The link between domestic violence and abuse and animal cruelty in the intimate relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities: A bi-national study

Abstract

Over the past three decades a growing body of research has focused on experiences of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) amongst people of diverse genders and/or sexualities. Missing, however, has been a focus on what is known as 'the link' between DVA and animal cruelty with regard to people of diverse genders and/or sexualities. The present paper reports on a study of 503 people living in either Australia or the United Kingdom, who reported on both their intimate human relationships and their relationships with animals, including relationships that were abusive. In terms of 'the link', a fifth of respondents who had experienced violence or abuse also reported that animal cruelty had been perpetuated by the violent or abusive partner. Statistical interactions were found between having witnessed animal cruelty perpetrated by a partner, gender and sexuality, and both psychological distress and social connectedness. Female participants who had witnessed animal cruelty reported greater psychological distress and lower levels of social support, and both lesbian and bisexual participants who had witnessed animal cruelty reported lower levels of social support. The paper concludes by considering the implications of these findings for future research and service provision.

Introduction

Historically, research on experiences of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) has primarily focused on the abuse of (nominally cisgender – i.e., not transgender) women by their (nominally cisgender) male partners (Donovan & Hester, 2014). More recently, a growing body of research has examined DVA as it occurs in the relationships of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (see Brown & Herman, 2015; Buller, Devries, Howard & Bacchus, 2014; Rothman, Exner & Baughman, 2011 for summaries), with attention to the experiences of transgender people also growing (e.g., Roch, Morton & Ritchie, 2010). Whilst this growth in research is to be welcomed, there has been almost no attention to date on what is understood to be 'the link' between DVA and animal cruelty in the intimate relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, specifically referring here towards cruelty directed at an animal companion who lives in the home (i.e., a domesticated animal). This is a significant gap in the literature, given research into links between DVA and animal cruelty among cisgender cohorts increasingly shows the importance of recognizing animal cruelty as a marker for human-human interpersonal violence (Becker & French, 2004; DeGue & DiLillo, 2009).

Given this gap in the literature, the present paper makes a significant contribution by reporting on a bi-national study of 'the link' between DVA and animal cruelty amongst a sample of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities living in either Australia or the United Kingdom. Specifically, the study explored the degree to which both DVA and animal cruelty occurred; to whom it most occurred; responses to abuse; and the relationship between experiences of abuse, psychological distress, and social support. The sections that follow first provide an overview of research on the link between DVA and animal cruelty and experiences of both amongst people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, followed by an outline of the study and its methods. The findings are then presented and discussed both with regard to the previous literature, and what they would appear to suggest about implications for DVA and animal cruelty research and service provision.

Literature Review

'The Link' Between DVA and Animal Cruelty

The 'Link' as it is commonly described acknowledges a relationship between cruelty directed at non-human animals and concurrent or subsequent violence or abuse directed at humans (e.g., Becker & French, 2004; DeGue & DiLillo, 2009; Onyskiw, 2007). Original conceptualisations of the link promoted a causal relation, where early witnessing of or engagement in animal cruelty by children was seen as leading to violence against both humans and animals in adulthood (e.g., Wax & Haddox, 1974). This 'graduation thesis', however, has been vigorously debated (e.g., Gullone, 2014; Walters, 2013), and researchers have increasingly conceptualised animal cruelty as part of a wider dynamic of antisocial and violent behaviour directed at marginalised or vulnerable others (Dadds, Turner & McAloon, 2002).

One area that has seen a great deal of recent research is the positioning of animals within violent or abusive human intimate partner relationships. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated higher rates of threatened and actual harm of animals in relationships where DVA is occurring (e.g., Ascione, Webber & Wood, 1997; Volant, Johnson, Gullone & Coleman, 2008). Volant, Johnson, Gullone, and Coleman, for example, compared the experiences of 102 Australian women who had experienced DVA with a demographically-matched sample of 102 women without DVA experience. They found that more than half of the women who had experienced DVA reported that their animal companions had been harmed, and 17% of these reported that their animal companions had been killed. This contrasted with only 6% of the matched sample reporting harm of animals, and no animal companion deaths.

There are many concerns relating to DVA and animal safekeeping. Animals can be deliberately targeted for harm by the abuser to maintain the human victim's compliance, silence, or to punish perceived wrongs committed (e.g., Collins et al. 2017; DeGue & Di Lillo 2009). The close

emotional bonds that exist between many human victims of DVA and their animals (e.g., Ascione et al., 2007; Fitzgerald, 2007), coupled with isolation from other sources of emotional support typically enforced by an abuser, means that threats of harm to beloved animals is a particularly effective abuse tactic (Upadhya, 2014). Now well documented is the concern for the wellbeing of animals (or 'fellow sufferers', Fitzgerald, 2007) can lead to DVA victims delaying leaving, remaining in, or returning to abusive relationships (e.g. Ascione et al., 2007; Faver & Strand, 2003; Newberry, 2017; Wuerch, Giesbrecht, Price, Knutson, & Wach, 2017).

