unwanted post-relationship interactions was also challenging and the young women described the process of moving apart from the young men gradually with time and distance. However, this same level of support was never offered to the young women by the young men in return. This gendered inequality of roles rendering the young men as more powerful within intimate relationships appears unchanged from previous Australian (Chung, 2005, 2007) and international studies (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Banister et al., 2003; Luft et al., 2012; Noel et al., 2016).

Attaining or pursuing higher education and understanding feminism did not seem to impact on the young women's perceptions of dating or dating violence. Many of the young women in this study were students recruited via the University of Melbourne, with several identifying as feminists; yet, the subtleties of male dominance within their romantic relationships were strongly ingrained in their narratives. A clear imbalance of power and control favoured the young men in the relationship over the young women (Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Banister et al., 2003). The need to serve, protect and support the young men was embedded in their belief systems. Most of the young women were quite traditional in their views of dating including roles specific to the young men, such as the expectation that the young men would pick them up for an outing and then drop them back home towards the end of the date. The young men were often held responsible for initiating and steering the course of a dating relationship and the young women would follow (Noel et al., 2016; Volpe et al., 2014). In the context of dating and the more committed relationships, this pattern of the male steering the course of the relationship continued all the way up until the relationship ended and sometimes beyond that point too.

The young women's feminist identities did not seem to be applied to their own dating relationships. Most of the young women's perceptions of dating were deeply gendered and demonstrated support for patriarchal structural norms within their own relationships. It is possible that the young women's feminist perspectives on gender equality were not always applied to their intimate relationships in the same way that they hold those beliefs in other areas of their life, consistent with young people's attitudes towards gender equality in public versus private domains (Politoff et al., 2019). Romantic relationships were perceived by the young women to be unique and personal, where choices within the relationship are made individually and not seen to be influenced by social structures. These individualistic views that are oblivious of structured patriarchy have been described in previous studies in Australia (Baker, 2003, 2008; Chung, 2005) and abroad (Wiklund et al., 2010) where there is conflict between a young woman's feminist identity and supporting gender equality, yet rejecting feminist ideals with respect to her own relationships.

From a feminist theoretical perspective (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Kleinman, 2007), it appears that the patriarchal structure of our society is so pervasive that belief systems about male dominance and female subservience are established early and particularly so, within romantic relationship scripts. The young women who were interviewed, including the seventeen-year-old women, spoke about caring for their boyfriends and succumbing to their preferences and needs while

sacrificing their own well-being, in the name of love. Further, the young men's reputations were fiercely protected too, with the young women making efforts to downplay the young men's dating violence behaviours. It might be that the young women would have observed and learned about structured roles and dynamics within heterosexual relationships from their own parents and other influential adults who might have modelled traditionally gendered and patriarchal family structures and roles (Debnam et al., 2017; Haglund et al., 2012; Ragavan et al., 2018). Then there is the influence of media and fairy tales where the purpose of a young woman's life is to wait for her handsome prince to arrive, propose to her and for them to live happily ever after.

Qualitative studies with other young women from around the world have shown similar findings of young women feeling pressured to remain in a relationship in order to fulfil a fairy tale narrative above and beyond their own well-being (Chung, 2005, 2007; Jackson, 2001), and this is in turn reinforced by popular media (Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012). Young women learn from an early age that they must enter a relationship with a prince and while they are in such a relationship, they must serve and care for the young man and live happily ever after, while putting his needs above their own (Jeffrey & Barata, 2017; Luft et al., 2012). The young women's desired scripts of living happily ever after seemed to dominate their thought processes and expectations despite recent research suggesting that young people's romantic relationships might be less focused on marriage and more focused on short term sexual relationships (Bogle, 2008; Eaton et al., 2016). Dominance of romantic narratives in these Australian young women's lives seems to be a persistent theme that remains unchanged since prior research in the last decade or two (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2005, 2007), which indicates that we are not doing enough to divorce our minds from these pervasive fairy tale scripts. Being wedded to a life script that dictates that a lifelong romantic relationship is necessary to be happy and fit in with societal norms, therefore impacts on young women's perceptions and management of dating violence within their relationships.

The young women's beliefs that they lived in a society of gender equality lulled them into a false sense of comfort that they were making informed choices about their dating relationships. Baker (2003) suggested in the early 2000's that popular feminist discourses lead us to believe that we are in the era of women rising above the odds, highlighting powerful and successful stories of women, thus contributing to this false belief that we live in a gender equal world. This was confirmed by further research with Australian young women who perceived their abusive relationships to be as a result of bad individual choices that would not be repeated in

future (Baker, 2008; Chung, 2005). Swedish young women who experienced severe dating violence with little community support held similar contradictory views of living in a society where gender equality had been achieved (Wiklund et al., 2010). However, Baker (2008) elaborates that individual choice is also constrained by social structures, and the choices that women make must be socially acceptable and within these boundaries. It may be that the young women have a false sense of agency and choice that get in the way of placing responsibility on the young men for perpetrating violence against young women. They believed that looking after the young men was the right thing to do because he was the more needy one in the relationship and thus the young women were lulled into a false sense of empowerment. This theme of empowerment was evident in some of the narratives of young women who were survivors of dating violence in past relationships; the dating violence was portrayed as a negative phase in their lives which the young women viewed as a catalyst for positive personal growth (Amar & Alexy, 2005). Thus the young women were able to dissociate themselves from the more disempowering victim identity which may not necessarily be perceived as being consistent with being a feminist (Jackson, 2001).

Age old religious doctrines and cultural traditions have propagated the belief that women should serve and accept their husbands regardless of the husband's wrongs in the relationship, and therefore women have always been taught to adapt to and accept men, rather than consider leaving them (Haglund et al., 2012; Kleinman, 2007). It is likely that the young women are so accustomed to following patriarchal traditions passed onto them by older generations that they feel the need to protect and excuse the young men which then further reinforces young male privilege and widens the gender equality gap. Unfortunately, consistent with older Australian studies (Baker, 2003, 2008; Chung, 2005) this study demonstrates that perceptions have not changed much in over a decade.

In summary, the young women in this study were married to a fairy tale script that was governed by strong patriarchal social norms. Patriarchal social structures informed the young women's roles and identities within their relationships and trapped them into following gendered scripts that disguised abuse and violence with romantic narratives. The young women were trapped within a joint identity with the young men and were thus unable to dissociate themselves from this identity which impacted on recognition of the young men's harmful behaviours towards them. Many of the young women identified as feminists but were unable to apply a feminist lens to their own relationships. The young women demonstrated little acknowledgement or awareness of the gendered nature of dating that influenced the way they

interpreted dating violence. Thus, recognising and naming dating violence was a struggle. Further, the young women steered away from placing responsibility on the young men for their abusive behaviours, instead perceiving dating violence as a result of themselves and external hardships faced by the young men. The next section furthers the discussion on oppressive social scripts and the master narratives that inform these scripts to insidiously maintain patriarchal social structures through young people's dating relationships.

Master narratives

Thus far the discussion has illustrated that the Australian young women who had experienced dating violence were trapped within scripted and gendered dating relationships which were in conflict with their own beliefs about feminism. The theoretical framework of social constructionism suggests that knowledge is constructed through stories, thus highlighting the power of stories in shaping the way people lead their lives (Burr, 2015). In line with this, the gendered social scripts that the young women abide by and endeavour to live by may also be explained by master narratives. Master narratives are 'the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings' (Nelson, 2001). Master narratives usually consist of clear cut, readily recognisable scenarios and character types that we use to make sense of our lives and justify our choices and actions; fairy tales, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, are examples of such master narratives (Nelson, 2001). Master narratives inform our social scripts and therefore we learn through these how to behave, interact and perceive others. Other types of master narratives that we base our lives on include prominent court cases, other classic works of literature, classic movies and so on (Nelson, 2001). For example, a content analysis of twenty romance novels that had won awards for romance writing between the years 1990 and 2009 revealed that the sexual scripts in these novels reinforced gendered sexual roles and behaviours that have been described in sexual script studies (Ménard & Cabrera, 2011). These master narratives subconsciously permeate our lives to inform and restrict the way we live our lives, thus reinforcing what we accept as 'traditional' social norms, usually patriarchal in nature.

The concept of master narratives is consistent with the social constructionist theoretical perspective, as social constructionism acknowledges that social constructs are informed by discourses, images and metaphors that we internalise and live out according to the perspective that we have adopted (Burr, 2015). Master narratives are important to identify because they must be studied well to understand how they contribute to oppressed identities and misrepresenting people (Nelson, 2001); in this case fairy tales and the media are seen to

normalise violence by depicting gendered heterosexual relationships in which power and control favour young men (Bonomi et al., 2013; Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012; Srdarov & Bourgault du Coudray, 2016). Master narratives not only construct but 'normalise' an identity through 'stories focusing on the behaviour that is expected under certain conditions, which deflects attention away from the conditions themselves' (Nelson, 2001). Therefore, the young women focus on the *Belle*-like behaviours expected of themselves; to be passive, to serve and care for the young men and to love them through thick and thin while enduring violence and thus deflecting attention away from the young men's behaviours, the dating violence itself and the associated health impacts.

To address the problem of prevailing master narratives that inform the way young women lead their lives, more empowering stories must be created. Burr (2015) says of social constructionism that it is possible to be critical of and reflect on the discourses or stories which govern our lives. Critical analysis of the discourses that inform our daily social scripts can help to effect change when we 'claim or resist them according to effects they wish to bring about'. Therefore, while we feel limited or even imprisoned by existing social constructs, 'counterstories,' or narratives that challenge oppressive master narratives (Nelson, 2001) must be created. Counterstories should aim to not only challenge the oppressive social scripts that trap young women into rigid, stereotyped gender roles but aim to create powerful female identities and stories that young women feel compelled to live by.

Counterstories, informed by feminist theoretical principles, should aim to retell oppressive stories or develop new stories where there is no power imbalance within romantic relationships and thus reject the normalisation of young men's abuse and violence against young women. Challenging existing master narratives with counterstories may aid in altering young women's perceptions of themselves, young men and the process of dating. Nelson (2001) suggests that the concepts of identity and agency overlap because in order to adopt a certain identity requires individual or collective agency. New counterstories will also serve as social guides to whoever consumes them, which might also include young men or even children, although it is important to acknowledge here that this does not suggest that people lack power or agency in the absence of counterstories (Palmer, 2006). It is first a consciousness-raising exercise and then a means to view the world differently and understand that the young women are not themselves responsible for the dating violence. Counterstories aim to re-create representation of a particular identity (Nelson, 2001); for example, representing young women as empowered,

equal partners within a relationship rather than the passive female partner who is controlled by young men.

However, challenging master narratives alone does not necessarily guarantee social change (Palmer, 2006) as transforming oppressive social structures requires large scale responses over time that impact on age old patriarchal perceptions of gendered roles. Master narratives are so pervasive, all-encompassing and buried so deeply in our subconscious that they are capable of ‘hiding what ought to be opposed, of absorbing such opposition as might be offered, of penetrating so deeply into a belief system as to be uprooted only at great cost, of spreading their nets so widely across the culture that localized resistance can make no headway against them’ (Nelson, 2001). But Nelson (2001) adds that master narratives consist of several elements that do not necessarily fit together neatly and do have ‘tensions, fissures and gaps’ that can be challenged effectively with counterstories, and she provides an example of how mothers and other oppressed groups have challenged master narratives and changed their identities over time. Counterstories need not be wide, all-encompassing stories but must target aspects of master narratives that are weak and take advantage of those weaknesses. For young women, recognising the master narratives informing their lives may benefit them by ‘re-locating problems away from an intrapsychic domain and into a societal one’ (Burr, 2015), as we are better at understanding and relating to social scripts. Further, creating counterstories for young women may help them to see their roles within narratives that are less ‘personally damaging’ (Burr, 2015). Thus, the role of counterstories is important when considering how best to impact existing policy and practice with respect to men’s violence against women, as will be discussed in the implications section.

As has been evident thus far, the young women struggled to recognise and make sense of their dating violence relationships due to feeling pressurised to conform to social scripts informed by oppressive master narratives. The next section extends this knowledge by focusing on how these perceptions impacted on the young women staying in or leaving their dating violence relationships.

Leaving – violence doesn’t matter

The young women were trapped within oppressive social scripts, informed by pervasive master narratives, that reinforced patriarchal social norms. These scripts disguised dating violence relationships as being desirable and thus made it challenging for young women to leave them. The young men maintained a degree of control throughout the relationship and also all the way

through to the end of the dating violence relationship. The young women's primary role of providing emotional support to the male partner was consistent throughout the dating violence relationship and sometimes beyond the point of relationship exit. Dating violence was minimised and normalised and therefore the young women found it difficult to recognise the abuse and violence, with priority given to remaining within the relationship in order to maintain structured social norms. These perceptions were only reinforced by the media and significant others (Amar & Alexy, 2005; Ismail et al., 2007; Luft et al., 2012), and the young women struggled to think outside of this oppressive lens due to their lack of experience with relationships and lack of education on healthy, respectful relationships. The conflict with being a feminist and living in an era of feminism only exacerbated the situation, as many of the young women perceived it to be their choice to stay in or leave their relationships, oblivious to the scripts that they were trapped in (Baker, 2003; Banister & Jakubee, 2004; Chung, 2007; Wiklund et al., 2010). It is then no surprise that the young women struggled to leave these abusive relationships.

Consistent with previous studies, dating violence was rarely the reason cited by the young women for leaving a relationship (Chung, 2007; Copp et al., 2015; Edwards et al., 2012). Recognition of dating violence did not seem to make a difference and the young women in this study did not leave as a result of the recognition. Talking to significant others or professionals was sometimes helpful and sometimes not and did not influence the young woman leaving. Sometimes the young women experienced significant mental distress but this did not influence them leaving the dating violence relationship either. Priority was given to care for the young man and provide emotional support. Leaving abusive relationships was perceived to be challenging to do and not always seen as the right thing to do. Some of the Australian young women were genuinely in love with their partners and so they hoped that the relationship might improve so that they could stay with the same partner. Perhaps the young women's belief in the concept of 'true love' withstanding all odds contributed to their reluctance to leave, again reinforcing the happily ever after fairy tale script (Baker, 2003; Chung, 2007; Helm et al., 2017; Jackson, 2001). Many of the young women held onto hope of the relationship improving and felt an obligation to care for the abusive young man. This is not surprising because while the young women had knowledge of textbook definitions of dating violence they were unable to apply a feminist lens to their own relationships and were at a loss when needing to seek help or leave their own abusive relationships (Baker, 2003).

The most common reason that an abusive relationship ended was when the young man ended the relationship. This was for a variety of reasons including finding another young woman, having had enough of the relationship or physical separation for travel, work or study. While the young women expressed sadness and anger at the young men for abandoning them and upsetting the fairy tale script, they also expressed feelings of relief that the abuse ended. The young women perceived themselves to be highly responsible for the young men's well-being and so the end of the relationship, even if he ended it, sometimes meant that the young women felt obligated to continue to extend a carer role to the young men. In particular, perceiving the young men as being childish and unable to trust their abilities to look after themselves reinforced the obligation to provide emotional support following the official separation.

