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Introduction

Once a marginalised and often hidden social problem within both wider society and the Queer community itself, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Queer couples is now a recognised phenomenon (Messinger, 2011; Raghavan et al, 2019). Accompanying this growing societal recognition is an increase in academic research into the topic (Donovan et al, 2006; Calton et al 2015, Callan et al 2021), however, despite these welcome advances, there is still a dearth of research into the interpersonal experiences of Queer male victims of IPV. This is in contrast to a large corpus of research that has examined how heterosexual female victims subjectively and affectively experience abuse (see for example; Meyer, 2016). Yet, the insights of this literature have not yet been applied in any substantive way to the experiences of Queer men struggling with IPV. This is a notable absence, as scholarship within the sociology of emotions has clearly demonstrated that affect and emotion are fundamentally shaped by context, identity, and social positionality (Hochschild, 1997). This paper aims to address this emergent gap in current research through an examination of how one emotion is experienced by a set of Queer male victims of IPV in the United Kingdom: that of shame.

By drawing on empirical data collected from semi-structured interviews with 40 Queer men who have experienced IPV from their male romantic partners, I will examine the role that shame plays in structuring the affective experience of abuse. I argue, drawing on the work of Martha Nussbaum (2004), that shame can be understood as an integrative and relational affect which arises when an individual feels that they have failed to achieve societal ideals and which consequently harms their sense of self. Shame has been recognised within experiences of victims of crime in numerous other pieces of research (see for example Dunn, 2012), and I suggest this is particularly so with male victims. This is due to cultural constructions of “*hegemonic masculinity*” (Connell, 1995) which pit a socially constructed stoic, invulnerable, and strong male identity against the feminised, weak, and vulnerable image of victimhood. The men in my study identify victimhood as a deeply shameful and stigmatising experience that they associate with feelings of weakness, vulnerability, and a lack of agency. I also argue that the shame of victimhood particularly in the context of IPV is further complicated by the men’s status as a stigmatised sexual minority, with experiences of abuse at the hands of romantic partners being seen as an unwelcome validation of negative stereotypes about Queer sexuality. This paper makes a unique contribution to the literature by unravelling how shame operates in the under-explored context of male same-sex relationships. With this set out, I turn to define what I mean when I talk about emotion, and to do this, I rely on the work of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum.

Shame

For Nussbaum, emotions gain their power through providing evaluative criteria for judging external phenomena (Nussbaum, 2004). This means that each emotion we feel has within it a cognitive evaluative dimension that ascribes some kind of judgment, for good or bad, to an external object. Nussbaum argues that these external objects are judged as either supporting or threatening valued end goals which are related to our understanding of human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2004.) In plain terms: emotions help us determine what is good and bad for our lives. This understanding is crucial for our discussion of shame, as we can observe the way shame also functions as a relational and evaluative affect. Nussbaum argues that shame is rooted in anxieties around our human frailty and mortality (Nussbaum, 2004). Shame, she

argues, is an emotion that derives from an individual's perceived failure to live up to an idealized norm of conduct, behaviour, or being. Unlike guilt, which Nussbaum argues only adheres to regret at an individual or specific action, shame pervades a person's entire sense of self (ibid). The consequence of this is that shame exerts a deeply degrading and harmful effect on an individual's conception of themselves (ibid, p.177). We feel ashamed when we feel we have failed to meet some external goal or ideal, particularly those relating to our sense of agency, or our ability to adhere to ideals of social conduct.

We can thus see that the process of shaming or stigmatisation is fundamentally relational, working to define a particular experience, behaviour, or person as deviant in relation to other dominant norms of conduct and appearance. Shame, therefore, has a legitimisation function in relation to the norms which it punishes deviance from. With a greater understanding of how shame operates, we can turn to examine why these concepts hold such relevance for my study.

Shame and Victimhood

Victims, despite often being popularly perceived as a valued social class, are in fact more often treated with a lack of respect and care by the justice system which is supposed to protect them (Wemmers, 2013). Moreover, an extensive vein of research has also demonstrated that victims frequently experience stigmatisation and belittlement by the wider population when they disclose their experiences of abuse or crime (Pemberton et al, 2019). What can explain this seeming stigma attached to victimisation? The victimologist Anthony Pemberton (2012) has argued that much of this disquiet originates from the fact that victims frequently violate our belief in the "*Just World Delusion*" (Lerner, 1980) that is, that the world is fundamentally a fair place which rewards good behaviour and punishes bad. This can also perversely produce an intense feeling of self-loathing and self-hate, as victims can blame themselves as a means of attempting to retrieve a sense of certainty and control. This finding is further reinforced by the fact that victims are often associated with traits such as passivity, weakness, dependence, fragility, and vulnerability, all characteristics which are typically looked down upon in western societies that lionise strength, agency, independence and action as core aspects of self-identity (Lamb, 1999; Fohring, 2018).