Studies (with cisgender cohorts) clearly show that women specifically are negatively impacted by witnessing animal cruelty (Arluke, 2002). Initial fear is typically followed by grief and sometimes compounded with guilt if women feel relief that the animal was targeted instead of them (Faver & Strand, 2007). This may be further complicated by responses to the specific behavior women are coerced into enacting through threats to their animal companions. For example, Loring and Bolden-Hines (2004) reported that the 52 women in their sample who had been forced to commit illegal acts due to threats against their animal companions felt "a sense of desperation and anguish at having to violate their own value systems and become victim-perpetrators" (p. 33). Schaeffer (2007) notes that whilst there has been little research on either short or long-term effects of witnessing animal cruelty, it is reasonable to assume that these will be similar to those effects identified from witnessing or experiencing other forms of violence and abuse, which include trauma related symptoms, anxiety, anger and helplessness (Low, Radhakrishnan, Schneider & Rounds, 2007).

People of Diverse Genders and/or Sexualities, Animal Companions, and Abuse

Existing research suggests that experiences of DVA across all sexualities and genders are similar, involving physical, emotional, financial, and sexual-based violence and abuse and coercively controlling behaviours (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Key differences in the experiences of those of

diverse genders and/or sexualities compared with their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts, reflect the discriminatory context in which the former live. Identity-based abuse takes specific forms in the intimate relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, and may often draw on societal tropes which position those of diverse genders and/or sexualities as pathological, deviant or immoral. For example, abusive partners may threaten to out their victim (Brown & Herman, 2015; Guadalupe-Diaz, 2013; Ristock, 2002). Outing takes place when an abusive partner threatens to, or actually does, tell significant others such as employers, friends, faith communities or children's services about the sexuality and/or gender of their partner without their consent (Grant et al., 2011; Head & Milton, 2015). Outing can also occur in relation to a person's HIV status, typically for gay men but also for transgender people (Grant et al., 2011).

Identity abuse also occurs when partners control the appearance of their partner. Lesbians have reported being pressured to either 'soften' or feminise their appearance or, conversely, to present in more 'butch' ways (Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). Transgender people report being pressured into wearing particular clothes, hairstyles, less or more make-up; of having their bodies shamed; of being deliberately misgendered (Goodmark, 2012). Transgender people also report identity abuse through medications and/or hormones being withdrawn, being financially abused by withholding costs associated with transitioning, and being kept from attending clinic appointments (Grant et al., 2011; Roch et al., 2010). People of diverse genders and/or sexualities also report being victimised by what Donovan and Hester (2014) call 'experiential power', referring to an abusive partner's apparently superior knowledge about what being gender and/or sexuality diverse means, and how relationships might be practiced, which can result in controlling and abusive behaviours (see also Ristock, 2002).

When DVA does occur in the intimate relationships of people of diverse gender and/or sexualities, discriminatory social contexts (or the perception of them) can also impact on help-seeking

practices. Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra and Weintraub (2005) suggest that help-seeking is a non-linear process including recognition and naming of the problem, making the decision to seek help, and selecting a provider of help. For people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, all three aspects of this help-seeking process might be hindered because of the discriminatory context in which they live. The heteronormative and cisgenderist presentation of DVA has been identified as a key barrier to those of diverse genders and/or sexualities identifying, naming, and therefore seeking help for their experiences as DVA (for an overview of the literature on help-seeking in North America see Guadalupe-Diaz, 2013). These problems may be exacerbated by animal companion ownership, given the limited availability of service provision for humans *and* their animals when leaving abusive or violent relationships.

The issue of animal cruelty in the relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities has received little attention to date. Two exceptions to this are studies by Renzetti (1988) and Donovan and Hester (2014), although it must be noted that animal cruelty was not the focus of either study. In Renzetti's (1988) classic study of intimate partner violence and abuse in lesbian relationships, she mentions in passing that 31% of the 100 lesbian women she surveyed reported that an animal companion had been abused, though of these 31 women 16 reported that a partner abused an animal rarely, 14 reported that this occurred sometimes, and only 1 reported that an animal was abused frequently. Also in passing, Donovan and hester (2015) note that in their survey of 746 people living in the United Kingdom (of whom the majority were lesbians or gay men), 4% reported ever having been in a relationship where an animal was abused. Whilst these rates are lower than that reported in previous research with cisgender heterosexual cohorts, they nonetheless suggest that the link between DVA and animal cruelty is applicable to the relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities.