Severity of dating violence did not appear to impact on how the young women perceived or responded to the dating violence either. Whether the young women described experiencing more subtle forms of abuse such as emotional manipulation or potentially life-threatening forms of violence, such as being threatened with a gun, their responses were similar. The young women felt overwhelmingly obligated to care for the young men, feeling 'sorry for them' and thus chose to remain in the relationship to avoid further conflict and possibly further escalation of the dating violence. It may be that the young women who identified as feminist were more aware about their rights as women but perhaps did not apply this feminist lens to their romantic relationships (Lamont, 2014), where emotional factors and social scripts anchoring them to the young men were much stronger. The young women held on to memories of the good times with the young men and positive aspects of the relationship; this perception was unfortunately reinforced by significant others. Many of the young women had no other form of emotional support as they were isolated from their usual support systems, having moved away for work or study. Therefore, leaving their romantic partners would mean becoming socially isolated and sometimes losing their only circle of mutual friends (Banister et al., 2003). An overpowering desire for love and to be in a fairy tale relationship with a young man also kept the young women attached to the controlling young men.

The young women almost never ended a relationship due to the dating violence even if they recognised it, as this was not seen to be a valid reason to leave (Toscano, 2014). An abusive romantic relationship could be ended mostly by the young man or sometimes by the young woman. In this study of Australian young women, recognition of dating violence did not seem to correlate with exiting the dating relationship. Regardless of whether a young woman recognised the dating violence, the outcomes were predictable; she would stay, the young man

would end the relationship, or the young woman would leave the relationship. A crisis or trigger was required for a young woman to feel validated about ending the relationship. This is reminiscent of the turning point theory, which explains how older women experiencing domestic violence are triggered to leave their abusive relationships (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). In the case of the young women in this study, only infidelity, or cheating on each other was perceived to be strictly unacceptable and worth leaving the relationship. Abuse was not always perceived to be unacceptable, or at least, it was rarely perceived to be a valid reason to end a relationship. The other most common way that a relationship would end was if the couple physically separated due to one of them moving away interstate or overseas.

It was unclear why infidelity was given so much weighting by the young women. One possibility is that infidelity might not conform to the young women's fairy tale script for a long-term romantic relationship. It appears from the young women's narratives that the beast is allowed to be abusive, because the aggression is endearing and likened to masculine attractiveness and one could still live happily ever after. However, infidelity, in contrast, was perceived to be hurtful, unacceptable and a sign of true betrayal. It perhaps indicates that the young man is no longer following the fairy tale script, does not love the young woman anymore and thus ruins the hope of living happily ever after; there is loss of hope for a future to the relationship. This also indicates that infidelity is more socially unacceptable than abuse is. As the young women described during the interviews, they were more likely to be validated by society if they cited the young man's infidelity as a reason to separate from their partners. Young women described instances of parents and friends minimising and normalising their experiences of dating violence but displaying anger and disbelief upon hearing about the male partner's infidelity.

As the young women in this study have demonstrated, attachment to a relationship may be strong despite it being abusive, because the dating violence relationship may represent the only form of security, especially in the absence of family (Burton, Halpern-Felsher, Rankin, Rehm, & Humphreys, 2011). The romantic relationship may be used as a secure base to explore and form other social relationships outside of the dating relationship and thus the value of the romantic relationship, even if abusive, becomes high (Burton et al., 2011). Attachment may also be linked to relationship commitment and, as explained by Rusbult's Investment Model (Rusbult, 1983), attachment and commitment to the relationship and/or the abusive romantic partner is stronger if there is a lack of a better alternative situation. Some young women may place greater value on the social status of being in the relationship, loyalty to the partner and

peer pressure to remain in the relationship while some young women may fear other repercussions of leaving such as loneliness or social isolation (Chung, 2007). However, the Investment Model does not take other factors into account such as the trauma of experiencing dating violence, the social scripts or the social constructs of gender that ensure that the young man is in control of the relationship. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), does not account for social constructs nor the influence of gendered norms that favour male control over the dating relationship and the young woman's perceptions and behaviours. The Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM) (Chang et al., 2006) and the Psychosocial Readiness Model (PRM) (Cluss et al., 2006) does not reflect the young women's narratives either, as the young women did not describe experiencing a cycle of change or a step wise set of actions that led to them leaving or safety seeking behaviours. This section discusses how the young women's dating violence relationships ended and then presents an exit model based on the findings.

How did the Australian young women leave their dating violence relationships?

Existing theoretical models of exiting abusive relationships did not necessarily fit with the young women's narratives. The findings resulting from the young women's narratives were compared with the Investment Model (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), the Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM) (Chang et al., 2006), the Psychosocial Readiness Model (PRM) (Cluss et al., 2006) and turning points (Chang et al., 2010; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Finally, a model was formed to describe the young women's experiences of exiting violent dating relationships (Figure 8).

The Investment Model, which has been extensively studied in young people's relationships, has demonstrated reliability and validity in predicting relationship commitment and the decision to stay or leave (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998). In particular it has also been studied in young people's dating violence relationships (Rhatigan & Street, 2005). The Investment Model determines commitment to a relationship by assessing relationship satisfaction, investment into the relationship and quality of alternatives. The studies exploring this model in young people's abusive relationships have shown that the Investment Model inconsistently explains young women's commitment to the relationships (Katz et al., 2006; Rhatigan & Street, 2005; Truman-Schram et al., 2000).

The young women in the current doctoral study were committed to their relationships due to emotional investment (including love and attachment), an obligation to care for the boyfriend,

and fairy tale like dating scripts. Social investment into the relationship was common, as the young women made friends via their boyfriends and thus the dating relationship also allowed the young women access to other friendships and social connections. In line with the Investment Model it is true that most of the young women did not have an alternate form of support or emotional fulfilment and thus remaining committed to the abusive relationship was the best option in an otherwise isolated environment. Leaving would result in social isolation as many of the young women were away from their family and friends. However, rather than an intrinsic imbalance between the investment, satisfaction or quality of alternatives for the young women, it was a crisis that ultimately helped the young women to exit their dating violence relationships. More often than a crisis, it was the young man who ended the relationship, consistent with the gendered dynamics within dating relationships where the young man plays the more active and dominant role. The Investment Model does not account for turning points or for gendered imbalance impacting on this equation and therefore oversimplifies young women's decisions to leave an abusive relationship.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) does not fit with the young women's narratives either. The TPB asserts that one's intention to action a specific behaviour (such as, in this case, exiting an abusive relationship) is determined by their attitude to the behaviour, subjective norms and their perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). This theory does not consider the power of social constructs that heavily influenced the young women's perceptions and actions. Nor does the TPB take into consideration the subtle control of the young men over the dating violence relationship.

The Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM) has been shown to be a good model, when adapted, to explain how adult women leave abusive relationships (Chang et al., 2006; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). There may also be a role for the TTM in describing how young women leave dating violence (Edwards et al., 2012). Similar to Edwards' (2012) study, if the young women's interviews were mapped across the TTM, the young women would fit with the stages of precontemplation (experiencing dating violence), contemplation (recognising the dating violence), action (leaving or creating a crisis) and maintenance (staying out of the relationship). None of the young women in this study fit into the preparation stage as none discussed preparing for or spending time planning to take action to leave their abusive boyfriends or seek help, and thus 'leapfrogged' this stage as even some adult women do (Chang et al., 2006). The linear aspect of the TTM does not account for the young man's actions or the young woman's impulsive behaviours and triggers that enable exit to occur at any stage.

Turning points have been incorporated into the TTM to address the issue of crisis situations, and are discussed as a separate subsection below (Chang et al., 2006; Chang et al., 2010). The Psychosocial Readiness Model (PRM), that was borne out of the inflexibility of the TTM (Cluss et al., 2006), does not reflect the young women's experiences of leaving dating violence either. The PRM illustrates the impact of external supports and a woman's internal factors on a woman's safety seeking behaviours in an abusive relationship, including relationship termination. The young women in this study did not describe the role of external supports as being significant in ending their dating violence relationships. Internal factors, such as awareness, perceived supports and self-efficacy were not particularly relevant for leaving either, with the young women depending on triggers or the young man to end the relationship. The PRM acknowledges that the perpetrators actions affect the survivor's behaviour within the PRM model, but in the case of the young women in this study, the young man's action of ending the relationship was significant and cannot be accounted for by the PRM alone. Turning points have also been identified as enablers of change within the TTM and were significant in the young women's experiences of leaving dating violence (Chang et al., 2010; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). The relevance of turning points to the young women's relationships is discussed in the following section.

Turning points

Turning points are enablers to positive change. A turning point is defined as a critical event or realisation that encourages positive movement through a stage of change (Chang et al., 2010; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). Turning points in the setting of intimate partner violence were originally described within the theoretical framework of the TTM (Chang et al., 2006; Chang et al., 2010). The young women in this study required triggers, or turning points, to leave their abusive relationships, that were unrelated to the abuse itself. Infidelity by the young man was the major turning point that triggered a young woman to leave a relationship. Another turning point was the young woman deciding to cheat on the young man and triggering him to leave. Physical separation was not clearly a turning point but usually ended in the couple separating, sometimes mutually and sometimes with either the young man or young woman ending the relationship.

Infidelity was described by the young women to be the most significant turning point for the young women to leave. Infidelity has previously been cited by young women in other studies to be an acceptable reason to leave an abusive relationship (Chung, 2007; Toscano, 2014) and has also been defined as a turning point for adult women in abusive relationships (Khaw &

Hardesty, 2007). Turning points have been described in adult women's abusive relationships as significant life events that change a woman's tolerance to her abusive relationship and have been shown to be useful for health providers responses to men's violence against women (García-Moreno, Hegarty, et al., 2015). In the young women's relationships, infidelity was perhaps perceived to deviate from the fairy tale script and therefore the romantic social script was challenged and disrupted. When the young man broke her trust, it was perceived as a betrayal that did not deserve forgiving. This perception was reinforced by the young woman's significant others, who came to the young woman's side only when the young man cheated on her but failed to offer support and validation for dating violence.

The young woman cheating on the young man was usually an impulsive betrayal with no long term planning. The young women described cheating on their boyfriends as a trigger for the young men to break up the relationship. This is consistent with the gendered dating script because the young women are used to the young men being in control and making decisions about the relationship. By displaying disloyalty, the young woman was able to hand the decision to the young man to leave her. The only other situation where a young woman felt able to end a relationship was physical separation, which refers to instances such as the young woman or man leaving for an overseas holiday or exchange or moving away for good. Physical separation was perceived by the young women as a valid opportunity to end the romantic relationship in the few instances that they did, but it was usually a forced mutual separation at this point and was also socially accepted. Often in the case of physical separation the couple might gradually drift apart from each other so a clear break up was not required from the young woman or the young man for the relationship to end. In the next section a model is presented, that summarises the pathways that led to the end of dating violence relationships for the young women in this study.

Dating violence exit model

A model was formed based on the analysis of the interviews, to explain how the dating violence relationships ended for the young women in this study (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Dating violence exit model

The dating violence exit model illustrates the various pathways that can lead to separation of the young woman from her abusive boyfriend, while highlighting the roles of the young woman and the young man in these scenarios. The young women's dating experiences, including their pathways to leaving were informed by overarching oppressive master narratives, all the way until separation from the abusive male partner; hence the oppressive master narrative bubble is placed above the model. These master narratives, such as fairy tales and romance movies informed the young women's dating to relationship scripts, from the beginning until the end of the relationships. Of course, leaving the abusive relationship sometimes had the risk of returning to the dating violence, although the young women in this study mostly described needing to be emotionally available to the young men following separation rather than going back to him as a dating or intimate partner.

The oppressive master narratives have been shown to favour the young man's control over the young woman and hence there is an indicator on the exit model that illustrates the degree of the young man's control over the dating violence relationship. As is illustrated in Figure 8, the young man's control over the relationship reduces with the various pathways that could lead to the end of the dating violence relationship. The young man's control over the young woman

was strongest while the young woman was actively in the dating violence relationship. Consistent with the gendered dating scripts, the young woman's primary role was to provide emotional support to the young man regardless of the circumstances and even after the relationship had ended. There is no control indicator for the young woman on the exit model because her role in providing emotional support to the young man is constant and not necessarily in her control.

The model illustrates the various pathways that the young women in this study experienced while in a dating violence relationship. She could stay in the relationship, the young man could leave the dating violence relationship or the young man or the young woman would cheat, resulting in the relationship ending. The young man's control of the relationship changed depending on how the relationship ended but the young women's role of providing emotional support to the young man mostly remained constant. Physical separation has not been included in the diagram because it did not consistently result in the young man or the young woman leaving the relationship and was not directly related to the young man's control. Although the young women did perceive physical separation to be a valid reason to leave their abusive relationships, physical separation mostly resulted in a mutual separation or the couple gradually drifting away from each other.

When a young woman stays in a dating violence relationship, she is going through the dating to relationship script that is predominantly controlled by the young man and informed by oppressive master narratives. Regardless of recognising the dating violence, talking to significant others or experiencing an impact on her mental health (internal mental state), the young woman stays and prioritises providing emotional support to the young man. This staying pathway is important to understand because it highlights that recognition of the dating violence did not trigger the young women to leave the relationship. Talking to significant others or professionals did not trigger her to leave either, although it may have helped with recognising the abuse and violence. In contrast, talking to significant others was also often not very useful as the young women's experiences of dating violence were often not validated and they were instead advised by their peers and significant others to tolerate the dating violence for the greater good.

The first exit pathway is that of the young man deciding to leave the relationship for his own reasons. The reasons could be varied, such as having had enough of the relationship or deciding to move away. The young man is obviously in control of this decision and the young woman

must agree for the relationship to end. She may continue to feel the need to provide emotional support to the young man until they eventually drift apart. This offer of emotional support mostly involved virtual communication over instant messaging or social media and was expected to gradually reduce with time, or when the young man found an alternative source of support, such as another girlfriend. Further, if the young man ended the relationship, the likelihood of him returning to the relationship was described by the young women as being very low. It appeared that the young man's decision to leave the young woman was the most definitive exit. While many of the young women continued to provide emotional support in this situation, the young women also described it as being less likely to need to extend emotional support to him if he ended the relationship.

The second exit pathway includes the young woman cheating on the young man. The young women described deliberate but impulsive cheating on the young man, and then ensured that he knew about it. The young women spoke about how they would do this in the hope that the young man would leave her and then never return to the relationship. Consistent with gendered dating scripts, this would keep the control with the young man and thus end the relationship without the control of the relationship needing to completely shift to the young woman. As can be seen in the young man's control arrow in the diagram, the degree of his control over the relationship reduces a little when the young woman cheats on him because she has taken this step towards destabilising the relationship. The young woman would continue to offer the young man emotional support though, particularly to make up for the guilt of having cheated on him, thus highlighting the burden of gendered roles and scripts.

