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Women’s Everyday Resistance to
Intimate Partner Violence

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for a
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in Health Psychology

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Alice Black
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Abstract

Aotearoa’s rate of reported intimate partner violence (IPV) is among the highest in the OECD. Surviving IPV requires considerable strength and resilience. There is a large body of work exploring women’s resistance to violence. However, this is often framed within a victim and agent dichotomy, which can obscure the variability of women’s everyday experiences. In addition to understanding the more overt forms of resistance women enact against IPV, there is a need to focus on the everyday ways in which violence manifests and the subtle, imperfect ways in which women respond as they carry out their daily routines and practices. This thesis draws on both feminist research and literature on the conduct of everyday life from social psychology to explore how women navigate their daily lives and reproduce gendered relations within the constraints of IPV. Particular attention is paid to moments of adaptation, agency and resistance. Working with the support of Te Whakakruruhau (Māori Women’s Refuge), I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight women, four staff members and four former clients, to explore their experiences of day-to-day IPV. My participants’ experiences revealed how deeply enmeshed IPV can become within everyday practices, from making breakfast to going to the toilet. While my participants’ lives were characterised by chronic anxiety and constraint, they adopted novel tactics to get through dangerous everyday situations such as going to bed or doing the dishes. They drew on simple routines such as making coffee or working in the garden in order to create a sense of routine that aided them in ‘getting by’. Further, they demonstrated remarkable creativity, flexibility and agency in creating novel enclaves of care within otherwise inhospitable settings. These findings have implications for how IPV is characterised and how agencies can identify and support women within the constraints of violent relationships.
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