Research Aims

Whilst there is now a significant body of research focused on DVA in the intimate relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, almost no research has focused on the link between DVA and animal cruelty in such relationships. Given what we know of the link in the context of cisgender, heterosexual relationships, it is reasonable to suggest that animal cruelty is likely to occur within the intimate relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, that this is likely to bear a relationship to responses to DVA, and that it is likely to impact upon psychological distress and social support. As such, the research aims of the current study were to identify:

1) The prevalence of DVA and animal cruelty in the lives of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities;
2) Whether there are differences amongst people of diverse genders and/or sexualities in terms of the forms of DVA and animal cruelty experienced;
3) How people of diverse genders and/or sexualities respond to DVA (including animal cruelty) in terms of leaving the relationship and seeking help; and
4) The relationship between experiences of DVA (including animal cruelty) and measures of attitudes towards humans and animals, social support, and psychological distress.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Inclusion criteria were 1) having a diverse gender and/or sexuality, 2) being aged 18 years and over, and 3) living in either Australia or the United Kingdom. Participants did not need to be living with animal companions nor did they have to have experienced abuse to participate. Participants were recruited via posts on social media (i.e., Twitter, Facebook), in emails shared via organizations (i.e., the LGBTI Health Alliance), and in emails to listservs (i.e., human-animal studies).

Of the 503 participants, 258 lived in Australia and 244 lived in the United Kingdom. Demographic information is provided in Table 1. The mean age of participants living in Australia was 39.40 (*SD*=30.04), and in the United Kingdom the mean age was 38.45 (*SD*=12.46). Ages ranged from 18 years to 81 years.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Participants completed a questionnaire designed by the authors based upon previous research by Donovan and Hester (2014), hosted on SurveyMonkey. The questionnaire design was non-experimental, between-subjects, intended as a scoping study given the relative lack of research on the topic. The questionnaire was open from January 15th 2016 and closed on August 5th 2016. The majority of participants (64%) completed the questionnaire within the first month it was open. A total of 578 people commenced the questionnaire; however, of these, only 503 completed all of the scales and are included in the analysis. Given that information about the questionnaire was shared widely, it is not possible to provide an estimate of response rates.

Questionnaire Materials

The first six questions were demographic, and were answered by participants living in both countries (see Table 1 and text above). Participants living in Australia then answered four Australian-specific demographic questions included in Table 1, whilst participants living in the United Kingdom answered the four UK-specific demographic questions also included in Table 1. Further demographic questions were then completed by all participants, focused on cohabitation (including with an animal companion – options given to participants being dogs, cats, rats, reptiles or fish) and being in an intimate relationship (see Table 1).

Participants then chose whether or not to complete a series of questions about their experiences of DVA and animal cruelty. Each of emotional, physical, sexual, financial, and identity-related abuse were presented on a separate page, so that participants could choose to skip pages that did not apply to them (see Table 2 for how each form of abuse was described to participants). Each of these pages contained the following. First, a multiple choice question about who had perpetrated the abuse, the options being DVA by either an intimate partner or a family member, and animal cruelty by either an intimate partner or a family member. Only responses about DVA or animal cruelty in an intimate relationship are reported here. Second, participants were asked to respond to a multiple choice question asking whether the abuse was a one-off incident in an ongoing relationship, a one-off incident that precipitated the participant ending the relationship, or an ongoing relationship where abuse continued to be perpetrated against either the participant or/and their animal companion(s). Finally, participants were asked if they had sought support with regard to animal cruelty (yes or no), and if they had sought support with regard to DVA (yes or no). Having completed (or skipped) the questions on DVA and animal cruelty, participants then completed four scales, outlined below.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Pet Attitude Scale.

The first was the *Pet Attitude Scale* (PAS; Templer, Salter, Dickey, Baldwin & Veleber, 1981). The 18 items on the PAS are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, and include two complementary types of questions. The first type endorses the idea that domesticated animals are part of the family and bring happiness to the lives of humans. The second type endorses the idea that animals do not bring humans happiness and should not be treated with positive regard. This latter type of questions are reverse scored before computing a composite score (possible range 18-126, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes towards animal companions). Templer and colleagues (1981) reported high reliability in their application of the

scale (*a*=.93), and reported strong divergent validity when compared to a measure of psychopathology. The reliability of the PAS when applied to the sample was similarly high, *a*=.916. The sample mean for the PAS was 101.45 (*SD*=15.21), indicating that overall the sample had very positive attitudes towards animals.

Liking People Scale.

The second scale was the *Liking People Scale* (LPS; Filsinger, 1981). The 15 items on the LPS are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and again include two complementary types of questions. The first type endorses the idea that other humans are an important part of human wellbeing. The second type endorses the idea that other humans are inessential to human wellbeing. The former type of question is reverse scored before computing a composite score (possible range 15- 75, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement that other humans are an important part of human wellbeing). In testing the scale, Filsinger (1981) reported that across three studies, the LPS demonstrated high internal reliability (*a*=.85; *a*=.75; *a*=.78) and was negatively correlated with a measure of misanthropy, and positively correlated with measures of affiliation, suggesting strong construct validity. The reliability of the LPS when applied to the sample was similarly high, *a*=.891. The sample mean for the LPS was 50.71 (SD=10.72), indicating that overall the sample had mostly positive views of other humans.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10).