The young man cheating on the young woman was the only trigger point that always resulted in the young woman actively and confidently leaving the dating violence relationship. This trigger point is associated with the young man having the least control over the dating violence relationship. The young men would not necessarily cheat on the young woman with the intent of breaking up; as is illustrated in the fairy tale story at the beginning of this chapter, the young man's infidelity would need to be discovered by the young woman. Infidelity was perceived by the young women as being strictly unacceptable and significant others validated the young women's decisions to leave when their partners cheated on them. While it would appear that the young woman's decision to break up was a concrete decision, she might continue to offer emotional support to the young man to help him cope with the relationship break up. While the young woman's decision to end the dating violence relationship illustrates a degree of control

for her, she continues to feel obligated to provide emotional support to continue her gendered role of serving the male.

It is interesting to note on this diagram that while the young man's control over the dating violence relationship might reduce depending on the stage of the relationship and the triggers, the young woman's role in providing emotional support is consistent and steady throughout. Consistent with the gendered scripts, the young man holds onto the power most of the time while the young woman is expected to serve the young man even when the relationship has officially ended. It is also important to acknowledge that leaving one abusive relationship did not mean that the young women never entered another abusive relationship again. Several of the young women in this study had experienced more than one abusive relationship with varying severities and types of dating violence but the patterns of behaviour that they experienced were consistent.

In summary, the young women were trapped in dating violence relationships that were governed by pervasive patriarchal master narratives. The young men were predominantly in control of the dating violence relationships, but this control varied once the relationship approached its end. The young women's obligation to extend emotional support to their male partners was most consistent regardless of the status of the dating violence relationship. The young man's infidelity was the only trigger that resulted in the young woman deciding to leave. Although the young woman also took some control by cheating on the young man to make him leave, this ensured that the control of the relationship partly stayed with the young man. Other factors such as recognition of the dating violence, talking to others or experiencing mental distress did not impact on whether or not a young woman left.

As this thesis approaches conclusion, it is necessary to discuss some of the challenges and then strengths of this doctoral study. The challenges and limitations are presented next.

Challenges and limitations

This research project was approached with a social constructionist and feminist lens. Accessing tacit knowledge and remaining authentic to the meaning-making activity of each young woman were challenges (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). It is impossible for me to judge how thoroughly I was able to access each young woman's tacit knowledge of the world, especially during telephone interviews, where visual cues were missing. Further, it was also impossible for me to completely detach myself from my own world views that have been

constructed over my lifetime and framed by my social and cultural influences. It is thus acknowledged that the knowledge that is presented in this thesis is a culmination of knowledge co-constructed by myself and the young women who participated in the interviews (Burgess-Proctor, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Young women from a variety of backgrounds were recruited into this research project. Young women came from a range of different age groups ranging from 17 years to 25 years, different occupational and educational backgrounds, ethnic subgroups and areas across Australia. However, the majority of the young women were from Melbourne and were university educated, therefore this may have contributed to some bias in the findings. Recruitment could not achieve inclusion of Indigenous young women and young women experiencing significant disadvantage such as homeless young women.

I faced several challenges while undertaking this sensitive qualitative study with the young women. The main challenge I faced in this project was participant recruitment into the study. The response rate to my anonymous screening questionnaire was high with many young women responding that they had experienced abuse and violence in their romantic relationships. However, when the young women were invited via email to take part in an interview, very few were willing to participate. Those who were studying at a university were more likely to respond. Recruiting young women from the University of Melbourne student portal was the most convenient and efficient method of recruitment. It is not entirely clear why the young women at the University of Melbourne were easier to recruit than the young women who responded to my screening questionnaire through other methods. It could be that the students at the University of Melbourne might have had more trust in research run by the university and more trust in myself, a fellow student, compared with the other young women who were not connected to the university. The University of Melbourne students might have also better understood the need to contribute to research, compared with others. As many of the young women identified as feminists, they may have felt emancipated by taking part in the research project focused on young women's relationships and some even commented that they wanted to contribute to research in this area for the greater good of fellow young women who might find themselves in difficult relationships. On a practical level, the project might have been more accessible to young women at the University of Melbourne due to the flexibility of being able to attend interviews confidentially on campus. It is important to note that there was no cost involved to advertise on the University student portal and it is well known that students regularly check the student portal for important notices and announcements. Having no cost

meant the advertisement was left on the student portal for a couple of weeks and advertised more than once.

Advertising via social media was very different. Advertising on Facebook required a short word-limited advertisement and ongoing payment, where the amount paid to Facebook was based on the number of clicks and views on each Facebook advertisement for the project and the project page. While money was a limiting factor when advertising on Facebook there were many responses to the screening questionnaire that came through the advertisements. However only one of these young women ended up taking part in the research project. On Twitter, I created a post about my project and requested contacts on my profile and relevant organisations to share, or 'retweet' my advertisements. While there was no cost associated with posting tweets on Twitter and therefore no limitations on my part, it is unlikely that the tweets would have reached many young people, despite being shared by organisations and prominent personalities that would have been relevant to young people. Instagram is becoming a popular social media platform and is used by young people more often nowadays than Twitter is (Sensis, 2016), but at the time of recruitment, Instagram was not offering paid targeted advertisements to its users like it does now. It is therefore worthwhile considering recruiting young people via Instagram in the future.

The sensitive nature of this research project must be acknowledged when considering the challenges in recruiting young women into this project. While the young women may have been comfortable filling out an anonymous online survey about their experiences of dating violence, they may have not been ready to speak about such personal experiences to a stranger for research purposes. While dating violence research has been shown to be tolerated well by young women (Edwards, Sylaska, & Gidycz, 2014), it is possible that the young women who were interested in the study might have been afraid of re-traumatisation from talking about their experiences. Filling out a paper or online survey creates a distance between the respondent and the researcher and so perhaps feels less personal, than the prospect of speaking directly to someone one-on-one.

While I found telephone interviews to be a strength of this research project, the main limitation I experienced from interviewing participants by telephone was my perceived inability to detect distress early and provide comfort in response to participant distress. This was probably not a significant detriment to the project as my role was that of researcher and not a medical practitioner (Dempsey et al., 2016). Participant-centred rapport-building and listening skills

were actively utilised (Barratt, 2012; Mealer & Jones, 2014) to help with establishing trust and to reduce participants' feelings of being judged, thereby encouraging them to speak freely and truthfully. All young women were provided with a resource card with helpful numbers and websites to contact in case they did experience significant distress.

The young women's narratives were specific to the time and context in which they were telling their stories and hence the same person may have told their stories of dating violence differently to another person at another time and place (Bold, 2012). The participants' judgements and perceptions of me based on my appearance, speech, mannerisms and profession would also have influenced how they presented themselves and their stories on the day of the interview (Josselson, 2013). Recalling experiences and events based on memory alone is often inaccurate hence this was a salient point for me to take into consideration when I embarked upon the narrative interview approach. Further, while the narrative interviews were introduced relatively vaguely without mention of abuse and violence, the young women had obviously completed a screening questionnaire which enquired about their experiences of dating violence, hence this step is likely to have influenced the young women's approach to the interviews.

As many of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, having to organise a mutually convenient time and place to meet that was safe for both the researcher and participant was admittedly challenging most of the time. Most of the interviews required a few back-and-forth emails, rescheduling of interviews, sometimes very last minute, and a couple of phone calls before a time could be set. Some participants did not turn up to the interview and were uncontactable when I tried their mobile phones. Further, while the participants were compensated for their time with a shopping voucher, they usually had to bear the costs of travel and parking to participate. My part-time availability in the department was also a hindrance. Weekend interviews were offered but the commitment to travel and give up social weekend time was not attractive to participants and therefore most interviews took place on weekdays. The interviews were all self-reported, as most methods of research are, therefore it is impossible to know how the narrated stories were different to the young women's actual experiences. It is also impossible to know how the young women's own childhood backgrounds and experiences might have shaped their perceptions of dating violence and their partners.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge my own biases in viewing and interpreting the data from the very beginning of the interview process. Researcher reflexivity was paramount in this piece of research because violence research is known to be emotionally driven and very

personal (Hume, 2007). I acknowledged from the start that my social and political background would influence how I conducted my interviews, how I responded and my interpretation of the data. Remaining reflexive of my interview methods and interview style was a priority for me through memo writing and regular meetings with my supervisors, and this is central to feminist research (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011). The major challenge lay in my conflicting roles as a feminist, a fellow woman with my participants, a medical practitioner and researcher. While my primary role was that of researcher, I struggled often to disconnect from my other roles, especially that of medical practitioner, where my role is focused on motivational interviewing, problem solving and advocating for the patient with a problem. The subtleties of this conflict were noted by my supervisors when they read the first few interviews I conducted and this feedback helped me to modify my interviewing style to remain research focused. I struggled, but successfully managed to not intervene or offer my opinion or advice when participants described situations of abuse and violence that were normalised and minimised. Influenced by my feminist identity, I often had the urge to call out the violence and say that it was wrong but in my role as researcher I had to refrain and gather data that needed to be analysed at a later point. I did have the comfort of knowing that if one of the participants disclosed a life threatening or other serious situation I did have the freedom to exercise my right to break confidentiality and seek help, as outlined in my distress protocol, and all participants were given a resource card. It is necessary for me to debrief about these tensions as these very personal emotions have shaped my data collection and analysis.

Strengths and original contributions to the field of dating violence

The young women who participated had all experienced dating violence relationships perpetrated by young men. This adds depth to the findings as every participant spoke about her own personal experiences rather than hypothesising about experiences of dating violence. Previous Australian studies of dating violence have included a mix of young women with and without experiences of dating violence in their own relationships (Baker, 2003, 2008; Chung, 2007). The young women's experiences of abuse and violence were also unique and diverse. Some young women experienced subtle forms of psychological abuse, some experienced sexual coercion in casual and long-term relationships while one young woman discussed her experiences of being threatened by a gun.

Interviews were minimally structured and conducted in the narrative interviewing method as this method seemed most relevant to my theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and

feminism and the research questions. The narrative interviews were effective in encouraging the young women to talk freely about their experiences and perceptions of dating violence and take more control over the course of the interview. However, it is important to note that the strength of narrative data is not its objectivity or certainty as narratives are based on the participant's own lens and how they interpret and relay their experiences.

At this point it is necessary to reflect on the medium of interviewing. Thirteen of the thirty-five young women were interviewed via the telephone and the remainder face-to-face. While there is some suggestion that telephone interviews allow participants a degree of freedom to express themselves due to anonymity (Mealer & Jones, 2014), I did not find a significant difference in the quality of telephone and face-to-face interviews, as has been described elsewhere (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Both modes of interviews were of comparable duration and the young women seemed to be comfortable discussing their experiences and thoughts with me, although it is impossible to comment on differences in rapport and whether or not those interviewed over the telephone divulged more than those who were not. This is because dating violence is a sensitive topic in itself and almost all of the young women chose to divulge very private and personal stories about themselves and their romantic relationships regardless of the mode of interviewing. The young women who were interviewed by telephone also appreciated the opportunity to participate remotely and according to their convenience. In terms of study strength, telephone interviewing allowed me to access participants living remotely and interstate, thus improving the diversity of my sample.

This thesis makes several original contributions to the topic of men's violence against young women in Australia. This study was original with respect to the methodology and research design, the participants, data collection, analysis and finally the research aims and findings. While there have been previous qualitative studies exploring romantic relationships and dating violence among Australian young women (Baker, 2003, 2008; Chung, 2007), to my knowledge, this is the first time that young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence have been explored among young women from diverse backgrounds across Australia and using a depth narrative approach. Further, unlike in previous studies, all of the participating young women had experienced dating violence in their own relationships, thus contributing to authentic data. The application of social script theory with a feminist lens to better understand dating and dating violence from the Australian young women's perspective was also an original contribution in the Australian context, through the novel use of analytical methods to address the research questions. Qualitative exploration of Australian young women's decisions to stay

in or leave their relationships with dating violence has been undertaken for the first time in the Australian context with development of a model to explain the possible trajectories and outcomes. The concept of master narratives and counterstories to explain the social construction of dating violence and how this could be challenged is also a novel approach to understanding and addressing men's violence against young women in Australia and has important implications for primary prevention of men's violence against women.

Implications

Findings from this study should inform policy and practice around primary and secondary prevention of men's violence against young women. Encouraging health promoters to take the lead in preventing and reducing the health and societal burdens of men's violence against women has been highlighted in Australia (Catford, 2015) and internationally (García-Moreno, Hegarty, et al., 2015). Understanding the pervasive influence of oppressive master narratives demonstrated in this thesis supports a focus on primary prevention activities to change attitudes in society (Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), & VicHealth, 2015). It is crucial to include the topic of men's violence against young women in schools, due to the possible trajectory of dating violence into future relationships and the long-term impacts on health and well-being (Ahmadabadi et al., 2018; Bonomi et al., 2013; Doom et al., 2017; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Taft & Watson, 2007). At a secondary prevention level, asking about dating violence needs to be incorporated routinely into the HEEADSSS assessment, a psychosocial risk screening assessment of young people, when enquiring about peers, sexuality and personal safety, as is already suggested by the authors (Klein, Goldenring, & Adelman, 2014).

Policy that approaches men's violence against women must incorporate the gendered nature of this violence and be informed by feminist principles that carefully and appropriately address the issue (Baker, 2003). Public health policy focusing on addressing men's violence against women alone is not enough, and careful consideration must be given to how interventions can be tailored to be applicable to young women (Wiklund et al., 2010). Thus, considering the power of social scripts in reinforcing these patriarchal social structures grounded in gender inequality is necessary in the consideration of appropriate policy formulation. In Australia the time is right for addressing dating violence and actioning appropriate policy since the momentous work of Rosie Batty, who was appointed as 2015 Australian of the Year for her work in family violence. As a result of Rosie Batty's work, the *Royal Commission into Family*

Violence was established in Victoria in the year 2015 and tabled in Parliament in 2016. The report resulting from this inquiry identified several recommendations to address family violence under the themes of prevention, victim support, perpetrator accountability and governance (Richardson, 2016).

Findings from this study are relevant to informing primary prevention of dating violence and support of young women experiencing dating violence in Australia. Men's violence against women can be prevented by addressing the underlying factors that cause the problem (Politoff et al., 2019). From a feminist standpoint it is necessary to address these underlying gendered societal 'norms' and ways of thinking, therefore existing social and sexual scripts must be challenged. The young women in this study confirmed that Australian young women need to be educated about dating violence awareness and how to recognise violence and this is consistent with current recommendations (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). While significant others were sometimes helpful but at most times a hindrance for the young women in this study, it is known that young women do talk to their friends and family about dating violence (Martin et al., 2012) and therefore it is important to focus prevention efforts on the general public and significant others too. The young women in this study experienced a lack of validation of their concerns from significant others which likely perpetuated the issue. This is a disappointing finding because it appears that not much has changed since previous Australian research published over a decade ago, calling for better education of young women to learn to be more supportive and less judgemental of peers who found themselves in dating violence relationships (Chung, 2007).