There is thus clear evidence that victimhood carries a social stigma that once applied or internalised produces a deep sense of pervasive self-hate and doubt that we can understand as shame. However, whilst it is clear that victimhood can generically be experienced as shameful, it is also the case that victimhood can produce particular types of shame when it is experienced by specific individuals (Fohring, 2018), and that is particularly the case when victims are men.

Men as Victims

It is of note that the traits commonly associated with victimhood are also characteristics that are typically associated with women in patriarchal society (Smart, 1995). Women are often portrayed as weaker, more passive, and more vulnerable than men, and consequentially, are often seen to be more likely to be natural victims (Christie, 1986). This begins to make more sense when we consider how masculinity has in turn been constructed in broader patriarchal society. As Raewyn Connell (1995) has argued in her influential research on masculinity, whilst there are multiple often competing presentations of masculinity within a given society, typically one achieves hegemonic status, which means it can enforce conformity with its dictates across society in often coercive ways (Connell 1995, p.77). For Connell, the current

formulation of hegemonic masculinity presents a vision of manhood based around a stoic invulnerability, where men are idealised as strong individual actors who resist emotion, protect themselves from harm, and conquer their enemies (ibid.). It should be noted that since Connell's original theorising there has been a global diversification of different masculinities, many of which have challenged traditional hegemonic conceptions of what it is to be a man (Beasley, 2008). This has also occurred alongside a greater acceptance of traditional non-hegemonic forms of masculinity such as homosexual or Queer masculinity (see for example Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly, 2013). However, despite these welcome changes, hegemonic masculinity continues to maintain a strong presence in the social worlds of many men, particularly when it comes to victimisation. Within the traditionally hegemonic formulation of masculinity there is little space for the kind of vulnerability, passivity, and weakness associated with the common cultural depictions of victimhood we described above.

Many studies have demonstrated that male victims find victimisation particularly emasculating and shameful, as to be a victim goes against their self-conceptions as strong and invulnerable agents in their lives (Burcar and Akerstrom, 2009). This is particularly the case when men experience a type of victimisation that is commonly associated with women, such as sexual assault, rape, and IPV. Indeed, a large corpus of research into the experiences of male victims of sexual assault and rape shows men frequently struggle both to accept their own experiences, suffering from debilitating shame and self-doubt (Javaid, 2017), but also that they anticipate and encounter frequent and often intense stigmatisation from other actors, who doubt, belittle, and even mock their experiences (Tsui et al, 2010; Weiss, 2010; Hlavka, 2017).

However, despite this welcome and important vein of scholarship there remains a gap in the research, which has so far failed to fully investigate how sexuality may further complicate this experience. Furthermore, other research has highlighted the complicating role that gender plays in the victimisation experiences of Queer victims specifically in the context of IPV. Donovan and Hester (2015), drawing on Lynn Jamieson's (1998) concept of public stories of intimacy, argues that there exists a "public story" of IPV which is both gendered and sexualised (Donovan and Hester, 2015 p.161). Within this framework, the public is led to understand that IPV is a problem that only impacts heterosexual female victims who are abused by their male partners. Moreover, these public narratives reify stereotypical gender roles, in which female victims are depicted as small, weak, and traditionally feminine, whilst male offenders are contrasted as strong, large, and masculine. In later work, Donovan and Barnes (2018) further attempt to understand this phenomenon through Nil's Christie's concept of the Ideal Victim, a framework in which Christie (1986) argues that society shapes expectations around which victims' experiences of crime or abuse will be recognised as legitimate or deserving of support. Christie argues that these decisions are shaped by a common understanding of what constitutes a deserving a victim, where a victim is expected to be a weak individual who is victimised by a stranger typically in a violent manner (ibid). Within this traditional framework Christie emphasises that this shared societal expectation is often gendered, with women who adhere to particularly feminine stereotypes seen as more deserving of legitimacy for their victimhood (ibid). Taking up this thread, Donovan and Barnes (2018) argue that this common cultural understanding of victimhood is not only gendered, but sexualised, as the Ideal Victim is assumed to be heterosexual, particularly in the context of IPV.