The next scale was the *Kessler Psychological Distress Scale* (K10; Kessler et al., 2002). The 10 items on the K10 are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, from none of the time to all of the time. Items focus on either anxiety or depression. The minimum possible score is 10 and the maximum is 50. Normative data from the K10 suggest that 88% of people are likely to score below 20, and that of those who score 25 or above, 66% are likely to meet the criteria for a diagnosis of clinical depression or anxiety (Andrews & Slade, 2001). Andrews and Slade (2001) assessed the reliability

of the K10 through comparing scores on the K10 with the probability of meeting a psychiatric diagnosis for psychological distress, finding a high association between the two. The reliability of the K10 when applied to the sample was high, *a*=.931. The sample mean for the K10 was 22.53 (SD=8.83), indicating that overall the sample experienced greater levels of anxiety and depression than would be expected from normative data.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

The final scale included was the *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988). The 12 items on the MSPSS are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree. Items focus on the degree of perceived supportiveness of intimate partners, friends, and family members. The minimum possible score is 12 and the maximum is 84, with higher scores indicating greater perceived social support. In testing the reliability of the MSPSS, Zimet and colleagues (1990) reported coefficient alpha values of between .81 and .94 across various applications of the scale. The reliability of the MSPSS when applied to the sample was similarly high, *a*=.92. The overall sample mean for the MSPSS was 34.92 (*SD*=9.21), indicating that overall the sample reported perceived social support below the midpoint of the scale.

Analytic Approach

After the questionnaire was closed all data were exported into SPSS 21.0, where they were cleaned in the following ways. First, negatively scored items on both the PAS and LPS were reverse scored, and composite scores generated for these scales. Composite scores were also generated for the K10 and the MSPSS. Reliability testing was then run on each of the scales, and descriptive statistics for these generated (see above).

Chi Square tests were performed to determine if there were any statistically significant differences

between country of residence and the categorical variables. As reported in Table 1, in terms of cohabitation, participants in the United Kingdom were less likely to live with children than would be expected in an even distribution, and participants in the United Kingdom were more likely to live alone than would be expected in an even distribution. In terms of sexuality, participants in the United Kingdom were less likely to identify as gay than would be expected in an even distribution, and participants in the United Kingdom were more likely to identify as bisexual than would be expected in an even distribution. Given these minimal differences between the two countries, the two populations were treated as one sample for the purposes of the analyses presented below.

Cohen's *d* was calculated for all *t* tests. Bonferroni corrected *p* values for determining significance were used in cases where multiple tests were run. Reported values are significant with this correction as indicated. For the analyses of variance, Levene's Test of Equality of Variance was used to test the assumption of equal variances, and to test the linearity of the data the Lack of Fit test was used. For each, results were non-significant, indicating that there were equal variances across groups examined, and that the data were linear. Finally, only statistically significant findings are reported below.

Results

Prevalence of, and Responses to, Each Form of Abuse

Table 3 focuses on how participants responded to the violence or abuse that they or their animal companions experienced. These figures are mutually exclusive, thus providing an indication of how many participants in total reported each form of abuse.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

In terms of proportions, 40.55% of the overall sample had experienced emotional abuse, 23.06% had experienced physical abuse, 16.50% had experienced sexual abuse, 11.33% had experienced financial abuse, and 20.27% had experience identity abuse. In terms of animal cruelty, 7.2% of participants reported emotional abuse of an animal companion, 3.8% reported physical abuse, 0.2% reported sexual abuse, 0.4% reported financial abuse. In terms of co-occurrences, and looking at all forms of abuse combined, of all participants who had experienced abuse by a partner, 21.0% had also experienced the abuse of an animal companion.

Experiences of Abuse Differentiated by Gender, Sexuality, and Being Transgender

Table 4 reports descriptive statistics about each form of violence or abuse perpetrated against a human, differentiated by participant gender, sexuality, and whether or not they had ever identified as transgender. Animal cruelty is not included in this Table as there were no statistically significant differences between participants in terms of who had experienced the abuse of an animal companion.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

In terms of gender, non-binary participants were more likely, and male participants were less likely, to experience emotional abuse than would be expected in an even distribution, X^2 (2, 488) = 9.271, p = .01. Non-binary participants were also more likely, and female participants less likely, to experience identity-related abuse than would be expected in an even distribution, X^2 (2, 488) = 9.918, p = .007. Participants who had ever identified as transgender were more likely to experience identity-related abuse than would be expected in an even distribution, X^2 (1, 497) = 15.58, p = .001.

In terms of sexuality, queer or pansexual participants were more likely, and gay or lesbian participants less likely, to experience emotional abuse than would be expected in an even

distribution X^2 (6, 493) = 18.99, p = .004. Similarly, queer or pansexual participants were more likely, and gay or lesbian participants less likely, to experience sexual abuse than would be expected in an even distribution X^2 (6, 493) = 13.98, p = .03.

Relationships Between Violence or Abuse and the Four Scales

Table 5 outlines the relationships between participants having experienced abuse and the PAS, LPS, MSPSS, and K10, and between the four scales and whether or not an animal companion had experienced any form of abuse.