In particular, young women need to become aware of the possibility of subconsciously becoming trapped in socially constructed, oppressive fairy tale scripts that thwart their feminist perspectives. Fairy tales set up romantic scripts that trap young women into abusive relationships while other artistic portrayals of men's violence against women normalise and glamorise the abuse and violence (Bonomi et al., 2013; Srdarov & Bourgault du Coudray, 2016). While these stories and media might contribute to perpetuating dating violence, these same fairy tales and media portrayals could be used as educational material to inform prevention, education and counselling of young women (Bonomi et al., 2016; Jackson, 2001) as well as their significant others about abusive relationships. The young women in this study had to provide emotional support to their intimate partners throughout the relationship, regardless of the abuse and regardless of the relationship ending. This is while the relationship was overwhelmingly in the control of the young men. Educating a young woman about the

pressure to conform to social and sexual scripts and then using counterstories, to challenge those scripts could be one step forwards, in improving recognition, naming and responding to dating violence.

Fairy tales and other sources are the permeating master narratives that inform young women's lives. It is important to identify the master narratives that inform social constructions of gender inequality that are paving the way for the normalisation of dating violence. These master narratives must be challenged with counterstories that redefine traditional roles and identities, particularly for young women, so that they form healthier and safer narratives to live by. From a feminist perspective, prominent patriarchal social scripts are incorporated into master narratives with the aim of protecting the existing social order to maintain the positions of those within power (Burr, 2015; Ferguson, 2017). When counterstories challenge existing master narratives and social scripts, those in power will be challenged and thus it is natural to expect resistance when trying to implement change (Burr, 2015). It is crucial then that strong, youth-appropriate influences such as celebrities and the popular media and literature, that are accessible to young people, create strong and lasting counterstories where plots and characters are informed by feminist theoretical principles. Feeling empowered to challenge the fairy tale script might help young women to look beyond the traditional patriarchal relationship scripts and challenge their own views of needing to constantly provide emotional support to abusive partners. This might help a young woman to become aware of the gendered nature of dating and perhaps perceive the abuse and violence as being a valid reason to leave her romantic relationship without the need for a crisis such as infidelity.

In the longer term, incorporating knowledge of social and sexual script theory into education about healthy relationships might aid in prevention of dating violence within young people's relationships. This is an important aspect in considering the design of dating violence interventions because it has been suggested that targeting risk factors for dating violence, such as traditional gendered norms is needed (Jennings et al., 2017). Further using fairy tales and counterstories to illustrate their application to real life adds a practical element to primary prevention. Helping young women to recognise dating violence and then simply advising young women that dating violence is unacceptable is not enough to reduce young women's vulnerability to dating violence (Murphy & Smith, 2010), and this has been demonstrated by the young women in this study. The young women in this study had a good grasp of textbook definitions of dating violence, sometimes sought advice from significant others or professionals and often even recognised the dating violence but none of this was sufficient for the young

women to leave their dating violence relationships. Recognition and naming the dating violence may improve the young women's help-seeking or safety seeking behaviours (Cluss et al., 2006) within the dating violence relationship, when leaving the relationship is not on the cards. The young women must be taught to question who controls the relationship and who provides the emotional support. These aspects of the relationship are heavily gendered and scripted and it might be eye opening for the young women to understand that in abusive relationships it is likely that the young man controls the dating violence relationship until the very end, but there is an opportunity for the young women to take some of this control away. It would also be important for the young women to reflect on their own gendered roles of providing continuous emotional support within these dating violence relationships, with this education extended to their friends.

Primary prevention programmes such as school based educational programmes and public campaigns such as *The Line* which aim to educate young people about gender based IPV would benefit from incorporating counterstories that empower young women. Findings from this study would also be useful to inform public health intervention programmes, including mobile phone applications that are targeted at young women who are considering leaving their relationships. It is known that young women prefer to seek help for their intimate relationships using mobile phones (Tarzia et al., 2017), therefore it would be appropriate to use social script theory to inform the development of these electronic interventions. Further, there has been recent work drawing attention to the need for policy in diverse sectors outside of public health, such as economic and education policies that could incorporate aspects of gender equality which impact on reducing and preventing dating violence (D'Inverno, Kearns, & Reidy, 2018; Niolon et al., 2017). The findings from this study, particularly the knowledge of how dating and dating violence is perceived by young women, have the potential to be useful in guiding such policy from multiple disciplines. More research into dating violence is required though, to investigate how young women can be better supported by healthcare and policy. The following section makes some recommendations for much needed future research in this area.

Recommendations for future research

This research project examined the perceptions of Australian young women who had experienced dating violence in their own relationships. The young women's perceptions of dating and how these impacted on their perceptions of dating violence and their responses were examined. This research project revealed a possible association between sexual forms of dating

violence and naming of the violence. Whether or not inherent recognition and naming of the violence is related to only sexual violence or other types of violence needs to be further investigated, as this information could be relevant to prevention programmes. Future research also needs to explore further why some young women inherently recognised dating violence in their relationships and why others did not.

The theme of male mental illness within a dating violence relationship was recurrent. It appears that many of the young women who were experiencing dating violence from their partners spoke about their boyfriends experiencing some form of mental illness, which was often cited as a valid reason for perpetrating violence. It would be interesting to explore the relationship between male mental illness and perpetration of dating violence in Australia, as this too would be important to inform dating violence prevention programmes and policy that influenced education of young men.

While the decision was made to not conduct internet facilitated interviews for this project following careful consideration, it would be worthwhile exploring other innovative interviewing platforms such as video conferencing and instant messaging to collect data from young women about their relationships. While they pose technical, ethical and safety challenges for sensitive research, the use of internet-based technology was considered a mundane part of the young women's lives and central to communication within romantic relationships (Meenagh, 2015). Therefore, it is worth exploring the role of internet mediated interviews for the positive aspects offered by this medium, including anonymity, familiarity, ease and flexibility of using these platforms. Recruitment from more vulnerable groups of youth might be more successful if young women know that they can anonymously participate in a research project using their private mobile phones, and in their own time, for example.

This research project was conducted among young women who had experienced dating violence in their own relationships. Their perceptions of dating and leaving dating violence relationships were scripted and gendered but it is not clear whether these same scripts apply to young women's relationships who have never experienced dating violence. Therefore, it is also worth examining the social scripts of young women who have never experienced dating violence to compare if they enter, progress and exit dating relationships in the same way as the young women in this study. Findings may reveal a protective social script and master narratives that could be used to tackle dating violence scripts. This would pose a significant recruitment

challenge, however, as most young women do not always recognise when they are experiencing dating violence.

From a broader feminist perspective, research into men's violence against women needs to involve more men, particularly young men. Conducting research with the young women about their experiences of dating violence was essential, in this project, to make the young women's voices heard and to further understand the issues from their perspective. However, excluding young men from research into dating violence risks rendering dating violence a problem that only concerns young women (Kleinman, 2007), and thus passively gives young men permission to tune out and even exacerbates the problem (Hall and Partners Open Mind, 2015). Therefore, addressing dating violence with young men who perpetrate dating violence is necessary and should be considered in future research projects.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine Australian young women's perceptions of dating and dating violence. The thirty-five Australian young women who participated in this study shared their powerful, personal stories of dating and dating violence. The Australian young women in this study perceived dating and other romantic relationships to be deeply gendered and socially scripted, with a power and control imbalance heavily favouring young men. Their dating violence relationship scripts were governed by powerful and pervasive master narratives and thus dating violence behaviours were minimised and normalised. The young women's own feminist identities were in conflict with their desire for idealistic fairy tale scripts that they were married to, and thus the young women were unable to apply a feminist lens to their own relationships.

The young women perceived themselves as being in love with young men who needed them to care for and serve them. The young women hoped that love would triumph and that one day the beast or frog might turn into a handsome young prince, with whom they could live happily ever after. The young women became trapped within a shared identity with their boyfriends, which impacted on their abilities to recognise and make sense of dating violence. These patriarchal social scripts and the young women's beliefs were perpetuated by the influence of media where dating violence is normalised, glamorised and made to appear desirable.

Minimising and normalising dating violence was also reinforced by the young women's friends and family members, thus leaving young women to feel invalidated about their experiences and learning to accept the violence as an expected and acceptable social norm. Staying in abusive relationships was often easier and sometimes seen as the right thing to do because it is easier to avoid conflict and hope that the violence will improve. Feeling love and attachment for the partner and an obligation to look after him sometimes made the young women feel empowered, as opposed to identifying with a victim identity. The young man and his abusive behaviours were often perceived by the young woman as childish and therefore the need for him to be looked after was reinforced. This in turn made abandoning the young man feel selfish and irresponsible.

Leaving a dating violence relationship was challenging due to these powerful social scripts that kept young women attached to a fairy tale ideal within their dating violence relationships. Dating violence, even when recognised was almost never the reason for a young woman deciding to leave her relationship. Other more powerful factors kept the young women in their dating violence relationships. Leaving would also mean that the young woman was likely to be worse off due to social isolation. The dating violence relationships usually ended if there was a crisis or if the young man left and an exit model was formed to illustrate how young women's dating violence relationships ended. The most common reason that resulted in the end of a relationship was if the young man left, thus highlighting the clearly dominant, controlling roles that the young men adopted until the very end. The young woman would only feel justified in leaving the relationship if the young man cheated on her, as the dating violence itself was not perceived to be a good enough reason to leave. Another turning point was the situation of the young woman deliberately cheating on her partner and informing him of the infidelity to encourage him to end the relationship, thus carefully ensuring that the control of the relationship remained with him. This illustrates how the young women ensured that they never breached the constraints of socially constructed gendered dating scripts. The young women would continue serving the young men by offering emotional support following separation and this would usually taper off with time in a gradual manner.

The concept of gendered social scripts influencing young people's romantic relationships need to be incorporated into education and intervention programmes targeting dating violence. Studies of intervention programmes to date have not shown any evidence of them having a significant impact on attitudes, behaviours or skills related to reducing dating violence (Fellmeth, Heffernan, Nurse, Habibula, & Sethi, 2013). Primary prevention of dating violence,

school-based education and intervention programmes and campaigns such as *Change the Story* and *The Line* would need to educate young people about the pervasive nature of gendered social scripts that govern romantic relationships, and thus target and challenge these scripts through effective counterstories. Training of community health professionals such as school nurses, psychologists and general practitioners in the community who are involved in the front line of dealing with dating violence and their sequelae also needs to include education on the influence of gendered social scripts influencing dating violence.

Because social scripts are pervasive in our day-to-day lives, we are often unaware of their influence on our perceptions and behaviours. Unless young women become aware of the presence and power of gendered social scripts and the master narratives that inform them, they may not recognise the gendered nature of dating and dating violence. These oppressive social scripts that keep young women in abusive dating relationships are informed by patriarchal master narratives that are so pervasive in our culture that we subconsciously live by them and fail to pay attention to the contexts within which they are relevant. These master narratives need to be challenged with counterstories using a feminist lens, that are then used to inform programs in primary prevention of dating violence. Such programs should focus on rebuilding identities of empowerment for young women and working on increasing their agency to resist and stand up against oppressive social scripts that govern dating relationships.

Epilogue

Undertaking this PhD has been a personal journey for me that has helped me grow as a person, a researcher and a medical practitioner. My identity has evolved as a feminist and even more so after becoming mother to my daughter in the last three years. This journey and the findings from this research project have made me wonder about how much more work there is to do before my daughter's generation enters adolescence. Over the last six years my knowledge pertaining to dating violence and family violence has improved significantly, as has my confidence in navigating situations where I need to provide advice, both in personal and professional settings. Through this PhD research project and related activities, such as training health practitioners and medical students on identifying and responding to men's violence against women, my clinical practice has been significantly impacted. I have become a better, more empathic doctor; more confident in asking sensitive questions and knowing what I could do to respond to disclosures of violence and to keep my patients safe. I am better informed about intimate partner violence and women's responses and behaviours within these toxic relationships and the external influences on these responses and behaviours. I routinely ask about dating violence to my young patients and this is consistent with the recommendations to ask about dating violence routinely as part of the HEEADSSS psychosocial risk assessment of young women (Klein et al., 2014). Dating violence should also be asked about when there are red flags for dating violence, such as mental health concerns, chronic pain, unexplained medical symptoms or multiple problems with reproductive health (World Health Organization., 2013).

While there is limited evidence on how we could best respond to disclosures of dating violence from young women in the clinical setting, the young women in this study spoke about struggling to recognise the dating violence due to lack of experience with relationships and then feeling invalidated by significant others. They did appreciate when someone else called out the violence and thus it would be appropriate for a general practitioner or other youth health practitioner to help the young woman to feel validated and confirm that the young man's perpetration of dating violence is wrong. While this may not necessarily help the young women to leave their dating violence relationships, it may help them to stay connected to the help-seeking process and thus to feel supported and know where to seek further help if the dating violence escalated. While there is a real need to understand how best to respond to young women's disclosure of dating violence, the WHO's recommendations for the health sector

response to adult women subjected to IPV or sexual violence can be incorporated into clinical practice with young women until further evidence arises. This comprises the LIVES model, which includes to listen, enquire about the woman's needs and concerns, validate her, enhance safety and offer support and appropriate referrals (World Health Organization, 2014). There are further recommendations for the health sector on how to respond to men's violence against women, and these might also be helpful in some cases of dating violence (García-Moreno, Hegarty, et al., 2015). This approach has worked well for me in my clinical practice thus far as I continue to support young women impacted by men's violence. In addition to the LIVES approach to enhance young women's safety and support networks, it may be worth challenging young women's perspectives of romantic relationships by encouraging them to consider two questions: who is responsible for providing emotional support within the dating violence relationship? And who is in control of the relationship? The purpose of asking the questions would be to stimulate the young women to think about the scripted and gendered roles that the young women and young men conform to in these relationships and how these social scripts are tying them down to abusive and unhealthy relationships and preventing them from leaving.

In conclusion, I started this thesis motivated by my passion to work towards youth health and ending men's violence against women. Through this PhD journey this motivation to be committed to young people's health and ending men's violence against women has continued all the way to the end. I will forever be grateful to have undertaken this PhD journey with thirty-five generous and brave young women who shared their most intimate and personal stories of abuse and violence with me and contributed to the construction of knowledge that has culminated in this thesis. These young women have shed further light onto my own clinical practice, and I look forward to sharing this important knowledge through publications and presentations to further inform prevention and policy pertaining to men's violence against women.