Despite this promising strain of research, little work has been done in examining how Queer male victims of IPV navigate these experiences of disjuncture from dominant narratives and

images of IPV victimhood on an emotional level. This is particularly problematic given Queer men are frequently stereotyped as embodying feminine traits such as weakness, emotionality, and hysteria, further distancing them from hegemonic ideals of traditional masculinity (Diefendorf and Bridges, 2020). In particular, we as yet lack an understanding of how experiences of shame and stigmatisation in the aftermath of their abusive relationships impact this population. This paper will now begin to attempt to address this conceptual gap through reporting on the findings of my empirical research.

Methods

The data used in analysis was collected as part of a wider study into the experiences of Queer men who had encountered IPV in their past relationships with other men, conducted between August 2020 and January 2022 across the United Kingdom. Given that affect and emotion are particularly well expressed in a narrative form (Miall, 1998) I decided to utilise qualitative methods, principally in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews. Specifically, I utilised a form of thematic narrative analysis (Sandberg 2022) which aims to identify thematic norms within a sample that can be used to understand how the participants' narratives are linked to the wider symbolic and cultural worlds they exist within.

Ethical approval for the project was sought and received from the appropriate institutional supervisory ethics council prior to data collection. Due to the then ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the decision was made to conduct the research entirely using digital technologies. As part of this move, I developed an online qualitative survey as a recruitment tool. To find participants interested in taking part in the study, I joined over one hundred Facebook groups catering to the Queer male community in the United Kingdom. Once administrative permission was granted, I would publish a post introducing myself and then provide a link to the secure online qualitative survey.

Participants were included if they were 18 years or over, identified as a Queer man, and had experienced domestic violence in a relationship with a male partner in the past, and were excluded if they failed to meet these criteria. For the purposes of this study IPV was defined as occurring when an individual experienced physical, sexual, psychological, or financial violence or coercion from a partner in the context of a coercively controlling relationship. In the recruitment process I advertised that I was looking to speak to individuals who had "*experienced Domestic Violence or Abuse.*" I should note I used the term domestic violence and domestic abuse within my recruitment rather than IPV. This was done purely due to the fact that domestic abuse is a more commonly recognised term amongst lay-persons than IPV and I did not wish to confuse or put off potential participants with unfamiliar language. Whilst I obviously recognise that Queer men can and do have partners of the opposite sex/gender, within this study I wanted to focus on IPV perpetrated by one male partner against another male partner due to the specific gendered nature of male-on-male victimisation. By the end of my fieldwork, n/116 individuals had responded to my online survey, two of which were removed due to a lack of fit with the study, bringing the final total to n/114. At the end of the survey, the participants were asked if they were interested in participating in a follow up interview, if they agreed, they were then asked to leave contact details which were sent to a secure online database that required two factor authentication to access. Of the men who responded to the survey, n/68 indicated they wished to be contacted for a follow-up interview; of this group, n/35 would eventually be interviewed. In addition, n/5 participants were recruited

through ad-hoc snowball sampling and were thus interviewed without completing the survey. In the end, n/40 men in total were interviewed, of these men n/34 identified as gay, n/3 identified as Queer, n/2 as bisexual, and n/1 as pansexual.

Whilst useful as a recruitment tool the Qualitative survey proved largely ineffective as a means to gather data. In general, many of the participants' responses were short, to the point, and lacking detail, sometimes even being a single word. Whilst some researchers have argued that qualitative surveys can generate rich data on their own and even form the basis of an entire study (Braun et al 2020), this certainly was not my experience. As a result, all of the data I present in the following paper comes from the interview portion of my research.

Once contact details were acquired, I would reach out to them to organise a one-on-one interview conducted remotely using video-conferencing software, telephone calls, and in two instances through email exchanges and instant messaging. For those two interviews conducted via text, I would send questions from the interview schedule to them one at a time and then ask a series of follow up questions about their responses until we both agreed to move on to the next main question, this process continued until both of us agreed to terminate the interview after the last question was answered. In both instances this back and forth took several days and was very labour intensive, moreover, the data-collected in each case was less detailed and rich than those gathered from the other interview methodologies used in the study. Prior to the interview participants were given information sheets outlining their rights as research participants and an oral consent sheet. I added several ethical safeguards throughout the entirety of the research process including providing information sheets, a list of wellbeing resources, and continually monitoring interviewees for signs of stress and offering to stop proceedings if they became upset.