[INSERT TABLE 5 HERE]

A series of two-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the influence of an animal companion being abused and participant gender, sexuality, and being transgender, on scores on the K10 and MSPSS. The rationale for this were the relatively consistent finding of statistically significant higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of social support across the forms of abuse experienced by participants, and the study focus on animal cruelty in the intimate relationships of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities. In terms of the K10, the interaction effect was significant for gender F (5, 421) = 3.693, p < .01, but not for sexuality or being transgender. Specifically, female participants who had experienced an animal being abused reported much higher levels of psychological distress than did male or non-binary participants. In terms of the MSPSS, the interaction effect was significant for gender F (5, 411) = 3.588, p < .01 and sexuality F (11, 404) = 2.788, p < .01, but not for being transgender. In terms of gender, female participants who had experienced an animal being abused reported much lower levels of social support than did male or non-binary participants. In terms of sexuality, lesbian and queer participants who had experienced an animal being abused reported much lower levels of social support than any of the other sexuality categories.

Discussion

The research reported in this paper makes a novel contribution to our understanding of the relationship between DVA and animal cruelty in the lives of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities. In terms of the research questions, the findings suggest a co-occurrence rate of DVA and animal cruelty of 21%. This is slightly lower than has been found in other international research (e.g., Barrett et al., 2017; Volant et al., 2008). One reason for these lower rates might arise from differing approaches to measuring or defining animal cruelty. In terms of measurement, researchers use a variety of scales or questions, including the Physical and Emotional Tormenting Against Animals Scale for adolescents (Baldry, 2004), and the Pet Treatment Survey (Ascione, 2011; McDonald et al, 2017; see also Anderson, 2007). The present study included examples of animal cruelty alongside definitions of each form of DVA. In terms of definitions, an often used example is "socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or death of an animal" (Ascione, 1993; for discussion and revision see Ascione & Shapiro, 2009), though the present study did not so clearly operationalize animal cruelty.

It might also be that there is something specific to the population studied that warrants further attention in terms of awareness of instances of violence and abuse, towards both humans and animals. For example, it might be that daily exposure to "casual" (although no less distressing or damaging) forms of (usually identity-related) abuse perpetrated by other humans leads to a desensitization when defining abuse (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis & Wong, 2014; Nadal et al., 2011). The lower co-occurrence rate may also be explained by the fact that a majority of the sample were lesbian women, and women are typically less likely to enact animal cruelty than are men (Herzog, 2007).

In terms of who was more likely to experience DVA, the results reported here suggest that identity-related abuse was more likely to be experienced by people who were not cisgender. This has

implications for help seeking behavior and service provision, given services often overlook the specific needs of those who are not cisgender, such as transgender women (Riggs et al., 2016). Again, when animal companions are factored into this, it becomes more complex given the scarcity of services offering help for those wanting to remain with their animals when fleeing DVA. In this context, then, it is important to note that more respondents reported seeking help that would include acknowledgment of the bond with their animal vis a vis identity-related abuse than they did when experiencing sexual abuse. Providing evidence of the link between human and animal abuse, human abuse victims/survivors not wanting to leave animals behind is an important consideration for many, showing serious regard for the wellbeing of animals (Wuerch et al., 2017). Services need to be cognizant of the severity of identity-related abuse, that it often necessitates individuals leaving abusive relationships, and that they may wish to do so with their animal companions. Admittedly, there are often many obstacles to navigate (such as welfare austerity and disinvestment in social housing), but some services and programs are, nevertheless, recognizing the need, including for people of diverse genders and/or sexualities (Fraser & Taylor, 2016).

In terms of responses to violence or abuse, it is noticeable that only a small percentage of the sample sought help for their animals specifically, although also of note is the fact that this percentage was approximately the same across the categories of sexual and physical abuse. This may be because little distinction is drawn between the sexual or physical abuse of animals, perhaps because they are presumed not to share human norms about privacy and sex. This reflects the scant research available addressing the psychological effects of abuse on animals, which tends to focus on physical abuse, with no mention of whether this includes sexual abuse (e.g., McMillan et al, 2015; Munro & Thrusfield, 2001). It is also worth noting that only one person indicated seeking help for their animal due to financial abuse. This could be due to awareness that little help exists, and/or that such forms of abuse are unlikely to be acknowledged. More research is needed to ascertain why help seeking for animals is relatively low, and in the case of financial abuse specifically, might

be an area in which veterinary associations can make an important intervention (i.e., by offering lower fees to those affected by DVA) and that insurance companies can address (by removing clauses that make animal injuries due to DVA ineligible for insurance claims, see Signal et al., 2017).

Finally, in terms of the relationships between DVA, animal cruelty, psychological distress, and social support, the findings reported here support previous research in terms of the negative effects of witnessing animal cruelty, alongside the well established negative psychological and social effects of DVA (Arluke, 2002; Loring & Bolden-Hines, 2004). That this was especially true for women amongst the sample again reiterates previous research in terms of gender differences with regard to emotional connectedness and positive regard for animal companions (Herzog, 2007). It should not be forgotten that women, across all categories of difference, continue to be subjected to the highest rates of frequency and severity of abuse, and likelihood of sustaining serious injuries, compared to men (Caldwell, Swan & Woodbrown, 2012).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In this study reports of animal cruelty and abuse may appear to be low. However, for a range of reasons, there are problems reliably estimating animal cruelty and abuse (Flynn, 2001). Several factors complicate the possibility of ascertaining baseline data about animal cruelty. These include definitional differences in the construction of terms, such as whether they be limited to those acts that are not socially sanctioned, which means excluding hunting, animal testing and agribusiness (Gullone, 2012). The potential secrecy and invisibility of animal cruelty in homes, and the stigma surrounding humans who commit animal cruelty, also influence disclosures and recorded incidence rates. Still needed are large-scale studies that ascertain cruelty and rates across categories of abuse and diversity of human populations.