APPENDIX

Attachment 1: Initial Telephone Invitation to participate in the research

This guide provides a telephone script for the research student, Deepthi Iyer to contact those young women who have been in the PARTY or Link project database or referred by a friend.*

Introduction

Hello, my name is Deepthi and I am calling from the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne. I am calling to speak to [participant's name]. Is he/she** available?

If the potential participant does not answer the phone and caller is asked to identify themselves:

I am a Researcher calling from the University of Melbourne about a project.

If potential participant is not available: Is there another time I can call back? [make notes]

*If potential participant is available: May I speak to him/her**?*

When potential participant is on the phone:

Hello, my name is Deepthi and I am calling from the University of Melbourne.

Establish Safety:

Can you please confirm your name and date of birth to double check who I am speaking with?

We got your contact details from an earlier project at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne called [PARTY or Link] OR the student portal Is this a good time for you to talk for a few minutes? If not that's completely fine and I can call back at a time that suits you if that is alright with you.

OR If young woman is a snowball sample participant:

Thank you for getting in touch with me. Is this a good time for you to talk for a few minutes? If not that's completely fine and I can call back at a time that suits you if that is alright with you.

If Yes: Go to next section.

If No: When would you like me to call you back? *[make notes]* Excellent I'll call then. Thank you.

Brief explanation of study

I wanted to talk to you about a project in our Department. I am a General Practitioner and I am working with A/Prof Lena Sancu, [the GP who leads the PARTY project and Link project], and a few other experienced researchers, Prof Kelsey Hegarty and Dr Victoria Palmer and I am undertaking a study about young people's views on dating, difficult relationships/experiences and help-seeking for difficult relationships/experiences. I am calling to see if you would have any interest in receiving some information about the project.

We are asking young people who said they were happy to be contacted in future, to come forward for an individual and confidential interview with myself. We will interview up to 40 young women. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or over the telephone depending on your age and location.

The purpose of this study is to understand young peoples' views on dating experiences, difficulties in dating relationships/experiences and help-seeking for difficult relationships/experiences. Young women will be asked to share their own personal experiences of dating, difficult relationships/experiences and how they dealt with problems if they are comfortable to do so. Alternatively, you may share other stories that you may have heard of. The study is completely voluntary and you are able to decline taking part at any time or withdraw from the study at any point without any disadvantage to you. If that sounds interesting to you are you happy for me to continue?

If Yes: *Go to next section*

If No: Could I call you another day and time to explain the project more? *[make notes]* Thank you for your time. Good bye.

Contact details *[ask and make notes]*

In the project materials there is some sensitive information about feeling afraid of partners. Are you happy for this material to be sent to the contact details you have provided? You have a number of options and you can choose the one that suits you best.

We can send you the information to your email or we can post the information to a house address that is private and safe for you. If you opt for a face-to-face interview I can give you the written information about the project when you meet me. I can also read out further information about the project for you right now if you wish.

Which do you prefer?

If participant wants to hear the PLS over the phone, the “explanation telephone script” (attachment 4) will be used at this point.

Would you like the materials posted to you? What address is private and safe for you?

☐ Safe address

Would you simply like me to explain the project over the phone? If you choose this option you can read more about the project again when you meet me during a face-to-face interview or via email before giving your written consent or permission for the interview.

☐ Telephone and time

Which email address would you like the materials emailed to you?

☐ Safe email

My email address is iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au if you would like to talk to me more about the project. Are there particular times of the day I should not call you?"

If Yes: record details

Have you got any other questions before I go?

Thank you for your time and interest. Good bye.

* PARTY (Prevention And Risk Taking in Young people) was a cluster randomized controlled trial run by my supervisor Prof Lena Sanci (Sanci et al., 2015). Recruitment was planned through this database but ultimately did not go ahead after the project paperwork was finalized.

** He and Him are redundant in this study.

Attachment 2: Invitation Letter/Email

Hi,

My name is Deepthi Iyer. I wanted to thank you for considering taking part in this project. The project you have been invited to participate in is to understand Australian young women's views on dating, difficult dating experiences and help-seeking for difficult dating experiences.

The project is based at the Department of General Practice at The University of Melbourne and involves a team of researchers – Prof Kelsey Hegarty and A/Prof Lena Sanci who are senior researchers and general practitioners, Dr Victoria Palmer, an expert qualitative researcher, and myself, a PhD student and practising general practitioner. We are inviting up to 40 young women aged 16 to 25 years who have expressed some interest in taking part in this research. The project involves an individual, private and confidential interview with me and would take between 30 and 120 minutes depending on how much you have to say. Interviews may be conducted face-to-face or over the telephone depending on your age and where you live. With your permission the face-to-face or telephone interviews would be audio-recorded.

You are invited to read the enclosed information about the study to help you make a decision about whether to participate or not. You *may* be invited to take part in an additional interview to follow up on the first interview. Your participation is completely voluntary and you would be free to withdraw at any time. Upon completion of each interview you will be compensated for your time with a \$30 shopping voucher. If you are invited and agree to participate in a second interview, you will be compensated with another \$30 shopping voucher. This will be given to you immediately at the completion of the face-to-face interview and posted to a safe address that you choose, following completion of the telephone interview.

I will follow up with you in the next week to hear the outcome of your decision. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns about this project, please don't hesitate to contact me on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au.

With kind regards,

Dr Deepthi Iyer

PhD Candidate and General Practitioner

Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne

200 Berkeley Street, Carlton VIC 3053

T (+61) 03 9035 5018

F (+61) 03 9347 6136

Attachment 3: Plain language statement (PLS)

Study Aim: *To understand how Australian young women perceive dating, difficult dating experiences, and help-seeking for difficult dating experiences.*

Researchers: *Dr Deepthi Iyer (PhD Student and General Practitioner), A/Prof Lena Sanci, Dr Victoria Palmer, Prof Kelsey Hegarty.*

Research Centre: *Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.*

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read about the dating experiences study.

Many young people in Australia are involved in dating experiences and while dating experiences and relationships are a healthy and normal part of development, about 1 in 3 young people have negative experiences in their relationships that are often unreported.

As part of this study we wish to interview young women aged 16-25 years who have experienced fear of a partner/girlfriend/boyfriend in a dating relationship. We want to understand young women's views on dating, difficult dating relationships/experiences and seeking help for difficult dating relationships/experiences.

The information we get from this study will be used to inform a better public health response for young people experiencing difficulties in their dating experiences. This study forms part of a doctoral research project and the student (Deepthi Iyer) is also a practising general practitioner.

What am I being asked to do?

We are inviting up to 40 young women like you aged 16-25 years to become involved in this study. It involves being interviewed one-on-one by the female researcher, Deepthi. You will be invited to talk about your own views and experiences on dating, difficult dating experiences or relationships and help-seeking. You may decide not to speak about your own personal experiences if you are not comfortable. If you are under 18 years of age at the time of the interview, you will be invited to take part in a face-to-face interview. If you are aged 18 years or over at the time of the interview, you will be offered either a face-to-face or telephone interview.

For face-to-face interviews, we could interview you at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne or somewhere that you choose is convenient and safe for you.

Telephone interviews can be conducted via a telephone number that you choose to be called on.

Interviews could take anything between 30 minutes to 120 minutes depending on how much you have to share. All interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission. You may decline to be audio-recorded at any time, including before, during or after the interview.

Once the interview is complete, we will offer you a \$30 gift voucher to compensate for your time. You may also be invited to take part in a second interview if the researchers are interested in exploring your interview a bit further, but you are free to decline at any point. If you are invited and you go on to participate in a second interview, you will receive a further \$30 gift voucher at the completion of the interview. We will require a safe and valid postal address to post the voucher to if you participate in a telephone interview. If you participate in a face-to-face interview, you will receive your voucher immediately at the conclusion of the interview.

The interview recording would be transcribed onto paper and we would then send you a copy of the transcript if you choose to receive it, to ensure it accurately represents your views and then you would return it to us. You will get the opportunity to choose whether or not you want to receive this document and how you would like to receive it, on the informed consent form.

What happens if I want to withdraw from the project?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you would be free to withdraw at any time. If you choose not to participate in this project it will not have any impact on participation in other research projects, the care you receive from your local doctor or anything else. If requested, we would destroy any of your interview material that has not already been analysed.

Do I need permission from my parent/guardian to participate?

If you are aged below 18 years of age at the time of enrolling into this study, we encourage you to get your parent/guardian's consent to allow you to participate. The informed consent form has a section for the parent/guardian to sign. However parental permission to participate in this research project is not compulsory.

However if you are not comfortable seeking permission from a parent or guardian, then the researcher, Deepthi Iyer, will talk to you on the phone and ask you a few questions about your understanding of this project. If Deepthi is satisfied that you might be suitable to participate, you will be invited to a face-to-face interview. When you arrive for the interview, Deepthi will

check your understanding of the project again. If she feels that you do not fully understand the purpose of the project and the interview, we may not proceed with the interview. If when you present to the interview you show that you understand the project well, we will proceed with the interview.

These steps are to make sure that the researchers of this project follow the official guidelines for researching with people less than 18 years old, set by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

How did you get my details?

Your details were passed onto us via one of the following:

1. You provided your contact details to a previous project you participated in, such as PARTY or Link;
2. You have contacted us directly after hearing about our project from a friend,
3. You have responded to an online advertisement or survey monkey link on the University of Melbourne student portal or social media channels such as Facebook.
4. You have responded to an advertisement through an organisation supporting this project such as Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre.

All young people invited into this study were identified as being at least 16 years of age and consented to being contacted by the researchers of this dating experiences project. Any new information provided to this study is entirely confidential and is kept completely separate from any previous studies you may have participated in. No person from outside the research team for this particular study has any access to your information. Participation in this project will in no way affect your participation in previous or future projects and it will not affect your medical care or involve your General Practitioner in any way.

How will this project affect me?

Protecting the well-being of the young people in this project is our main concern. The interview questions will focus on your views on difficult dating experiences/relationships and help-seeking for them. You will be invited to share your personal experiences if you feel comfortable to do so.

We acknowledge that participating in this project may raise sensitive issues for you. If you agree to be interviewed and then find you are distressed during the interview, we ask that you let the interviewer know straight away. You will be free to take a break during the interview at any time you wish and the audio-recorder and/or the interview can be stopped at any time. Changing your decision to participate is completely acceptable at anytime.

You are free to discuss issues in confidence with the interviewer, who will be glad to listen and put you in touch with another person or organization that can offer you more specific advice and assistance. The interview itself is not designed to be for treatment. This project is independent to the general practice you attend and will not influence the medical care you receive.

At the end of the interview you will receive a resource sheet that will include a list of helpful phone numbers and websites that you can contact if you have questions or concerns about your health or if you wish to discuss your experiences with someone.

How will my privacy be protected?

Every effort will be made to protect your privacy. The information you provide to us will be treated as **confidential** subject to legal requirements (e.g. requests from court) and only the team involved in the dating experiences project will have access to your information. All information you share with us is kept secure – either in locked storage or on a password-protected electronic system to which only the 4 members of the research team have access at the Department of General Practice. All contact information that we have for you would be stored separately from your interview record and any names mentioned during the interview including your own name would be replaced with false names. Information from the interviews will be kept confidential subject to legal requirements and stored in accordance with The University of Melbourne guidelines for conducting research. The research data and records will be kept for at least 5 years after publication, or public release, of the work of the research. It will then be destroyed according to University guidelines. No individuals will be identified in the publications arising from this work.

Most face-to-face interviews will take place at the University of Melbourne, but if you choose to be interviewed at home, the researcher who interviews you will need to share her location with her research supervisor. This is done in order to follow the guidelines of researcher safety outlined in the ethics application for this project.

If you are being interviewed over the telephone, we suggest that you select a quiet, safe and private location to be interviewed, where there will be minimal interruptions. You will need to be mindful that what you share with the researcher over the phone will not be accessible to anyone that you might be afraid of. This is to protect your own privacy and keep your

information confidential. If a parent, guardian or any other person contacts the researchers and asks about the project and/or your involvement in this project, no information will be provided to them without your consent.

The only other situations where confidentiality may need to be broken are if you tell the researcher that you are in serious danger of harming yourself, harming someone else or if there is danger to a child at home. In these situations the researcher will first discuss the situation with you and then may facilitate contact with necessary sources of help. In the case of danger towards a child or any young person under the age of 18 years, relevant authorities such as the Department of Human Services and police may be notified. If you are aged less than 18 years of age and you tell the researcher that you are in danger of serious harm, the researcher has a duty of care to seek further advice from her research supervisors and Child Protection services. However the researcher will have a discussion with you prior to anyone being contacted.

Who is on the project team?

This project is being conducted by a team of four researchers who are listed at the top of this statement. Deepthi Iyer, the PhD student, will be responsible for inviting young people into this study and coordinating and conducting the interviews. She is a general practitioner and researcher who is experienced in talking to young people about difficult issues in their lives. Her supervisors include Professor Kelsey Hegarty and A/Prof Lena Sanci who are general practitioners and researchers, and Dr Victoria Palmer, another expert researcher. The team members share a common interest in improving the health and well-being of young people.

The project is based at the Department of General Practice at The University of Melbourne. The PhD student, Deepthi, is funded by the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre and the Windermere Foundation. This project has been granted ethics approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne, HREC 1544130.1.

How do I find out the results of this project?

A report of the results will be sent to you by mail or email at the end of the project if you chose to receive it. Details of opting in or out of this are on the Informed consent form. You may contact Deepthi via email if you are worried that you have not received the results.

Who can I talk to about this project?

If you have any concerns about this project or would like further information please contact Deepthi on (03) 9035 5018 or email her on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au . We have enclosed a resource sheet in case participating in this project raises sensitive issues that you would like

to discuss further. The card lists a number of agencies that you may contact for support, or you could contact your local GP or psychologist. If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of this project please contact the Manager Human Research Ethics, Melbourne Research and Innovation Office, The University of Melbourne on (03) 8344 2073 or fax (03) 9347 6739.

**We hope that you will consider sharing your views
and experiences with us.**

Attachment 4: Explanation Telephone Script

This guide provides a telephone script for DI to be used for any young person who has expressed interest in receiving information (similar to the plain language statement) about the difficult dating experiences study OVER THE PHONE. See additional Attachment 5 for conversation with young people aged under 18 years, who will have to undertake an initial telephone assessment to assess their maturity to participate in this project.

□ Introduction

Hello, my name is Deepthi. I am calling to speak to [name]. Is he/she available?

If No: Is there another time I can call back? [make notes]

If the young person does not answer the phone and caller is asked to identify themselves:

I am a Researcher calling from the University of Melbourne about a project.

If Yes: May I speak to him/her?

When potential participant is on the phone:

Hello, my name is Deepthi and I am calling from the University of Melbourne.

□ Establish Safety

Is this a good time for you to talk for a few minutes? Are you okay to talk to now? (Apply risk assessment as appropriate)

If Yes: Go to next section.