All interviews were audio recorded, with the participants' consent, and once completed they were transcribed and rendered into text files, with the original audio files destroyed there-after. These text transcripts were uploaded into the qualitative software programme NVivo 12 and subjected to thematic coding. Coding was conducted iteratively alongside data-collection and recruitment for the interviews was stopped once theoretical saturation was reached. Upon the completion of the study, my final sample size was n/114 complete survey participants and n/40 interview participants, this included both the remote interviews and the two interviews conducted via direct message and email. All the names used below have been pseudonymized.

Despite efforts during the recruitment stage to contact and interview a more diverse sample of participants through targeting Facebook groups which catered to ethno-religious minorities within the Queer community, the sample of eventual interviewees was largely homogenous. Of the n/40 men interviewed n/32 identified as white, n/5 as Asian and n/3 as Mixed race.

Findings

It is worth pausing to briefly outline how shame is operationalised within my analysis. As I have indicated above my understanding of shame draws heavily from the work of Nussbaum (2004) who in turn drew on earlier psychoanalytic theories in developing her framework (see Morrison, 1997 for an indicative example). Drawing on this work, I identified shame or stigma in my participants accounts both when they explicitly described feeling shame or ashamed, but also when the indicated that they felt weak, vulnerable, unable to act, passive in regard to their own agency, or engaged in social conduct that was socially disvalued, particularly in contrast

to an active social ideal to which their conduct is negatively compared. With this in mind I want to turn to my findings.

The principal finding that arises from this study is that my participants understood and experienced victimhood as a particularly shameful and stigmatising social identity. When I first broached the topic of victimhood with the men I interviewed, they often expressed a great deal of ambivalence and disquiet with the very term. Indeed, many went on without prompting to identify and highlight the shame associated with being labelled as a victim. A good example of this can be found in the account of a participant called Victor.

Victor had experienced extensive psychological, emotional, and physical abuse by an ex romantic partner, with his partner becoming controlling and verbally abusive, frequently lying to, and manipulating Victor to isolate him from friends and family. After a particularly dark evening of verbal abuse Victor managed to end the relationship, sending his partner into a violent rage where he destroyed their shared house. In the aftermath of his experience Victor came to recognise that he was a victim of IPV however he expressed some ambivalence over the label. Whilst he identified as a victim and said that the experiences had changed him, he noted that the label was one he struggled to accept at first and that he felt was not socially desirable. When I asked him why this was the case he went on to say:

I think victim...it's one of them words that you don't want to sort of say. [You don't want to say] I am a victim.

(Victor, 25-30)

When I asked him why he felt that way he clarified:

I think [the word] victim, makes you feel weak.

(Victor, 25-30)

We can thus observe that victimhood, both as an explicit social identity and as an implicit description of his experiences was viewed negatively by Victor even as he accepted it as an accurate description of his experiences. Victimhood was implicitly understood to be associated with weakness and thus, with shame.

In Victor's account we can observe the way that the stigma, shame, and negativity associated with victim seems to emerge from their understanding that to be a victim is to be seen as passive, weak, and lacking in agency. I argue that this allows us to begin to understand the men's sense of ambivalence around victimhood and indeed the shame they often expressed at being labelled as such. As I have noted throughout this article, victimhood is often seen to violate socially valued heteronormatively gendered norms of strength, agency, and control. To be a victim is to have failed to master oneself and one's surroundings. Adding to this discomfort at the notion of victimhood was the further fact that within my dataset few if any of the men interviewed expressed alternative positive labels to be used instead of victim or victimhood. Whilst literature in the field of relationship violence victimisation amongst women has often found the re-identification with the label of survivor to have a positive impact (Brosi and Rolling, 2010), such survivor discourses were largely absent from my data set. Indeed, most men struggled to articulate alternative understandings of their experiences aside from the label of stigmatised victimhood.