Having noted the challenges of establishing baseline data about animal cruelty abuse, it is also important to point out the limitations of the present study. Beyond defining what constitutes animal cruelty, other limitations are evident, specifically the bias in the sample towards a population of white, well-resourced people. Concern should be elicited not just for this group, but also for those who are not white and/or who are less well resourced. Given that a relatively privileged cohort reported on average relatively high scores on the K10, and relatively low scores on the MSPSS, future research would benefit from focusing on less privileged cohorts, to ascertain whether they are even more negatively impacted by experiences of DVA and animal cruelty.

Another limitation of the present study is the measure for social connectedness, which might not be a particularly sensitive tool for use with people of diverse genders and/or sexualities who might already be less socially connected, especially with family members, as a result of responses to their sexuality and/or gender. Finally, in terms of geographical location, the questionnaire did not ask participants whether they live in urban, regional, or remote areas. Collection of this information in future research would help expand understanding of the specificity of experiences of DVA and animal cruelty amongst people of diverse genders and/or sexualities.

In terms of future research, the findings suggest that both animal cruelty and identity abuse amongst people of diverse genders and/or sexualities require ongoing and focused attention. Specifically, qualitative research may be helpful to explore experiences of identity abuse in more depth, in addition to qualitative research that explores the relationships that people of diverse genders and/or sexualities experience with animal companions, including relationships where animal cruelty occurs.

Implications for Service Provision

The findings from this study suggest that practitioners need training to be aware of how both identity abuse and animal cruelty might be used to victimise and control people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, as well as harming their animal companions; and how strong bonds with their animal companions might prevent victimized partners leaving an abusive relationship. Intervention tools also need to be scrutinised for relevance to both these populations. For instance, Donovan and Hester (2014) suggested that the Duluth Power and Control Wheel needs to be amended to address the heteronormativity inherent to it. Instead, they suggested the use of the COHSAR Power and Control Wheel. In this wheel, ‘male privilege’ (in the Duluth Power and Control Wheel) is replaced with ‘identity abuse’ and ‘entitlement abuse’. This recognises the ways in which abusive partners, regardless of their sexuality or gender, are able to exploit social structural inequalities and prejudicial beliefs and stereotypes about marginalised groups so as to further undermine and isolate them from potential sources of support.

Training tools also need to include animal cruelty, and not as a subsidiary item, as is currently the case in the Power and Control Wheel. This could be done by adding other 'pet-abuse' items in each section, or by adding in a new section called 'Using animals' and listing possible examples, as has been done for other sections such as, 'Using children' and 'Using male privilege' (Godsey & Robinson, 2014). Similarly, in the Nonviolence and Equality Wheel, attention might also be given to the recognition of animals' rights and welfare, under present headings such as, 'Respect', 'Nonthreatening behaviour', 'Negotiation and Fairness' and 'Trust and Support' (Domesticshelters.org, 2015).

Prevention campaigns should ensure to promote sex and relationship education that is inclusive of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities; enable recognition of DVA (using the COHSAR power and control wheel to raise awareness of the range of tactics of abuse an abusive partner can

use, including identity abuse); and make clear the link between DVA and animal cruelty. Prevention campaigns amongst communities of people of diverse genders and/or sexualities should also work to achieve the same aims.

Conclusion

Animal companions can hold particular and unique meanings for people of diverse genders and/or sexualities (Riggs et al, 2018). In the context of DVA amongst people of diverse genders and/or sexualities, animal companions may thus play a significant role: both as tools of abuse, and as reasons that people do not leave the relationship. As such, it is vital that researchers and practitioners continue to focus on the intersections of human and animal wellbeing in the lives of people of diverse gender and/or sexualities. Doing so will benefit the lives of both humans, and the animals they live with.