If No: When would you like me to call you back? [make notes] Excellent I'll call then. Thank you.

□ **Background of study**

I am calling to follow up on your interest in taking part in our study on help-seeking in difficult dating experiences or relationships. If you are still interested I can tell you a bit more about the study.

Many young people in Australia are involved in dating or relationships and while adolescent dating experiences and relationships are healthy and a normal part of development, about 1 in 3 young people have negative experiences and many go unreported.

As part of this study we are inviting young people aged 16-25 years to take part in the study, if they have contacted us via a friend, via an internet advertisement or via a previous research project they have participated in. We invite you to help us understand young women's views on dating experiences, relationships, difficult dating experiences/relationships and your experience with help-seeking for difficult experiences/relationships.

The information we get from this study will help us to better understand difficult dating experiences from young women's perspectives, and therefore inform an effective public health response to help young people experiencing difficult relationships with their intimate partners. Remember that you are allowed to decline taking part in this study or withdraw from the study at any time if you are not comfortable taking part and this will not place you at any disadvantage. Your decision to participate in this project or not, does not affect your participation in other research projects and doesn't impact the care you receive from your local doctor.

May I continue?

If Yes: Go to next section

If No: Could I call you another day and time to explain the project more? [make notes] Thank you for your time. Would you like me to send you some resources that help young people who have had difficulties in dating relationships or experiences? Good bye.

□ **What is involved**

I'd like to tell you what involvement in the study means. We are inviting young women like yourself aged 16-25 years to become involved in this study. It involves being interviewed one-on-one by the female researcher, Deepthi. You will be asked to talk about your views on dating, difficult relationships or dating experiences and help-seeking. You will be invited to speak about your own personal experiences if you are comfortable. Interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone. Interviews could take anything between 30 minutes to 120 minutes depending on the mode of interview and how much you have to share.

Telephone and face-to-face interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission. Recorded interviews would then be transcribed onto paper and we would then send you a copy of the document if you would like, to ensure it accurately represents your views, which you could then return to us. You will get the opportunity to choose whether or not you want to receive this document and how you would like to receive it, on the informed consent form.

Once the interview is complete, we will offer you a \$30 gift voucher to compensate for your time. We will require a safe and valid postal address to post the voucher if you choose a telephone interview. If you participate in a face-to-face interview, you will receive your voucher immediately at the conclusion of the interview.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you would be free to withdraw at any time. If you choose not to participate in this project it will not have any impact on the care you receive by your GP or anything else. If requested, we would destroy any of your interview material that has not already been analysed. For face-to-face interviews, we could interview you at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne or somewhere else that you choose is convenient, private and safe for you. Telephone interviews can be conducted via a telephone number you choose and on a date and time that is suitable to you.

Do you think you would be interested in being interviewed?

If Yes: Go to next section.

If No: Thank the caller and discontinue. Would you like me to send you some resources that help young people who have had difficulties?

☐ **Distress during interviews**

Protecting the wellbeing of the young women in this project is our main concern. However, participating in this project may raise sensitive issues for you. If you agree to be interviewed and then find you are distressed during the interview, we ask that you let the interviewer know straight away. The audio-recorder and/or the interview can be stopped at any time, and changing your decision to participate is completely acceptable at anytime. You are free to discuss issues in confidence with the interviewer, who will be glad to listen and put you in touch with another person or organization that can offer you more specific advice and assistance. This project is independent to the general practice you attend and will not influence the medical care you receive. However you are free to express whatever you feel comfortable with.

Do you still think you would be interested in being interviewed?

If Yes: Go to next section.

If No: Thank the caller and discontinue. Would you like me to send you some resources that help young people who have had difficulties?

☐ **Arrange interview [ask and make notes]**

We can go through what's involved in more detail before the interview when we meet face to face, or over the telephone, and remember that your participation is voluntary and you can change your mind at any time. For now, let's decide on a date, time and where/how you would like to be interviewed.

Record information on interview details.

☐ **Method of interview (F2F or telephone)**

☐ **Date and time of interview**

☐ **Location of interview (if F2F)**

☐ **Wrap up call**

I am looking forward to meeting/talking to you. In the meantime if you have any questions or queries about the project you can call me on (03) 9035 9714 or send me an email (iyerd@ustudent.unimelb.edu.au). Do you have any questions before I go?

Thank you, good bye

Attachment 5: Telephone conversation with mature minor

This guide provides a telephone script for the research student, Deepthi Iyer, to assess a minor over the phone.

Introduction

Hello, my name is Deepthi from the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne. I am calling to speak to [participant's name]. Is she available?

If the potential participant does not answer the phone and caller is asked to identify themselves:

I am a Researcher calling from the University of Melbourne about a project.

If potential participant is not available: Is there another time I can call back? [make notes]

If potential participant is available: May I speak to her?

When potential participant is on the phone:

Hello, my name is Deepthi and I am calling from the University of Melbourne.

Establish Safety

Thank you for contacting me regarding your interest in our project on dating experiences. Is this a good time for you to talk privately for a few minutes? If not that's completely fine and I can call back at a time that suits you if that is alright with you.

If Yes: Go to next section.

If No: When would you like me to call you back? [make notes] Excellent I'll call then.

Thank you.

Brief explanation of study

I wanted to talk to you about the dating experiences project in our Department. I am a General Practitioner and PhD student and am working with my supervisors, Lena Sanci, Victoria Palmer and Kelsey Hegarty at the University of Melbourne undertaking a study about young

people's dating experiences and seeking help for problems in the relationships. Did you get a chance to read through the plain language statement?

If no:

Then would you like to have a read of it and then we can chat later? Or alternatively I can go through it with you on the phone now and then we can talk about your understanding of it. **(If young woman opts to hear the plain language statement over the phone, then researcher will revert to Attachment 4. If the young woman says she would like to have a read of the PLS first, the telephone assessment for her mature minor status will be postponed and rescheduled).**

If yes:

OK great. Thanks for going through the plain language statement in your own time.

In your correspondence with me you had said that you are not keen to get permission from a parent/guardian to take part in this research project. Has that changed at all?

If the young person says they are now happy to get consent from their parent/guardian:

OK great! In that case I don't need to ask you too many questions about the project right now. Now I can email you to make a time to meet for the interview. We could probably chat when we meet for the interview then. Do you have any questions to ask me before I go? [If no, then I will thank them and hang up]

If the young person says they are still not keen to get permission from their parent/guardian:

OK that's fine. According to the NHMRC guidelines, we as researchers have to make sure that anyone under the age of 18 years is properly assessed to make sure that they understand what is involved in the research project. Are you happy for me to ask you a few questions about your understanding of the project? If you need to clarify anything feel free to interrupt and ask me as many questions as you like. At the end of the set of questions I will let you know if I feel that you would be suitable for the research project, is that OK?

If young person is happy to be asked about her understanding of the project, the researcher will go through Step 1 of the mature minor assessment, which is outlined in Table 3 (World Health Organization, 2016). The researcher will go through all 5 sections of the table while making comments on the right hand column about the young woman's answers. At the end of the

assessment, the researcher will make a decision as to whether or not the minor should proceed to the face-to-face.

If participant passed Step 1 of the mature minor assessment:

Thanks so much for being patient with all those questions. I am pleased to say that I think you would be suitable to proceed to the face-to-face interview. Before we start the interview I will clarify that you understand the project well and we can go through any more questions that you may have. Are you happy for me to email you again to make a time for the project interview?

If participant did not pass Step 1 of the mature minor assessment:

Thanks so much for being patient with all those questions. Unfortunately, following this assessment I think that you might not be the right person to take part in this project. Therefore, I do not think you would be suitable to take part in this research project.

My email address is iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au if you would like to reach me for more information about the project. In the meantime I will contact you via the details that you have given us today. Does this sound alright? Are there particular times of the day I should not call you?"

Attachment 6: Informed consent form

Study Aim: *To understand how Australian young women perceive dating, difficult dating experiences or relationships, and help-seeking for difficult experiences/relationships.*

Researchers: *Dr Deepthi Iyer (PhD Student and General Practitioner), A/Prof Lena Sanci, Dr Victoria Palmer, Prof Kelsey Hegarty.*

Research Centre: *Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.*

Name of participant *(Please print):*

1. I consent to voluntarily participate in this project.

This involves:

Participating in an interview about young women's views on dating experiences, difficult dating relationships/experiences and seeking help for such experiences. I understand that the interview will be face-to-face or via telephone and take between 30 and 120 minutes. I understand that interviews will be audio-recorded. A copy of the transcript of the interview will be made available to me for checking if I wish and will be sent to a safe postal or email address of my choice.

This has been explained to me. A written copy of this information has been given to me via email or in person, to keep.

2. I acknowledge that:

- a) I have been informed that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I am free to take a break or stop the interview at any time, withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed information previously supplied. I understand that withdrawal from the project at any point will not disadvantage me in any way. I understand that taking part in this research project will not affect my participation in previous research projects or care from my local doctor.
- b) The project is for the purpose of research and not for treatment.
- c) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements, e.g. requests from court.

- d) I understand that confidentiality may not be maintained if I disclose to the researcher information of significant danger to myself, others or children at home. In the case of danger towards a child, relevant authorities such as the Department of Human Services and police may be notified.
- e) The information that I provide may be used in future publications and that alternative false names will be used to ensure that no individual data is identified.
- f) I have been informed that my medical care will in no way be affected by my decision to participate in this project and that my GP is unaware of my decision to participate or not.
- g) I understand that this form must be completed, signed and reach the researcher either face-to-face, via email (iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au) or fax (Attn: Deepthi Iyer, Fax number: +61 3 9347 6136) prior to commencing the interview. Once signed and returned, this consent form will be retained by the researcher.
- h) For participants under 18 years: I understand that I am being asked for my parent or guardian's signature on this consent form to participate in this research project.
- i) For participants under 18 years: If I do not wish to seek my parent or guardian's permission, I can let the researcher know and the researcher will take me through a 2 step process to check if I understand the project. The researcher will talk to me on the phone to check if I understand the project and then go through my understanding of the project again before the face-to-face interview starts.
- j) I have the option of receiving a written transcript of this interview and I will provide a safe postal or email address to receive any further communication.
- k) If I choose to participate in a telephone interview, I must be aged 18 years or over.
- l) If I choose to participate in a telephone interview, I understand that I must provide a valid and safe postal address so that a \$30 gift voucher can be posted to me following completion of the interview.

I would like to receive:

☐ my interview transcript to verify and send back to the researcher

☐ A final summary report of the project

I prefer communication by:

☐ Post

☐ Email

Please provide a safe postal or email address below that we can send the requested information to:

Please provide a safe and valid postal address if you need the gift voucher to be posted to you:

☐ I am willing to ask my friends to contact the researcher if they are interested in the project. You can send me a reminder via Email.

Please provide a safe email address:

Signature of participant:

Date:

Signature of parent or guardian (if participant aged under 18 years):

Date:

Attachment 7: Interview guide

Preamble: Many young people in Australia are involved in dating relationships. Many of them may be uncomfortable or have experiences such as fear in such relationships but perhaps don't know if this is normal or acceptable. Further, they may not know what to do about it or where they should go for help.

I am interested in hearing about dating, what it means to you and any help you might have sought for a difficult relationship.

- 1. Can you tell me what “dating” means to you?**
 - a. Tell me about any of your dating/relationships/experiences if you feel comfortable to.**

(Interviewer to summarise and clarify participant's views¹)

- 2. Tell me what makes an intimate relationship bad/unhealthy/difficult? You may use examples if you wish.**
 - a. How and when did you know that your relationship was not going so well? You may use your personal stories or other examples if you feel comfortable.**

(Interviewer to summarise and clarify participant's views¹)

- 3. Tell me about the time(s) you tried to seek help for your relationship.**
 - a. What was going through your mind when you thought of seeking help?**
 - b. What, if any, is the role of technology in these situations?**

(Interviewer to summarise and clarify participant's views¹)

¹ *Does this summary capture all the main points you have said? Please correct me if I have missed or misunderstood anything that you have said.*

Attachment 8: Distress and disclosure protocol

This is the protocol for the study exploring ‘dating violence, help-seeking and the role of technology: perceptions among Australian young women’ that outlines our response if young women participating in the study are distressed at any stage during recruitment, the interview or thereafter as a result of participating in the study and/or if they disclose current abuse or imminent risk of harm.

- Before starting each interview, Deepthi will indicate that the interview may be interrupted or concluded at any time should the young person not wish to continue (e.g. to have a break, if the participant is distressed, or for any reason does not want to go on completing the interview. The informed consent form will be talked through and the exceptions to breaking confidentiality will be explained.
- DI will also explain that sometimes talking about personal experiences in a research project may mean that the person would like to talk further about some of the issues raised, either with the researcher or with someone else afterwards. A resource sheet (Attachment 10) containing important helpline phone numbers and websites will be provided to all participants at the beginning of each interview or prior to the interview via email for those participating in telephone interviews.
- If a participant should become distressed, Deepthi will inform her that the research process has been suspended and that she will use her professional skills to alleviate any distress and assist them to contact other support if they wish. This will include:
 - Listening empathetically to each participant’s account of how she is feeling and what issues she is concerned about
 - Determining what the young person identifies as the reason for the distress, an opportunity to express these feelings as they feel comfortable to do so, attending to practical matters e.g. tissues, comfort items, leaving the interview space etc., assisting her to gain a sense of control over self and environment, planning for support and follow-up e.g. resource material and/or counselling options. This would include a thorough risk-assessment (Attachment 9) which Deepthi is trained to do as a General Practitioner. Asking if the participant finds their GP or other health professional supportive and if the young woman is able to discuss any physical or emotional health issues with. Deepthi will encourage the young woman to speak with them; if not, she will suggest some of the agencies contained on the resource material we provide and assist in choosing a local counselling or support organization.
 - Exploring with each participant their support networks and whether she knows anyone she feels able to talk to and encouraging them to do so if they feel this would provide understanding and support.
 - Deepthi and the young woman will then discuss the appropriateness to continue with the research process either at that point or on another occasion, or to opt out of the project completely.
 - If it becomes disclosed to Deepthi that a child in the participant’s care is in danger of harm, a risk assessment will be done (Attachment 9) and Deepthi will seek further advice from her supervisors, LS and KH as appropriate. Deepthi

will then contact the Child Protection Services for advice and contact the Police if needed. Also see mandatory reporting paragraph towards the end of this document.

- If Deepthi and the participant decide to continue with the research process, Deepthi will inform the participant that she will resume her role of researcher and that interrupting the research process can be repeated if the person becomes distressed again or does not want to continue for any reason. It will be emphasised that withdrawing from the project will not disadvantage the participant in any way.