Only one participant discussed the label of survivor as an alternative to victim. Geoff, like many of the other men I interviewed, had entered a relationship with another man that had deteriorated into abuse, in his case this mainly manifested in his partner coming to demand constant financial support which rapidly drained his bank account and nearly left Geoff destitute. In the aftermath of the relationship Geoff reached out to a support organisation for victims of IPV and sexual assault, one of the only men in my study who contacted formal support services during or after his relationship and was exposed to the frequent attempts by the counsellors to reframe his experiences as one of survivorship rather than victimhood. However, Geoff expressed a deep discomfort at this framing, and even went as far as to suggest that the label of survivor carried its own implicitly stigmatising connotations:

It's a concept that you have to go through something traumatic and negative, to come through the other side to prove yourself as a survivor. And therefore, I feel that a lot of people in groups I volunteered with or in discussions that I've had, see survivalism as a sort of badge of honour... I think it's quite judgmental in some ways to call yourself a survivor because you're saying, "Well, actually, do you know what, darling? I survived!"

(Geoff, 30-40)

In this account, we can see Geoff draw attention to a pervasive narrative present in the support groups he frequented that to be a survivor requires a flourishing of post-traumatic growth. His discomfort speaks to the notion that abuse is something that can be transcended and turned into a positive. Geoff seems to argue that he came to see such a transformation as a normative goal to which all victims were expected to aspire, implicitly suggesting that those who are unable to make this transition to flourishing survivors have failed in some way (*Well, actually, do you know what, darling? I survived!*). In this way we can see that even when presented with alternative frameworks for understanding their experiences, some victims of IPV still struggled with feelings of inadequacy and shame in attempting to navigate experiences of abuse. However, the shame and stigma my participants grappled with did not just stick to their status as victims in general, but to their status as male victims in particular.

Gendered Shame

Indeed, a key theme which emerged in the accounts of my participants was the fact that victimisation was understood to present a real and immediate danger to their sense of masculinity. This took on an added dimension of importance due to the nature of the men's victimisation. IPV was framed in my participants' accounts as a problem that traditionally only impacted heterosexual women. Their own experiences were thus constructed as abnormal and deviant in response to this "public story" (Donovan and Hester 2015), particularly when as Queer men they failed to adhere to the image of the Ideal Victim of IPV (Donovan and Barnes 2018). Consequently, this abnormality provided a fertile ground for the growth of self-blame and shame. A good example of this can be seen in Fred's narrative. Fred differed from other participants like Victor, as unlike them, Fred had considerable relationship experience with other men prior to meeting his abusive partner and did not display any conflicted feelings about his sexuality. Indeed, Fred met his abusive partner after separating from a previous male romantic partner who he had been in a relationship with for ten years. His new partner was significantly younger than him and, by his own admission, Fred was significantly larger, older, and traditionally masculine than his new boyfriend. Soon into the relationship however, his partner became abusive, which graduated from verbal attacks to frequent physical and sexual

assaults on Fred combined with an intense paranoia that Fred was seeing other men. During our interview Fred expressed deep shame at having been abused by his partner and particularly drew my attention to the fact that his partner was so much younger and smaller than him. When I asked why this was important, he noted how discordant his experiences had been compared to the dominant public story of IPV:

People think well, two men, how can one abuse the other? You know, you're not a little lady being abused by a big nasty man. It's...this is somebody smaller than me. And I'm, I'm quite a big chap you know.

(Fred, 30-40)

Here we can observe that Fred identifies domestic violence as a crime that either typically impacts women or one which men simply cannot be victims of. This, I suggest, might be a function of the wider hegemonic nature of the “public story” of IPV identified by Donovan and Hester (2015). Indeed, we can see some of these gendered understandings in Fred’s transcript, as he describes the prototypical IPV victim as a “little lady” who is abused by a “big nasty man.” This juxtaposition between a small woman and a big man reflects a gendered binary in which weak, vulnerable women are preyed on by strong sinister men. In this construction of victimhood, femininity and victimisation become intimately linked. This then presented a problem for my participants, as they struggled to understand how they, as men, could be victimised in this way. The social role of the victim, particularly a victim of IPV, the Ideal Victim as identified Donovan and Barnes (2018), was a female one and this stood as incompatible with their wider understanding of self.