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Table 1. Australian and United Kingdom Demographics

		Australian *N* (%)	United Kingdom *N* (%)	χ^2	*p*
	Category				
Gender *	Female	148 (57.3)	156 (63.9)	3.64	.162
	Male	75 (29.0)	55 (22.5)		
	Non-binary	28 (10.9)	26 (10.7)		
Ever identified as trans*	Yes	46 (17.8)	50 (20.5)	0.68	.409
	No	212 (82.2)	189 (77.5)		
Sexual orientation*	Lesbian	92 (35.7)	79 (32.4)	21.02	.001***
	Gay	68 (26.4)	45 (18.4)		
	Bisexual	36 (14.0)	70 (28.7)		
	Heterosexual	4 (1.6)	7 (2.9)		
	Pansexual	30 (11.6)	27 (11.1)		
	Asexual	6 (2.3)	1 (0.4)		
	Queer	20 (7.76)	15 (6.1)		
Employment status*	Employed full time	115 (44.6)	112 (45.9)	8.13	.151
	Employed part time	57 (22.1)	39 (16.0)		
	Not employed	11 (4.3)	15 (6.1)		
	Student	54 (21.0)	37 (15.2)		
	Retired	10 (3.9)	13 (5.3)		
	Disabled, unable to work	10 (3.9)	12 (4.9)		
Disability*	Physical	23 (9.0)	28 (11.5)	1.34	.854
	Mental	78 (30.2)	68 (27.9)		
	Learning	11 (4.3)	12 (5.0)		
	HIV	8 (3.1)	9 (3.7)		
Cohabitation**	Partner/s	158	126	5.47	.368
	Child/ren	59	37	15.23	.006***
	Extended Family	31	24	3.21	.735
	Housemate/border	23	16	.98	.739
	Friends	20	17	2.45	.324
	Animals	194	168	2.50	0.69

	Alone	35	62	8.37	.007***
In a relationship*	Yes	193 (74.8)	175 (71.7)	.610	.435
	No	65 (25.2)	69 (28.3)		
Experienced familial abuse	Yes	72 (27.9)	66 (27.0)		
	No	186 (72.1)	178 (73.0)		
AU State or Territory	Victoria	83 (32.2)			
	South Australia	73 (28.3)			
	New South Wales	37 (14.3)			
	Queensland	30 (11.6)			
	Northern Territory	2 (0.7)			
	Tasmania	4 (1.6)			
	Western Australia	16 (6.2)			
	Australian Capital Territory	13 (5.0)			
AU Indigenous status	Aboriginal	6 (2.3)			
	Torres Strait Islander	1 (0.4)			
	Neither	244 (94.6)			
UK national identity	British		158 (64.8)		
	English		37 (15.2)		
	Northern Iris		4 (1.6)		
	Scottish		12 (4.9)		
	Welsh		6 (2.5)		
UK ethnicity	Asian		3 (1.2)		
	Black/Caribbean/African		1 (0.4)		
	Chinese		2 (0.8)		
	Mixed ethnic group		4 (1.6)		
	White		230 (94.3)		
Income	Under £12, 000		39 (16.0)		
	£12,001 - £22, 999		39 (16.0)		
	£23, 000 - £32, 999		34 (13.9)		
	£33, 000 - £40, 999		32 (13.1)		
	£41, 000 - £50, 999		32 (13.1)		

	£51, 000 - £60, 999		19 (7.8)
	£61, 000 - £70, 999		12 (4.9)
	£71, 000 - £80, 999		10 (4.1)
	£81, 000 - £90, 999		7 (2.9)
	£91, 000 - £100, 000		4 (1.6)
	Over £100, 001		11 (4.5)
	$0 – $18,200	27 (10.5)	
	$18,201 – $37,000	35 (13.6)	
	$37,001 – $80,000	69 (26.7)	
	$80,001 – $180,000	101 (29.1)	
	$180,001 and over	23 (8.9)	
Educational Achievement	UK GCSE/Standard grade		3 (1.2)
	UK NVQ/SVQ		10 (4.1)
	UK A and AS level/BTEC/(Advanced)		39 (16.0)
	UK Higher Degree		87 (35.7)
	UK Postgraduate Degree		87 (35.7)
	UK Professional/vocational qualification		17 (7.0)
	UK No formal qualifications		1 (0.4)
	AU SACE	14 (5.4)	
	AU Certificate	31 (12.0)	
	AU Diploma	47 (18.2)	
	AU Higher Degree	75 (29.1)	
	AU Postgraduate Degree	65 (25.2)	
	AU No formal qualifications	14 (5.4)	

* Not all participants answered this question
** Cohabitation categories are not mutually exclusive
*** *p* value is significant with Bonferroni correction

Table 2. Descriptions of each form of abuse provided to participants

Form of Abuse	Description
Emotional	May include being isolated , being insulted, being frightened, being told what or who to see, companion animal locked outside and unable to be fed or given water or shelter, being verbally threatened, being belittled or ignored, or restrictions on food.
Physical	May include being slapped, kicked, punched, restrained, bitten, physically threatened, stalked, chocked, locked in or out of house or room, hit with an object.
Sexual	May include being touched in a way that caused fear, having sex for the sake of peace, being forced into sexual activity, hurt during sex that was not consensual, threatened with sexual abuse, ridiculed about sexual performance, being forced to watch pornography, being raped.
Financial	May include being made to account for all expenditure, expected to go into debt for another person, your money being controlled, restrictions on money available to provide care for a companion animal.
Identity-Related	May include your sexual or gender identity being undermined or questioned, having medications hidden or deliberately confused, being misgendered, prevented from engaging with other LGBT people, and having your sexuality or gender disclosed to other people without consent.