Although from the research team's experience this is unlikely, there may be spontaneous disclosure of the person being in current danger during the research process. Deepthi will enquire about the safety of participants at the point of such disclosure. A risk assessment framework (Attachment 9) will be followed and where there exists a high risk to individuals, a safety plan will be discussed with the participant and expert advice from supervising general practitioner researchers LS or KH will be sought by Deepthi. Resource material (Attachment 10) will be offered and referrals made as appropriate regardless of level of risk.

Deepthi will make notes of the disclosure details so that the information may be passed on to the participant's General Practitioner or Counsellor if required by the participant. She will read back to the young person the disclosure notes to confirm that the information is correct. Deepthi will then reiterate the importance of the participant's safety and well-being overriding the need to keep such information confidential. If it is necessary to escalate the issue and seek advice, this would be conveyed to the participant before any action is taken by Deepthi. The research process with the particular young person would be suspended indefinitely to allow safety of the young person to be established.

Mandatory reporting of child abuse

The Australian Institute of Family Studies defines mandatory reporting as "a term used to describe the legislative requirement imposed on selected classes of people to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to government authorities". The occupations mandated to report child abuse vary from state to state but as Deepthi, the primary researcher, is also a trained medical practitioner, under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.) she may have a duty of care to report child abuse of any young person aged under 18 years of age, if she had reasonable grounds to believe that a "child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse and the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type". Emotional and psychological abuse, neglect and exposure to family violence do not require mandatory reporting in Victoria.

However the latest State Government of Victoria guidelines which came into effect on 27 October 2014, outline that "any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been

committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police” (Department of Justice, 2014). Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence and can result in up to 3 years imprisonment. This study will only recruit **participants aged 16 years and over**, and therefore does not fall into the mandatory reporting category of child abuse. However, as per the distress and disclosure protocol any young person aged under 18 years reporting high risk of harm will be discussed with the PhD student’s supervisors and if necessary, Child protection services. If the researcher forms a reasonable belief that an adult participant (aged 18 or over) is involved in sexually assaulting a young person under 16 years, the researcher will need to consider reporting to police after discussion with the participant.

If Deepthi has reasonable grounds to believe that reportable child abuse was taking place (either towards the participant or a child that the participant lives with), she would first speak to the young woman about the situation and then seek further advice on management. She would explain to the participant why the situation constitutes child abuse and why this requires reporting. She would explore the participant’s support networks and ways to seek help and then conduct a risk assessment (Attachment 9). Deepthi would then contact one of her general practitioner supervisors, KH or LS by mobile phone alert them of the situation and seek advice. She would then contact Child Protection Services at the Department of Health to seek further advice about the situation. Based on the risk assessment, advice from her supervisors and Child protection services, Deepthi would then reassess the young person’s safety and make a judgement on whether or not the police need to be called. If the situation is unlikely to be seriously harmful or life threatening, the young person will be asked to identify a parent or guardian who can take them home or to another safe place. A resource card will be given to the young person at the beginning of the interview and this will be highlighted to the young person before they leave the interview.

As outlined above, the young person will be provided with constant support throughout the time that they are present for the interview, in line with the guidelines published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Goldsworthy, Hunter, & Irenyl, 2015).

Here is a summary of the steps that will be taken if Deepthi has reasonable grounds to believe that a mature minor participant or another child in the participant’s home is at serious risk of immediate harm:

1. Deepthi will allow the young person to articulate their concerns and details of the abuse in their own words.
2. Deepthi will thank the participant for disclosing the abuse and acknowledge that the disclosure was the right thing to do and that the young person was very brave for disclosing.
3. A risk assessment (Attachment 9) will be carried out. Deepthi will explain that the participant’s immediate safety and protection is a priority.
4. Deepthi will speak to the participant to explain why the situation constitutes child abuse and that this requires mandatory reporting and an exception to maintaining confidentiality. Deepthi will reiterate that seeking advice from others is necessary for the safety of the young person.
5. Deepthi will ring her GP supervisors for advice.
6. Deepthi will ring the Child Protection Services hotline for further advice.
7. Participant’s safety to go home will be reassessed based on above advice.
8. If Deepthi has reasonable grounds to believe that the participant or another child at home is in immediate danger of harm, she will consider contacting the police.
9. If there is no serious risk of harm as per the above assessment, then Deepthi will ask the young woman to identify a protective parent/guardian who would take them home or to another safe place.
10. A resource card will be provided to the participant and useful contacts highlighted. Deepthi may contact one of the services if necessary to help the participant.
11. The interview will most likely be discontinued indefinitely.

Agencies that may be contacted in this instance:

Child Protection Crisis Line	Ph. 13 12 78
Victoria Police	Ph. 000, Family Violence Unit
Sexual Assault Crisis Line	Ph. 1800 806 292
Domestic Violence Crisis Line	Ph. 1800 015 188
Lifeline	Ph. 13 11 14
Helpline for young people	Ph. 1800 55 1800
Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team	Ph. 1300 721 927

Attachment 9: Risk Assessment Framework

A series of question will be asked and if the person is feeling very unsafe to go home DI will assist participant to contact an appropriate service.

How safe do they feel to go home today?

Have they been threatened with a weapon?

Does the person who made them afraid

- a. Carry a weapon with them?*
- b. Have a mental health condition or drug addiction?*
- c. Have a history of other criminal activity in the community?*

Has the violence been escalating?

Are there any concerns for the safety of a child at home?

Attachment 10: Resource card for young people

- Kidline is a free call service for children and young people aged 5-25 years;
 - Phone: 1800 55 1800
 - Web: www.kidshelp.com.au/
- Centre Against Sexual Assault - for men and women aged 18 years and over who are survivors/victims of sexual assault;
 - Phone: 1800 806 292
 - Web: <http://www.casa.org.au/>
 - [Download a sexual assault instant reporting app for your mobile phone at: www.sara.org.au](http://www.sara.org.au/)
- Child Protection Crisis Line, Department of Human Services
 - Phone: 13 12 78
 - Web: <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/child-protection>
- Lifeline - general 24 hour counselling for people of any age in relation to any issue;
 - Phone: 13 11 14
 - Web: <http://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- MyLine – a relationships helpline for young people.
 - Phone: 1800 MYLINE
 - Web: <http://theline.org.au/>
- DirectLine – for drug and alcohol issues;
 - Phone: 1800 888 236
 - Web: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/aod/directline.htm>
- Domestic violence crisis line – 24 hour crisis counselling, support, advocacy and referral for women;
 - Phone: 1800 RESPECT or 1800 737 732
 - Web: <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/>
- Men's Referral Service – freecall in Victoria for males who are thinking about their anger, behaviour, relationship issues or parenting, and need help and support;
 - Phone: 1800 065 973
 - Web: <http://mrs.org.au/>
- WIRE – women's information and referral
 - Phone: 1300 134 130
 - Web: <http://www.wire.org.au/>
- Relationships Australia
 - Phone: 1300364277
 - Web: <http://www.relationships.org.au/>
- Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CATT): a government funded adult mental health crisis support service.
 - Phone: 1300 721 927
- The Lookout:
 - www.thelookout.org.au

- Mensline Australia
 - 1300 789 978
- Bursting the bubble: information on dealing with Family violence for young people.
 - www.burstingthebubble.com
- Your local General Practitioner (GP)
- Your local psychologist.

Attachment 11: Snowball sampling reminder email to participants

Dear.....

Thank you very much for participating in our dating relationships project run at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne.

As we are still searching for participants we were wondering if any of your friends or other contacts might be interested in taking part in our research? We need young people aged 16 to 25 years from any background.

If you have anyone interested please advise them to contact iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au for more information.

Thank you.

Deepthi Iyer.

Attachment 12: Advertisements

Initial student portal advertisement

FEMALE VOLUNTEERS WANTED for confidential project on dating relationships.

Are you aged between 16 and 25 years?

Are you worried about your relationship?

Does your partner sometimes scare you?

Do you sometimes wonder if you are safe?

We need young women to take part in interviews exploring young women's perceptions on dating relationships and seeking help for difficult relationships. Interviews will be conducted by a female researcher who is a PhD student and General practitioner. Your participation is confidential and you will receive a \$30 gift voucher for each completed interview. To find out more, please email the researcher, Dr Deepthi Iyer, on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au

Revised student portal advertisement

FEMALE VOLUNTEERS, aged 16 to 25 years WANTED for confidential project on dating experiences. We need young women to take part in interviews exploring young women's perceptions on dating relationships and seeking help for difficult relationships. Interviews will be conducted by a female researcher who is a PhD student and General practitioner. Your participation is confidential and you will receive a \$30 gift voucher for each completed interview.

Please complete this questionnaire to help us determine if you are eligible to participate in this study:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZLWB8M5>

To find out more, please email the researcher, Dr Deepthi Iyer, on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au

This project is conducted by the University of Melbourne, HREC 1544130.1.

Social Media advertisements

Social Media advertisements will be created without any of my personal details. I will target the following social media users with my advertisement:

- Female
- Aged 16-25 years
- Living anywhere in Australia
- English-speaking

I will not specify any other demographics.

The following advertisement will be posted on Facebook and other forms of social media such as Twitter, Instagram and so on:

Headline: *Dating Experiences Study*

Advertisement text: “*16-25 year old women needed for a study on dating experiences run at the University of Melbourne.*”

The interested social media user then clicks on the advertisement which takes them to the survey monkey link. They then complete the survey monkey demographic survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZLWB8M5>

Facebook and regional campus advertisements

Dating experiences study

16-25 year old young women needed for project on dating experiences and relationships. Further detail can be found at: www.facebook.com/datingexperiencesstudy

Please email iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au for more information.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

YOUNGANDWELL
Cooperative Research Centre

Attachment 13: Email follow up for young women expressing interest in project via snowball sampling, student portal or Facebook advertisements

Email follow up for participants aged 18-25 years

This email will be sent to all young women who complete the survey monkey link or who contact me directly via email in response to Facebook or student portal advertisements.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in our dating experiences study.

My name is Dr Deepthi Iyer and I am a general practitioner and PhD student undertaking a study on young women's dating relationships. For further information on this project I have attached a plain language statement of the project and also an informed consent form.

If you live in Melbourne or the surrounding regions we encourage you to come in for a face-to-face interview. Interviews are usually conducted at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne, in Carlton. Other locations may be negotiated with myself if the Department of General Practice is not convenient. For face-to-face interviews, the informed consent form can be signed and handed to me when we meet for the interview.

If you wish to participate in a telephone interview, you will need to sign and date the informed consent form and send it to me via email, fax or post. If you are faxing or posting the informed consent form to me, please address it to "Dr Deepthi Iyer, PhD student, Department of General Practice". All contact details can be found in my email signature below. Once I have received your consent form I will set up a time and date with you to conduct the telephone interview.

For further information about this project, please do not hesitate to contact me via email.

Kind regards

Deepthi

Email follow up for participants aged 16-17 years

This email will be sent to all young women aged 16 to 17 years who complete the survey monkey link or who contact me directly via email in response to Facebook or student portal advertisements.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in our dating experiences study.

My name is Dr Deepthi Iyer and I am a general practitioner and PhD student undertaking a study on young women's dating experiences and relationships. For further information on this project I have attached a plain language statement of the project and also an informed consent form.

Because you are a young woman aged 16 or 17 years old, you may be required to get parental consent to participate in this project. Further details can be found in the attached plain language statement and consent form. Interviews are usually conducted at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne, in Carlton. Other locations may be negotiated with me if the Department of General Practice is not convenient.

For further information about this project, please do not hesitate to contact me via email. I look forward to hearing from you about your continued interest in this project.

Kind regards

Deepthi

Follow up reminder email

This email is sent to all participants who do not respond to schedule an interview within a week of receiving the plain language statement and again 2 weeks after receiving the PLS. If the two reminder emails do not trigger a response from the participant, they will be deemed lost to follow up and not sent any further reminders.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in our dating experiences study. This is a friendly reminder to please contact me to arrange a time to be interviewed, if you are still interested in

participating in this study. I have attached the plain language statement and informed consent forms again for you in case you needed to have a look at them again. If you are no longer interested in this study, please let me know.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this study.

Kind regards,

Deepthi

Attachment 14: Invitation for a second interview

Dear [Insert participant name],

Thank you for kindly taking part in the Dating relationships project run at the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne. In the informed consent form you had indicated that you might be interested in taking part in a further interview at a later date. The research team has reviewed the findings so far and identified that we would like to interview you again, if you are willing.

If you agree to participate, the interview would be conducted in a similar way to the previous one. You would be interviewed by Dr Deepthi Iyer and the interview may go for 30 minutes to 120 minutes depending on what you have to say. If you are aged less than 18 years at the time of the second interview, you will be invited to participate in a face-to-face interview. If you are aged 18 years or over, you are eligible to be interviewed over the phone or face-to-face. If you participate over the telephone you must provide us with a valid postal address so that we may post a gift voucher to you safely.

If you are interested in participating in another interview to contribute to our findings on difficult dating relationships, please contact Deepthi via email, on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au.

Kind regards,

Deepthi Iyer

Attachment 15: Recruitment flowchart

Attachment 16: Mature minor assessment

The need to research intimate partner violence among Australian minors

There is a need for further research in Australia into intimate partner violence in young people, also known as dating violence. Dating violence is prevalent in Australia and globally, it begins in early adolescents, and is associated with disastrous consequences such as homicide and suicide. While awareness and research into adult intimate partner violence is encouragingly increasing on a global level (Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015), it is even more important to explore *how* this violence develops and how it can be managed in the early stages of dating.

Dating violence is prevalent across the world and studies show that between thirty and seventy percent of young people perpetrate violent behaviours towards their intimate partners (Niolon et al., 2015; Straus, 2011). In Australia it is known that young women aged between 18 and 24 years experience the highest rates of gendered partner violence compared to older age groups (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) but prevalence studies in the young age groups are limited. Precise measures of prevalence are difficult to obtain due to varied definitions of dating violence, different age groups and populations studied and the poor recognition and reporting of dating violence by young people (Barter, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Murphy & Smith, 2010)

While dating violence studies are often conducted in university age students, there is evidence that the violence begins much earlier. Retrospective studies that interviewed young women aged 18 years and over found that dating violence begins in adolescent girls as young as 13 years (Bonomi et al., 2012; Draucker, Martsof, & Stephenson, 2012). A study conducted in South Australia by Chung (2007) exploring romantic relationships in 14 to 17 year old heterosexual adolescent girls, showed that these young women were routinely experiencing gendered violence from their partners and learning to accept, defend and forgive these behaviours. Unfortunately these attitudes justifying use of violence have changed little over time (Webster et al., 2018; Webster et al., 2014).