From this understanding, we can begin to see why IPV is so shame-inducing for the men in my study, as the cultural understanding of victimhood in this context is often associated explicitly with femininity and thus is entirely antithetical to cultural understanding of masculinity. In this way, to be a victim of IPV is to violate what it means to be a man in the first place. Indeed, throughout the participants accounts were frequent references to the idea that men were not meant to experience vulnerability. We can see an example of this in Dan’s account. Dan had met his abusive partner on a dating app after breaking up with a previous partner who he had described as unfulfilling and uncommunicative. Despite a promising start this partner had become increasingly controlling and abusive. When Dan tried to leave the relation, his abuser had threatened suicide and tried to attack him with a weapon. In the aftermath of the relationship Dan had struggled with his mental health and expressed a deep sense of shame about this fact, hiding his struggles from his friends and family. When I asked him why this was the case, he noted that his understanding of gender stereotypes around traditionally masculine behaviour had shaped how he felt others would react if he disclosed his struggles:

The first year, I say, I fell from grace, if you will, with my mental health [I] was just a shadow of my former self. So, I felt absolutely defeated, I wasn't in the right place at all for anything and just felt powerless if you will. And I thought everyone thought the same. But a bit more negative because you've got those certain gender...gender stereotypes, that a man must always be strong, which is still prevalent.

(Dan, 25-30)

In this account we can observe how Dan constructs acceptable and desirable masculinity as stoic, rigid, and resistance to harm and trauma. Through this construction there is also the idea

that failure to meet these standards will result in shame and stigmatisation. Dan notes that he felt his struggles with mental health would be viewed negatively particularly because of “gender stereotypes” that state a man “*must always be strong*” and contrasts this with the fact that he “*felt powerless*” an experience clearly associated with feelings of shame and stigmatisation (Nussbaum, 2004). Furthermore, poor mental health in and of itself might be seen as a failure to adhere to hegemonic masculinity in which men are expected to be both rational and in control of their mental states. In this context, the trauma of IPV which is often associated with poor mental health outcomes (Callan et al 2021) may act as a particularly intense vector of shame. This sense of presenting a front of strong, rational and invulnerable masculinity worked to frustrate their ability to accept or internalise a victim identity, particularly one associated with IPV and complicated through mental health struggles. From these accounts then, we see that the men’s sense of masculinity was influenced to some degree by wider cultural norms of hegemonic masculinity. To fail to adhere to these cultural standards produced a disparity which acted as a potent vector for stigmatisation and shame.

However, if we continue to examine my participants’ accounts, we see that these experiences of stigma and shame are further complicated by other important aspects of the men’s identity, in this case, by their sexuality.

Queering Shame

For the men in my study their sexuality was often deeply implicated with shame even before IPV entered the picture. Returning to Victor’s account; when I asked him about how he came to understand he was gay he responded that he initially really struggled to accept his sexuality. When I asked him why this was the case he replied:

Participant

I think it's probably my own, shame. I think I was, like, not now but then I was probably, I was worried about what people would say...I was always scared that people wouldn't like me...I've always craved that people like me, and it would always upset me if someone didn't like me.

(Victor 25-30)

He went on to add:

Yeah, I think it's growing up in quite old-fashioned family. Yeah. You know, I'm an only child. And I think there was, you know, there was great expectations for me to live that traditional sort of life. Know what I mean? Sort of like man, wife, kids. And I don't know, I just think I've always been so like, just scared of disappointing people, essentially.

(Victor 25- 30)

Here we see Victor explicitly link his struggle to accept his emerging sexuality to the emotion of shame, moreover he goes on to describe this shame as arising from a belief that being gay would lead him to be unable to meet expectations of creating a heteronormative family and to live in his own words “*that traditional sort of life.*” In this way we can quite clearly observe the ways in which shame operates relationally as Nussbaum suggests. Victor’s shame at his emerging homosexuality is linked to an idealised norm of intimate and family life that he feels he is unable to meet. However, in addition, my participants also often seemed hyper-aware of the fact that their victimisation threatened their relationship with their masculinity, which was

often already tenuous and fragile. Many of the men in my study disclosed having previously experienced situations where their masculinity had been called into question or dismissed due to their status as Queer men. We can see a clear example of this in Nikoli's account. Nikoli's partner would frequently ridicule his masculinity and call him effeminate. In reflecting on the impact of this abuse, Nikoli connected these experiences to earlier encounters with homophobia from his youth where his masculinity was similarly called into question:

Participant

When I was a young teenager [I] was spat at in the street [and] called names...So I knew the world was set up [against] me, so I think...my version of masculinity and my Queerness...it's always been in jeopardy...by going through an emotionally abusive relationship, that was under attack again, even though it was by another Queer person...I think it was an emasculation, you know, a lot of it was emasculation...I was just under attack, every fibre of my being...and my Queerness was under attack as well. And my masculinity, they were things he mocked about me.