Table 3. Responses to abuse by country

	Response	Australian *N* (%)	United Kingdom *N* (%)
Emotional Abuse	Once off, stayed in relationship	3 (2.72)	8 (8.51)
	Left relationship	9 (8.18)	8 (8.51)
	Ongoing abuse in relationship	98 (89.10)	78 (82.98)
	Total	110	94
	Sought help for self	83 (75.45)	56 (59.57)
	Sought help re: animal	5 (4.5)	5 (5.32)
Physical Abuse	Once off, stayed in relationship	6 (8.82)	7 (14.58)
	Left relationship	14 (20.58)	9 (18.75)
	Ongoing abuse in relationship	48 (70.58)	32 (66.67)
	Total	68	48
	Sought help for self	42 (61.76)	17 (35.41)
	Sought help re: animal	3 (4.4)	2 (4.17)
Sexual Abuse	Once off, stayed in relationship	7 (15.56)	1 (2.63)
	Left relationship	13 (28.89)	10 (26.32)
	Ongoing abuse in relationship	25 (55.56)	27 (71.05)
	Total	45	38
	Sought help for self	20 (44.45)	27 (71.05)
	Sought help re: animal	1 (2.22)	0
Financial Abuse	Once off, stayed in relationship	1 (3.03)	0
	Left relationship	2 (6.06)	3 (12.5)
	Ongoing abuse in relationship	30 (90.91)	21 (87.5)
	Total	33	24
	Sought help for self	14 (14.42)	10 (41.67)
	Sought help re: animal	4 (12.12)	2 (8.33)
Identity-Related Abuse	Once off, stayed in relationship	9 (15.00)	9 (21.42)
	Left relationship	11 (18.33)	9 (21.42)
	Ongoing abuse in relationship	40 (66.67)	24 (57.14)
	Total	60	42
	Sought help for self	24 (40.00)	19 (45.24)

Table 4. Forms of abuse differentiated by country and sexual orientation, gender and having ever identified as transgender

		Emotional		Physical		Sexual		Financial		Identity-Related	
	Category	AU	UK	AU	UK	AU	UK	AU	UK	AU	UK
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian	38	33	30	20	18	14	16	8	20	15
	Gay	26	10	16	3	8	4	8	2	11	9
	Bisexual	15	28	3	14	4	9	2	8	7	14
	Heterosexual	2	4	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2
	Pansexual	20	15	11	7	8	7	3	3	16	10
	Asexual	3	0	3	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
	Queer	6	4	3	2	4	2	1	2	3	2
Gender	Female	67	66	41	38	26	30	22	21	29	23
	Male	26	15	19	6	12	5	6	3	13	12
	Non-binary	17	13	8	4	7	3	5	0	18	7
Identified as	Yes	25	26	15	11	11	10	1	5	26	20
Transgender	No	85	68	53	37	34	28	28	19	34	32

Table 5. Statistically significant relationships between the scales and having experienced a form of abuse or not

		M		*SD*		*t*	*p*	*d*
		Yes	No	Yes	No			
Emotional Abuse	PAS	105.18	99.95	9.75	9.24	2.472	.01	0.550
	LPS	50.18	51.06	11.07	10.49	0.866	.387	0.081
	MSPSS	31.14	36.67	9.19	9.04	3.315	.001*	0.606
	K10	25.05	20.71	8.28	8.04	5.130	.001*	0.531
Physical Abuse	PAS	103.92	100.83	14.11	15.44	1.500	.135	0.208
	LPS	50.69	50.71	10.52	10.79	1.015	.988	0.001
	MSPSS	33.81	35.27	9.22	9.20	1.371	.171	0.158
	K10	25.27	20.63	8.66	8.37	3.706	.001*	0.544
Sexual Abuse	PAS	107.54	100.70	11.80	12.53	2.394	.01	0.562
	LPS	48.56	51.11	11.65	10.51	1.879	.061	0.203
	MSPSS	30.71	35.78	8.94	8.46	4.280	.001*	0.582
	K10	27.54	21.45	8.16	9.08	5.611	.001*	0.705
Financial Abuse	PAS	104.44	101.17	15.15	15.21	1.108	.269	0.215
	LPS	49.67	50.84	10.65	10.72	1.744	.457	0.109
	MSPSS	30.48	35.38	8.68	9.91	2.801	.005	0.526
	K10	27.75	21.76	10.92	9.23	4.771	.001*	0.592
Identity-Related Abuse	PAS	104.55	100.77	13.51	15.50	1.763	.079	0.259
	LPS	48.69	53.21	8.36	8.77	2.049	.04	0.527
	MSPSS	31.39	35.94	9.02	9.03	4.278	.001*	0.504
	K10	26.42	21.39	9.38	8.34	5.053	.001*	0.566
Animal Cruelty Occurred	PAS	106.30	101.30	11.15	15.31	1.022	.307	0.373
	LPS	50.45	50.71	9.94	10.77	1.074	.841	0.025
	MSPSS	30.00	35.14	10.51	9.10	3.469	.001*	0.522
	K10	29.21	22.21	11.43	8.58	2.330	.001*	0.62

* Significant with Bonferroni correction