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**Living Under Siege:  
Women's Narratives of Psychological Violence  
within Coercively Controlling  
Intimate Partner Relationships**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Psychology

at Massey University, Manawatū,  
New Zealand

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2017

## Abstract

*Good relationships feel good. They feel right. They don't hurt.*

(Michelle Obama, 2016).

As a global epidemic, the violence of women enacted through gendered social power relations of inequality, exploit, harm, and silence women. Specifically, intimate partner violence (IPV) constitutes a systematic pattern of coercive control, embedded within psychological, physical, and/or sexual violence, that intimidates and hurts women through fear and terror. Although previous literature has identified the debilitating effects of psychological violence, within our socio-political landscape physical violence continues to occupy a more visible and privileged position, minimising other forms of violence. The aim of this research, therefore, was to explore and make visible heterosexual women's experiences of psychological violence within previous intimate relationships, framed through coercive control, to enable a greater understanding of how women become subjected to men's coercion and control within intimate relationships. The aim was also to explore how psychological violence positions women within the gendered social hierarchy. A narrative-discursive approach analysed the stories of six women subjected to psychological violence and attended to the discursive resources the women used to narrate their experiences. The analysis identified how the women's experiences of heteronormative coupledom developed into relationships of coercion and control, emphasising their inequitable and subordinate positions within femininity. Becoming entrapped within a destructive pattern of coercion, the women's everyday lives were micro-regulated through their partners' tactics of intimidation, isolation, and control and through their own operations of imperceptible disciplinary power. Importantly, the analysis identified particular turning points of resistance enabling the women to leave their relationships, however, they continue(d) to live under siege post-separation, subjected to psychological violence by their ex-partners through the men's use of both their children and the legal system. The analysis ends with the women's reflections on how these previous relationships continue to currently affect them.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my heartfelt thank you and immense gratitude to the six courageous and strong women whom participated in this research. Sharing your stories with me and allowing me access into your personal life was a great privilege. Throughout the writing of this thesis I have walked next to each one of you, heard your voices, and shared your pain, joy, sadness, and laughter. I hope that our chorus of voices contributes to challenging the many injustices that constrain women on a daily basis, especially women who live within coercively controlling intimate partner relationships.

To my supervisor, (Doctor) Leigh Coombes. Thank you for sharing with me your plethora of wisdom and profound knowledge during this thesis journey and for your support throughout my whole University journey. It has been an honour to work alongside you as a woman and as an academic as you continue your unwavering advocacy for social justice and women's rights.

To my University friends who have celebrated with me in times of success, listened and encouraged me in times of frustration, Skyped, and put aside time to read through my drafts – thank you! Your friendships have been integral to my journey and you are all a source of inspiration.

Thank you to all my friends beyond academia who have supported me in some special way throughout my University journey and the writing of this thesis. Particular thanks to my wonderful friends who helped me recruit the six women for this research project.

To my family, especially my son Max. Thank you for your encouragement, reassurance, support, and love as I navigated the murky waters of post-graduate study, thesis writing, and my whole academic journey. Max, I hope my journey will inspire you to realise that anything is possible and your own innate thirst for knowledge, inquiry, and learning will deepen.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to all the women who have previously or are currently living under siege within violent intimate relationships. There is support, you can do it, you can get out.

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