Dating violence can result in disastrous consequences and therefore understanding from young women how they can better recognise and seek help for dating violence is important. Dating violence is known for its negative impact on the individual and the community including: poor physical and mental health; risk-taking behaviour; poor perception of overall health; a significant economic burden on society (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Biebl et al., 2011; Bonomi et al., 2013; Champion et al., 2004; Coker, McKeown, et al., 2000; Henderson

and Associates, 2000); and in extreme cases, homicide (Azziz-Baumgartner et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2007). Further, longitudinal studies show that dating violence can persist into violence affecting adult intimate relationships (O'Leary et al., 1989; Smith et al., 2003). Therefore it is important to understand young women's perspectives on intimate partner violence, including their journey to help-seeking in order to inform policy and practice that can be targeted appropriately before the possible onset of violence.

The ethical argument

The literature supports that for *minimal* risk research, such as surveys on health services, a young person of at least 14 years has the intellectual capacity to weigh up risks and benefits and give informed consent for participation (Sanci, Sawyer, Weller, Bond, & Patton, 2004). Further, the National Statement on Ethical Conduct (2007 (Updated March 2014)) states that the document should go beyond a “mechanical” interpretation and instead, there should be “deliberation on the values and principles, exercise of judgement, and an appreciation of context,” when taking into account research proposed among mature minors. In other words, if the research project:

a) is appropriate in its topic, methods and relevance to young people under the age of 18 years;

b) has potential to “advance knowledge about the health or welfare of, or other matters relevant to, children and young people”; or

c) “children's or young people's participation is indispensable to the conduct of the research,” (Section 4.2.4 (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2007 (Updated March 2014)));

Then it would be relevant to assess minors as mature or not for the purposes of the research project. We believe that this dating violence project fits the need to include young people, including mature minors, to help us advance knowledge about early intimate partner violence.

Australian studies that have investigated dating violence in minors with little parental involvement include studies by Chung (2007) and the National Crime Prevention (2001). Chung interviewed adolescent girls aged 14 to 17 years from schools in South Australia about dating violence. Parents were not specifically asked for their consent with respect to this research project although they had provided ‘blanket’ consent for their children to take part in research projects. Importantly, participants comfortably spoke in depth of their experiences

with the researcher and there was no formal report of harm to participants. This was confirmed by the author who the researchers spoke to.

The National Crime Prevention (2001) interviewed 12 to 20 year old young people on the topic of intimate partner violence in their own age groups (dating violence) and family violence. Interestingly, parental consent was sought to interview young people aged less than 15 years but those aged 15 years and over did not require parental consent. While there are reports of the young children hesitating to speak about domestic and dating violence due to lack of knowledge of the topic or difficulty recognising the violence, there was no formal report of harm to any of the participants.

One dating violence study conducted overseas among 13 to 24 year old urban African-Americans waived parental consent altogether, justifying the waiver because the “nature of data collected included definitions and opinions that are commonly asked during clinical visits” by health professionals in confidence (Martin et al., 2012). This would be consistent with the Australian health system where adolescents, from the age of 15 years, are eligible to register for and have their own *Medicare* card, which entitles them to health care from public systems with separate medical records, and to be billed separately to their parents. Further, insisting on parental consent, presence or involvement in the research project is likely to discourage young people from taking part or from sharing honest experiences or perspectives for the purposes of this research project. This does not preclude the researcher from encouraging each young person to consider speaking to their parents about the research project and their individual experiences.

We argue that this research project on exploring dating, dating violence and help-seeking for dating violence among Australian young women will advance knowledge in understanding, preventing and intervening against intimate partner violence in young people. This research therefore cannot be conducted without honest input from the young people who experience the beginning of relationship violence.

Mature minor assessment

Young women under the age of 18 years who are interested in participating in this dating relationships study will be encouraged to seek their parent or guardian's consent to take part. This is outlined clearly in the consent form (Attachment 6), which has a section for a parent or guardian's signature. However, the consent form also gives young women the opportunity to decline asking a parent or guardian for consent. If the young woman is not comfortable

involving her parent or guardian, she will be invited to participate in a two-step assessment of whether or not she is a mature minor who can take part independently without parental consent. This is necessary to encourage participation in this project by offering an alternative pathway because compulsory parental consent can be a deterrent for young peoples' participant, particularly if involving the parent or guardian is likely to be inappropriate, offers no protection or is more risky than protective (Spriggs, 2010).

A participant aged under 18 years will be assessed by the main researcher, Deepthi Iyer, as to whether they are a mature minor or not. This will be carried out as a two-step process. First, the researcher will talk to the young woman on the telephone (Attachment 5) to assess her understanding of the research project and make notes according to the table provided below, which was adapted from the World Health Organization then draft guidelines on conducting ethical research on violence against women (World Health Organization, 2016).

Table 3: Mature minor telephone assessment (Step 1)

	Open-ended question/statement	Required points of comprehension	Tick box ☐	Researcher Comments
1	Please tell me your understanding of the purpose of this study.	Participant should understand that: - Study is to understand Young people's (YP) views and experiences on dating relationships and help-seeking for difficult relationships. - Study is for researcher to understand dating relationships so as to help people with this problem in the future. - The purpose of the study is not a for treatment or counselling. If the young person needs help they will be directed to other sources of help.	☐	
2	What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?	Participants should understand that:	☐	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a risk they may become distressed. But if they do then they can take a break or stop the interview altogether at any time without it impacting on future studies or the care they receive by their GP. - Their name will be protected by a pseudonym that they provide. 		
3	What will happen if the young woman decides to leave the study?	<p>Participant should understand that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She is free to take a break or withdraw from the study at any time. - Withdrawal will not affect her participation in past or future projects or the care she receives from her GP. - The young woman may choose to withdraw any unprocessed data she has provided at any time. - Only the researchers listed on the plain language statement have access to the interview findings. - When findings are published, the participant's name will remain anonymous. She may choose a pseudonym. 	☐	
4	What are the possible benefits for the participant?	<p>The participant has the opportunity to contribute to information on how health professionals and policy makers can best deal with dating violence.</p> <p>They may have the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences.</p> <p>All participants will receive a resource sheet that will contain</p>	☐	

		<p>helpline numbers and websites that they can contact if they need further help.</p> <p>There is no direct or immediate benefit to participants taking part in this research project.</p>		
5	<p>What should participants do if they have questions or concerns about their well-being or about what is happening in the study?</p>	<p>Participants should understand that the purpose of this study is not to directly impact on their well-being. If they have concerns with regards to their physical or mental health they should visit a general practitioner.</p> <p>If the participant has questions, concerns or feedback about the study, they can contact the main researcher, Deepthi Iyer, by email on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au.</p> <p>If the participant has questions of an ethical nature about the project, they can contact the human research ethics office – details are on the plain language statement.</p>	☐	
<p><u>Mature minor assessment, Step 1 (Telephone) Outcome:</u></p> <p>☐ This young woman can proceed to step 2 of the mature minor assessment.</p> <p>☐ An interview has been scheduled.</p>				

☐ This young woman is unlikely to be a mature minor and therefore cannot proceed to Step 2. Young woman excluded from dating relationship study.

Once the participant has successfully passed the Step 1 mature minor assessment, their mature minor status will be clarified when they present for the face-to-face interview. Therefore we will insist that participants under 18 years of age will be eligible for face-to-face interviews only. This will allow the main researcher, Deepthi, to clarify the plain language statement and informed consent again and ensure that the young person is comfortable with the requirements of the project and publication of results. Any distress experienced by the participant will also be better handled in the face-to-face setting. Deepthi is a general practitioner with additional training in mental health, who regularly consults young people and is experienced in consulting in mental health and patients who are otherwise distressed.

At the beginning of the interview, participants will be welcomed by the researcher and a brief ice-breaking conversation will be held. The Researcher will offer participant a glass of water or a cup of tea to help them feel at ease.

The researcher will then assess:

1. The young person's level of independence and ability to express their wishes. E.g. if they have contacted the researcher independently to participate in the research project and made an effort to get themselves to the research interview independently.
2. The young person's understanding of the plain language statement and informed consent.
3. The young person's understanding, in her own words, of what research participation involves and how the research findings will be used to disseminate anonymous information to the research community, healthcare workers and policy makers.

Once satisfied that the young person has demonstrated competence, independence and understanding of the plain language statement, the researcher will talk her through the informed consent form. If she demonstrates an understanding of the contents of this form and is able to explain it in her own words, she will sign the consent form and we will proceed with the research interview.

If at any point the young woman's independence, competence and confidence to give consent is questionable the young woman will be advised that she is not suitable for this research project

and we will not proceed with the interview. If upon presenting to the face-to-face meeting it becomes evident that the young woman is outside the age range of 16 to 25 years or if the young woman becomes obviously distressed, she will be immediately excluded from the project.

If a participant's parent contacts me separately to ask about their child's participation in this research project, the researcher DI will explain to them that it is unethical to share research findings with anyone other than the researchers involved in the project. If confidentiality is breached, the participant is likely to feel betrayed by the researcher, or embarrassed that their thoughts have been shared with their parent/guardian. In more serious cases, the participant may be reprimanded or punished by their caregiver for sharing specific information and therefore in the interests of the participant's wellbeing, information will not be provided to anyone else (Spriggs, 2010). Parents will be offered the plain language statement and a blank copy of the consent form if they wish to find out more about the study and then directed to the University of Melbourne HREC if they have further questions about the project or its ethical conduct. Parents will in all cases be encouraged to speak directly to the young person about their research participation or personal life. All participants under 18 years will be encouraged to share their research experiences with their parents, for example by sharing the plain language statement and/or their interview experiences.

Attachment 17: Screening for dating violence

Dating violence questionnaire for Link project

In the following section we would like to know about your relationships with any intimate partner(s). An intimate partner is a boyfriend, girlfriend or partner (casual or regular).

Have you ever felt afraid of any partner?

- Yes
- No
- I have never had a partner

Have you ever felt afraid of anyone else?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, who have you felt afraid of? _____

Has any partner ever (tick all that apply):

- Used physical force (such as pushing, kicking, slapping you)?
- Used more severe physical force (such as punching, strangling, hitting you with an object)?
- Shouted at you or called you names or told you that you were not attractive?
- Told you where you could go or who you could hang out with or said negative things about your friends/family?
- Sent you nasty messages online or via a mobile phone.
- Regularly checked your mobile phone or emails or social networking pages to see what you were up to?
- Pressured you to send sexual photographs or videos of yourself over the internet or mobile phone or shared them with their friends when you were not comfortable.
- Pressured or physically forced you into kissing, intimate touching or other sexual things (not intercourse)?
- Pressured or physically forced you into having sexual intercourse?

Has anyone else other than a partner ever done any of the above to you?

- Please tell us more _____

Survey monkey questionnaire screenshots

Dating Relationship Study [Exit this survey](#)

1. Introduction 25%

Welcome to the dating relationships study, conducted by the Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne. We are recruiting **English-speaking young women aged 16 to 25 years old, living in Australia**, to participate in a confidential dating relationships study.

Participating in the study involves one or two interviews exploring young women's perceptions on dating relationships and seeking help for difficult relationships. Interviews will be conducted by a female researcher who is a PhD student and General practitioner. Your participation is confidential and you will receive a \$30 gift voucher for each completed interview.

We will now ask you a few questions to determine your eligibility to take part in this project. Once you have completed the set of questions, the main researcher will be in contact with you via a safe and private email address that you choose.

If at any time you need to leave this survey, please click the "Exit this survey" tab on the top right of this survey.

This project is conducted by the University of Melbourne, ethics approval reference: HREC 1544130.1.
If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this project you can contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, Ph: 6344 2073, Fax 9347 6739.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact the main researcher, Dr Deepthi Iyer on iyerd@student.unimelb.edu.au

*** 1. Are you...**

☐ Female?

*** 2. How old are you?**

☐ 16 to 17 years old (face-to-face interviews only)

☐ 18 to 25 years old (face-to-face or telephone interviews)

*** 3. Where in Australia do you live?**

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2. Questions about your relationship 50%

Now you will be asked some personal questions about your intimate relationships. This includes relationships with anyone who is/was your boyfriend/girlfriend, partner etc. These questions are very sensitive.

*** 4. Has your partner or ex-partner ever**

☐ Made you feel afraid or unsafe?

☐ Followed you or harassed you over the phone or online?

☐ Called you names, humiliated, bullied or criticized you, or threatened you in any way?

☐ Isolated you from your family and friends or restricted your behaviour in any way?

☐ Physically harmed you in any way?

☐ Forced you to do sexual things you didn't want to?

☐ Other (please specify)

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3. End of questionnaire. 75%

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Now we just need your contact details to get in touch with you about our study! Thanks for your time and we look forward to talking to you.

*** 5. Please provide a safe and private email address to contact you on (e.g. one that any person you are afraid of does not have access to). The main researcher will send you an email with more details about the project.**

If you do not have your own personal email address, you can create one for free using a free email provider such as www.gmail.com or www.hotmail.com

For good privacy, avoid using your full name and select a username for your email that would not be recognised by others as you. Use a strong password that others do not know and would not be able to guess (but one that you will remember).

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4. Here some resources that you may find useful.

1. Kidsline (5-25 years): Ph 1800 55 1800, Web: www.kidshelp.com.au
2. Centre Against Sexual Assault: Ph: 1800 806 292, Web: www.casa.org.au
3. Lifeline: Ph: 13 11 14, Web: www.lifeline.org.au
4. Domestic violence crisis line: Ph: 1800 RESPECT or 1800 737 732, Web: www.dvrcv.org.au
5. WIRE (women's information and referral): Ph: 1300 134 130, Web: www.wire.org.au
6. Relationships Australia: Ph: 1300 364 277
7. Bursting the bubble: www.burstingthebubble.com
8. Your local GP
9. Your local psychologist

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Attachment 18: Project's Facebook page

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for 'Dating experiences research project'. The page header includes the Facebook logo, a search bar with the text 'Dating experiences research project', and a navigation bar with 'Deepthi', 'Home', and icons for friends, messages, notifications, and settings. Below the header, the page is divided into sections. On the left, the profile picture is the University of Melbourne crest, and the page name is 'Dating experiences research project' with the handle '@datingexperiencesstudy'. The main content area features a large photo of a man and a woman looking at each other. Below the photo are buttons for 'Liked', 'Following', 'Share', and a menu icon. To the right of the photo is a blue notification box that says 'A new way to tell your story' and 'This is a new space for you to share the special details of your business. Click anywhere on the card to start editing.' Below the photo is a white box with a bar chart icon and the text 'Share a few photos to engage more people' and 'People tend to engage more when Pages similar to yours post a few photos. Try adding some text to your post so that people know why you're sharing it.' At the bottom left, there is a small red icon and the text 'PreparationofPhDt....pdf'.

Dating experiences research project

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Dating experiences research project
@datingexperiencesstudy

Home

About

Photos

Events

Videos

Posts

Liked Following Share ...

A new way to tell your story
This is a new space for you to share the special details of your business. Click anywhere on the card to start editing.

Share a few photos to engage more people
People tend to engage more when Pages similar to yours post a few photos. Try adding some text to your post so that people know why you're sharing it

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