(Nikoli, 30-40)

We can see here how Nikoli identifies his sense of masculinity as always having been “*in jeopardy*” and links this to previous experiences of homophobia in his youth. In this way, his masculinity and its relationship with his Queerness existed as a potential vector of stigmatisation, an insecurity which could be exploited whether it was by his peers or later even by his abuser. In this sense, we might argue that my participants' masculinity was always rendered unstable by their Queerness, always ready to be challenged for its normative deviance from the generally heterosexual standards of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, there was a persistent theme throughout my participant's accounts which viewed Queerness as a sometimes-shameful identity that needed to be negotiated. This was particularly true when their relationships turned abusive, as the men in my study noted a fear that disclosing their abuse would further reinforce negative stereotypes about Queerness, namely that Queer relationships were inherently volatile and dysfunctional.

We can see a good example of this in Oliver's account. Oliver had grown up outside of the United Kingdom in a family that was traditional and religious. This had led to him struggling with his family's homophobia, particularly his mother's, and he had consequently long concealed his sexuality from them. He had hoped that his relationship with his abuser, his first and long awaited “*real*” relationship in his words, could be a way for him to come out to them in a positive manner by demonstrating he was able to have a “*normal*” loving and stable romantic partnership.

Unfortunately, their relationship broke down after months of abuse and during the difficult recovery, Oliver reached out to his mother for support, coming out to her in the process. Rather than providing help or comfort, his mother instead suggested that he had deserved the abuse because of his sexuality and remarked that Queer relationships were very dysfunctional due to their “*hormonal*” and overtly “*passionate nature*.” For Oliver, his attempt to reach out to his mother was instead used as an opportunity to stigmatise his status as a Queer man, simply reinforcing a belief that homosexuals are unstable and thus, by implication, unable to properly commit to healthy long-term relationships. As he noted:

[The relationship] only came to cement this negative view of gay relationships being abusive, being destructive, and negative and everything. My wish was that I would come out to my family saying that I have a wonderful boyfriend, and he's head over heels for me, and we're super happy! But instead of doing that, I had to reach out to my mother for some support, because I was in tatters after our relationship. So, you see, the damage [continued] even after the relationship had finished.

(Oliver, 30-40)

Here we can see Oliver highlight that his experiences of abuse were linked by his own family to the wider societal stigmatisation of Queer relationships as dysfunctional, and thus a failure to achieve a more stable heteronormative ideal. In this way, his abusive relationship was transformed into another failure to adhere to the norms of heterosexuality and thus a means to feel shame. We can see another example of this in Adnan's account. As a young man, Adnan had a long struggle to reconcile his homosexuality with his Muslim faith and the role he had to live up to as a man both within his family and the wider Islamic community. This conflict led to him act out, both to reaffirm his masculinity, and to hide his sexuality. This, he contended, was part of the reason he struggled to accept he was a victim of IPV:

Growing up, I really struggled to reconcile my sexuality and my faith. I identify as a gay Muslim man. So for many years, you know, I just couldn't accept the fact that I was gay and Muslim...I grew up in a predominantly Asian, sort of Muslim community...it meant that you know, sexuality, sex in general wasn't discussed, but sexuality, especially being homosexual, was regarded as a big no, no...So for a long time, I basically tried to hide my sexuality. And by hiding my sexuality, what I mean is that I was trying to portray a kind of toxic masculine identity. And that led me to get into trouble with the police from a young age. I just didn't want people to find out, I was gay. So I was, I was fighting, trying to avoid any stereotype that could link me to my sexuality.

(Adnan, 30-40)

Here again, we can observe the ways in which sexuality acts as a vector for potential stigmatisation and thus induces a feeling of shame within my participants. Adnan viewed his sexuality as incongruent with the dominant norms of gender within his community, and this conflict led, in his own words, to his adoption of a “*kind of toxic masculine identity*” to prevent others from finding out about his orientation. Later in our interview he further highlighted that this toxic masculinity made him more willing to accept his partner's physical abuse, because he felt violence was normal and acceptable between two men.

To be Queer and masculine then, is to continually open your sense of masculinity to be challenged and threatened and thus to the possibility of experiencing stigma for not meeting the norms of hegemonic masculinity. This sense of emasculation and shame seemed to reflect the instability of Queer masculinity (Dunn, 2012; Javaid, 2017), and any potential failure to perform invites a deeply emasculating sense of shame that exists to highlight their continual inability to be “*real*” men (Connel, 1995). My work supports these earlier findings and demonstrates that feelings of emasculation and stigma are also experienced by Queer male victims of IPV. This demonstrates the integrative and interactive impacts of shame, as the emotion works to de-legitimise expressions of non-hegemonic masculinity.

Two implications immediately arise from this paper's findings. First, is that it re-affirms previous research into the study of shame which has argued that the emotion is uniquely relational. Through the experiences of the men in my study, we can observe how the already identified societal wide process of shame which targets victims, subordinated men, and sexual minorities, can be instantiated and experienced on a personal affective level. This is further reinforced in the context of IPV where the dominant "*public story*" (Donovan and Hester, 2015) relies on a reified heteronormative conceptualisation of victimhood, in which only feminised female victims abused by physically violent masculine men are taken seriously. In this context, Queer men may struggle to identify themselves as victims when the public perception of victimhood is so linked to heteronormative gendered binary of masculinity and femininity, and where, as I have shown above, they have already struggled with an unstable relationship to their own masculinity due to their experiences of being Queer. From this interaction, we can see further evidence for the fact that victimhood, particularly in the context of IPV, remains a stigmatised and shameful societal identity.

This leads to the second implication in my findings, that hegemonic masculinity is heavily implicated in these men's experiences of victimisation and shame. Indeed, a key finding from my work is the fact that Queer men still experience victimhood as a form of emasculation in a way that is remarkably similar to previous research conducted with other male victims (see for example Weiss, 2010). These findings, I argue, can tell us a great deal about the relationship between victimhood, sexuality, and masculinity. Victimhood can be seen as antithetical to masculinity, its basic connotations clashing with the standards embodied in masculinity's hegemonic form, and this effect seems to extend even to men whose masculinity is "*subordinated*" (Connell 1995, p.78). Moreover, this Queer masculinity is unstable, that is, it is never settled or secure, and is instead constantly apt to be questioned, disputed, or stigmatised. Victimised masculinities, therefore, and in this specific case, Queer victimised masculinities, still exist as a subordinated form of masculinity. In this way, hegemonic masculinity retains its predominant cultural status even for Queer men, a sort of cultural baseline waiting in the wings to re-exert its authority through shame should the men fail to meet its exacting standards.

Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the extant literature on the study of Queer male victims of IPV in a number of important ways. First it builds on previous research into the experiences of Queer male victimisation by scholars such as Dunn (2012) and Javid (2017) who both showed that Queer men struggle with shame and stigma in the aftermath of victimisation. It has advanced this scholarship by demonstrating that within the context of IPV Queer men not only experience stigma and shame but that these emotions are further influenced by dominant cultural scripts that dismiss Queer experiences of violence as abnormal deviations from a public story of domestic violence (Donovan and Hester, 2015) in which only a select number of people get to be considered Ideal Victims (Donovan and Barnes, 2018). Furthermore, it adds to scholarship in the field of IPV by scholars such as Donovan and Hester (2015), by demonstrating that Queer men face specific challenges related to their status as Queer men, in which IPV victimhood is seen as particularly stigmatising. In addition, the findings of the paper suggest that shame and stigmatisation may be common problems Queer male victims struggle with in the aftermath of abusive relationships. For those in services or organisations that offer support for Queer victims of IPV, these findings suggest that developing interventions or programmes that can assist in

managing or working through feelings of shame and self-blame may be important priorities for assisting victim recovery and support during the process of exiting a relationship.

Despite these welcome additions to the research literature this paper does suffer from some limitations. A notable example would be the lack of diversity within the overall sample, as the majority of the men I interviewed were white, cisgender, and well educated. The homogeneous nature of the sample might reflect the digital nature of the recruitment strategy used, as other research has highlighted that social media methods may still entrench the digital divide in which marginalised populations struggle to access digital spaces (Watts 2020). This is problematic given, as my findings have demonstrated, shame is a highly contextual emotional response which is deeply bound up with the wider social position of the individual who experiences it. This suggests that participants from racial or ethno-religious minorities may face unique experiences of shame which merit investigation by future researchers. It is my hope that this paper opens fruitful future avenues for research where these limitations are recognised, and eventually transcended.

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interest

Data Availability Statements

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